

Andrew J. POWER, « *Gorboduc*, Early Elizabethan Seneca and the Religious Settlement »,  
« Theta IX, Théâtre Tudor », 2010, pp. 129-148  
mis en ligne en mai 2011, <<https://sceneuropeenne.univ-tours.fr/theta/theta9>>.

## Theta IX

est publié par le Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance,  
dirigé par Philippe VENDRIX,  
Université François-Rabelais de Tours, CNRS/UMR 6576

## Responsables scientifiques

Richard HILLMAN, André LASCOMBES & Pauline RUBERRY-BLANC

---

## Mentions légales

Copyright © 2011 – CESR. Tous droits réservés.  
Les utilisateurs peuvent télécharger et imprimer,  
pour un usage strictement privé, cette unité documentaire.  
Reproduction soumise à autorisation.

---

## Date de création

Mai 2011



## *Gorboduc*, Early Elizabethan Seneca and the Religious Settlement

Andrew J. POWER  
Trinity College, Dublin

In the years following Elizabeth's accession to the throne there was a sudden "vogue" for Senecan plays in performance and in print. Undoubtedly, Elizabeth's personal penchant for Seneca had something to do with this.<sup>1</sup> But the resonance of many of the plays with the violence of recent political history must also have been a factor.<sup>2</sup> And it is certainly also worth noting that the Theban legend features very prominently in productions and published translations in this early period of Elizabeth's reign. In only the second Christmas of her reign (1559-60), Andrew Oxenbridge staged a production of *Oedipus* in Trinity College, Cambridge. Again at

- 1 Jasper Heywood writes in his dedication of his translation of *Troas* to her: "I thought it should not be vnpleasant for your grace to se some part of so excellent an author in your owne tong (the reading of whom in latten I vnderstande delightes greatly your maiesty) as also for that none may be a better iudge of my doinges herein, then who best vnderstandeth my author" (Heywood, sig. A3<sup>r</sup>; cited Winston, pp. 45-46).
- 2 Winston observes (p. 40): "Like Seneca, the translators lived at a time of quick and dramatic shifts in leadership—three changes of monarch in little over a decade—an unsettled and contested succession, and, with each new reign, the repeated and growing threat of tyranny. As Seneca did with his Greek sources, the early Elizabethan translators looked to the Roman tragedies for a compelling set of fictions that could reflect the crises and uncertainties of their time".

Cambridge, Thomas Browne probably produced his *Thebais* in the same Christmas season as *Gorboduc* (1561-62).<sup>3</sup> Alexander Neville's translation was printed in the same year. *Jocasta* was performed in the year following the first (bad) printing of *Gorboduc* (1565). There was a *Destruction of Thebes*, which was probably never staged, planned for the visit to Oxford of the Chancellor, Robert Dudley, with Cardinal de Chatillon in May 1568-69 (Elliot, Nelson *et al.*, eds., I: 150, II: 848). William Gager's *Oedipus* was then performed at Magdalen in Oxford in February 1581-82 (Elliot, Nelson *et al.*, eds., I: 175; II: 992 and 848), just after the reprint of Neville's translation (1581)<sup>4</sup> and in the same year as Thomas Watson's *Antigone* was printed. The Theban legend surely struck some thematic chords for those living under Elizabeth, particularly in the first ten years of her reign, and *Gorboduc* must be read as a part of this broader trend.

On 18 January 1561-62, a performance of *Gorboduc* was staged for Queen Elizabeth I at Whitehall (Cauthen, ed., Sackville and Norton, p. xii). The play had been performed first at the Inner Temple as part of the Templars' Christmas celebrations on Twelfth Night, but such was the content of the play that it aroused her curiosity, and she commanded a royal performance of it. This command, perhaps spurred by reports of the contentious matter that the play deals with, has led to extensive scrutiny of the political implications and arguments of the play. Generally, critical readings have focussed on the succession of the royal line. The traditional approach (exemplified by Marie Axton) considers Catherine Grey as being the appropriate heir and finds the suggestion that King Gorboduc's fatal error in dividing his kingdom between his two sons might be repeated in England if Catherine is not formally announced as the heir to the throne (Axton, "Robert Dudley", pp. 365 ff.). Foremost in the minds of those who adopt this reading must be the failed plot to place the Protestant Lady Jane Grey on the throne of England on the strength of Edward VI's alteration of the succession in her favour in his death-bed will (the will is reprinted in Nichols, ed., pp. 89-90). The message would be that such plotting and the upheaval that followed might be avoided in future by decisive and early acknowledgement of a firm Protestant line of succession.

3 The evidence is not entirely conclusive, but he is credited with a production of *Thebais* during his short time at Cambridge, and he did receive a payment from King's College in 1561-62 for expenses for a play (Nelson, ed., II: 933 and I: 213).

4 In Thomas Newton's complete English translations of Seneca, published as *Seneca: His Tenne Tragedies*.

Alternatively, but similarly in terms of a clearly-arranged succession, Susan Doran, among others, looks at the potential marriage proposals under consideration by Elizabeth. That the play took place first at the Inner Temple, where Robert Dudley (who is generally acknowledged to have been her main romantic interest at this time) was “Christmas Prince” of the Temple’s festivities, adds weight to and complicates these readings. In these readings, the play is seen as his argument in favour of his own marriage suit. In this line of criticism, James and Walker read the play as explicitly responding to the proposed match with the King of Sweden. Their discovery of an eye-witness account of the play provides persuasive evidence that the play was read by a contemporary audience as a direct engagement of the politics of the competing claims of Robert Dudley and the King of Sweden to the hand of the Queen (James and Walker, esp. p. 118).

The play, though often referred to as the “first English tragedy”, is not without a dramatic tradition that also seems regularly to have engaged the issues surrounding succession. As Jessica Winston has recently suggested, the tradition of Senecan performance and printing by the scholars of the two universities and the Inns of Court has relatively unexplored political implications. Senecan tragedy, Winston surmises, “provided a vehicle for men at the universities and Inns—as individuals and as members of an intellectual, ambitious, and politically savvy group—to represent anxieties about the nature of kingship” (p. 53). Her argument focuses upon the published translations of Jasper Heywood and Alexander Neville and on the politics of their immediate circles. In dealing with much the same material, although focussing on the performance of Seneca at the universities and Inns of Court, I will argue for a more broad-reaching and religiously-engaged political reading than Winston provides.

The first legislative alteration to the Tudor succession was Henry VIII’s Succession to the Crown Act, which passed through Parliament in March 1534. The act removed his first-born, Mary, from the line and made the Princess Elizabeth the heir presumptive (reprinted in Tanner, ed., pp. 382-88). The act was not purely a matter of inheritance, though, but was directly related to the state religion, as it included the oath recognising the King’s supremacy and independence from Rome in religious matters.

The other Henrician act that has a bearing on this tradition is the slightly earlier Appeals Act of 1533. Stewart Mottram has argued that the language of the act reflects an ongoing project whereby Henry sought to establish England’s independence from Rome by reference to “sundry old authentic histories and

chronicles” (reprinted in Tanner, ed., pp. 40-46; citation p. 40). The act, on the vague assertion of historical sources, attempts to trace the “empire” of Britain, and hence Henry’s supreme authority over it, back to Brute and beyond to the fall of Troy (Mottram, pp. 8-12).<sup>5</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historiae Regum Britanniae* (1136) was one such chronicle, fitting aptly into Henry’s agenda. It is also the historical source for *Gorboduc*, and a similar nationalistic, or anti-papal, agenda may also be involved. Sackville and Norton take pains to stress the Trojan and then Roman heritage of Britain in the establishment of the kingdom by Brute. Philander, Eubulus, and Dordan each reference Brute by name at various stages before Philander draws the line even further back to the fall of Troy:<sup>6</sup> “the mindful wrath of wreakful gods / (Since mighty Ilion’s fall not yet appeased / With these poor remnants of the Trojan name)” (II.ii.75-77). *Gorboduc* also picks up the theme:

O cruel fates, O mindful wrath of gods,  
 Whose vengeance neither Simois’ stained streams  
 Flowing with blood of Trojan princes slain,  
 Nor Phrygian fields made rank with corpses dead  
 Of Asian kings and lords can yet appease;  
 Ne slaughter of unhappy Priam’s race,  
 Nor Ilion’s fall made level with the soil  
 Can yet suffice; but still continued rage  
 Pursues our lives and from the farthest seas  
 Doth chase the issues of destroyed Troy. (III.i.1-10)

What *Gorboduc*’s speech makes clear is that the arrival of Brute in England brought, not only the foundation of Britain with the issue of the near-devastated Trojan line, but also the curse unleashed by the gods against that line.

However, Sackville and Norton’s theatrical model is, like the ancient founder of the isle, also Roman. The play is a subtle reworking of Seneca’s incomplete *Thebais*. Unable to share rule, two brothers, Eteocles and Polyneices, fall to strife and destroy each other, and in the process the family line. In *Gorboduc*, these two sons are replaced by Ferrex and Porrex, Thebes becomes Britain, their mother Jocasta is replaced by Videna (who is a sort of anti-Jocasta, in that she

5 See also Maley, pp. 31-44.

6 Philander makes reference to “forefather Brute” (I.ii.165), Eubulus to “The mighty Brute, first prince of all this land” (I.ii.270). Dordan more ominously says, “I fear the fatal time now draweth on / When civil hate shall end the noble line / Of famous Brute and of his royal seed” (II.i.194-96).

aggravates the strife rather than attempting to quell it), and, finally, their blind and cursed father, Oedipus, is replaced by the aging and foolish Gorboduc.

In 1566, George Gascoigne and Francis Kenwelmersh produced the Gray's Inn play *Jocasta* for another audience including the Queen. Essentially, *Jocasta* is a translation of Euripides' *Phoenissae*, his version of the *Thebais* story. This, filtered through Dolce's Italian translation, is then "cast", as John W. Cunliffe puts it, "into the form of Seneca" (Cunliffe, p. 9). As such, it is again the story of Eteocles and Polyneices, the warring sons of the incestuous Oedipus. In the final scene of the play, Oedipus is brought forth from a "darkesome denne" (V.iv.1). The stage entrance is not specific, but even if he does not come up from beneath the stage through a trap, it is at least made clear that he is the physical manifestation of the family curse that has been lurking beneath the house and the city. Axton has identified this figure as "a 'blind' Elizabeth", arguing that the play sets out to show her "the dangers of her metaphorical marriage with the realm and by implication to urge a real marriage" (Axton, *The Queen's Two Bodies*, p. 54). However, if Elizabeth's subjects are anxious about their future ruler, then it must be because they can see back into the recent past and the uncertain successions that have occurred as a consequence of Henry's multiple marriages. In this light, it seems more appropriate to look at Elizabeth as akin to one of the remaining sons of a flawed king or to his unmarried daughter, Antigone. In this instance, the sexes are reversed, and instead of two sons and a daughter, there were two daughters and a son. The internal conflict that ensued was not so much a civil war between equal claimants to the throne as a struggle between two religious factions contending for the realm at the end of Edward's minority.

Elizabeth's first legal act as queen was to restore the state religion in The Act of Supremacy (1559). As with Henry's Act of Appeals, this act evokes an historical empire, specifically "the imperial crown of this realm the ancient jurisdictions, authorities, superiorities, and pre-eminences", in opposition to any foreign interference, implicitly Rome. And it refers explicitly to Henry's own Act of Succession (1534) and to Mary's repeal of "said good laws" (reprinted in Tanner, ed., pp. 130-35; citation p. 130).

Those "good laws", however, were not without complication for her position on the throne. Henry's succession act of 1534 had determined "the marriage heretofore solemnised between [Henry] and the Lady Katherine [to be] against the laws of Almighty God" (reprinted in Tanner, ed., pp. 382-88; citation p. 382). Though the marriage between Henry and his brother's wife Katherine had been

granted a dispensation from Rome, the act of 1534 declared it incestuous. The Succession Act of 1536 annulled Henry's marriage to Anne, also on grounds that, as Bruce Thomas Boehrer has observed, "included incestuous adultery" (Boehrer, p. 44).<sup>7</sup> Effectively, because Anne had supposedly been committing fornication with her brother (among others) prior to her marriage to Henry (and was potentially already pregnant with Elizabeth), their marriage was illegal. The Succession Act of 1543 reinstated both Mary and Elizabeth in the succession behind Edward.

In this context, Mary and Elizabeth could both potentially be viewed as the products of incestuous relationships. Obviously, Elizabeth's presence on the throne implicitly refutes any suggestion that she is a bastard. However, Catholics waiting in the hope that Mary, Queen of Scots' declaration of herself as Queen of England would come to fruition might see the situation otherwise. Even for her supporters, though, in returning to those "good laws" made by Henry that separated England from Rome as an Imperial State, Elizabeth was forced to rely on a legal tradition that contained the suggestion that Mary was the child of incest, and that she herself was the child of a king guilty of incest.

The appeal of the Oedipus legend in this light would be irresistible. In terms of the Senecan drama generally, succession is almost always an issue because an essential element of the plays in the tradition, including *Gorboduc*, is that they depict the fall of a noble family in its entirety, and not just of a single Aristotelian tragic hero. In the Oedipus legend specifically, that fall is depicted as the direct result of incest. The secondary effect is that the children of these marriages fall to civil war, primarily because of the curse brought down by the taint of incest, and because a side-effect of that is the lack of clarity of succession. In England after Henry, that civil war becomes a metaphor for the religious division between Protestantism (under Edward and Elizabeth) and Catholicism (under Mary).

A number of other critics have noted the prevalence of incest motifs in Renaissance tragedy. Among them, Zenón Luis Martínez takes a fairly loose Freudian psychoanalytic interpretation of incest that allows him to include a chapter on *Gorboduc* and *King Lear* ("Plots of Tyrants and the Place of Desire: *Gorboduc* and *King Lear*" [pp. 98-169]), although neither play contains any actual incest. Charles Forker looks at special environmental factors more proximate than the Oedipal archetype to account for the particular proliferation of incest

7 See also Menon, pp. 158-59, and McCabe, pp. 159-61.

stories and figures of speech on the Elizabethan stage. The most important of these intellectual and sociological pressures may be attributed to the humanistic literary tradition, the emotional climate within the family, and recent dynastic history (with the related theological debates concerning marriage, divorce, and remarriage). (Forker, p. 142; cited Martínez, p. 15).<sup>8</sup> Forker's separation of "humanistic literary tradition", "the Oedipal archetype" and "recent dynastic history" is, I would argue, artificial. From the start of Elizabeth's reign, theatrical productions at Cambridge were already looking at these issues of incest, succession, and, by extension, religion.

The first recorded Senecan play performed during Elizabeth's reign was *Oedipus* itself. It was produced by Andrew Oxenbridge in Trinity College in the Christmas season of 1559-60, the second of her reign (Nelson, ed., I: 208). It opens with a lament about the stress of reign:

Does anyone find joy in kingship? So deceptive a good, hiding so many evils behind its seductive appearance! As the high ridges always catch the winds, and as a rocky crag that cleaves the vast deep is battered by waves however calm the sea, so supreme power lies open to Fortune's blows. (ll. 6-11)<sup>9</sup>

The passage in its general theme is very similar to a passage that Elizabeth translated out of Seneca's *Hercules Oetaeus* and may seem conventionally appropriate for a state with a new monarch.<sup>10</sup> But of course in *Oedipus* this lament is not simply against kingship but against the twisted and incestuous lineage that the king has sired. The lament, "Unhappy ties of kinship!" (l. 19), might as easily have applied to Elizabeth, whose ties to her sister, as I have stressed, were deeply complicated. Oedipus goes on to describe the plague that is wracking the city. An informed audience will know that he is the cause of the pollution that the realm suffers from, and an English audience would be well aware that the idea of a plague as divine scourge for sin is not unique to the Greek or Roman gods.

8 Martínez sees Forker as having opened up a new trend of scholarship by diminishing "the relevance of psychoanalysis and cultural anthropology" and promoting "the necessity for tackling the historical and dramatic specificity of incest in early modern drama" (Martínez, p. 15).

9 Except where a particular Elizabethan translation is explicitly indicated, all quotations of Seneca are taken from the Loeb translations of Fitch.

10 Elizabeth I's translation of *Hercules Oetaeus*, ll. 600-99, is reprinted with the Latin text in Walpole, pp. 102-9.

When Alexander Neville published his translation of the same play three years later (1563), he seemed to find it difficult to distinguish the plague and depravity of Thebes from his view of England. In his “Preface to the Reader” he writes,

Mark thou . . . what is meant by the whole course of the history, and frame thy life free from such mischiefs wherewith the world at this present is universally overwhelmed: the wrathful vengeance of God provoked, the body plagued, the mind and conscience in midst of deep devouring dangers most terribly assaulted, in such sort that I abhor to write; and even at the thought thereof I tremble and quake for very inward grief and fear of mind, assuredly persuading myself that the right high and immortal God will never leave such horrible and domestic crimes unpunished—as in this present tragedy, and so forth in the process of the whole history, thou mayst right well perceive. (Neville, p. 3)

In the best tradition of *The Mirror for Magistrates* (1559), Neville is holding up the mirror of this tragic house to the gaze of those living under Elizabeth’s reign. Winston deals with this translation in some detail and, drawing connections between Neville and the Inns of Court authors (including Sackville), suggests that the popularity of *The Mirror for Magistrates* is one of the main factors in the subsequent interest in translating and performing Seneca.<sup>11</sup> However, she makes no connection between Oedipus and Henry VIII, and she reads the translations, for the most part, as warnings against both an uncertain succession and tyranny in general. But Neville’s concern does not initially seem in any way connected with marriage (beyond Oedipus’ incestuous one), nor is there even much indication that succession is his concern. He is deeply concerned with the “wrathful vengeance of God” plaguing a realm for the sin of incest in a family. This may have seemed particularly relevant in a plague year, when the Queen herself had fallen ill from smallpox.<sup>12</sup>

The fate of the universities had been for centuries bound to that of the state, as the chief advisors to the crown traditionally took up the chancellorships of the two institutions. At Cambridge, where as many as four Senecan plays were

11 Sackville contributed a section for the new edition of *Mirror* in 1563. See Winston, pp. 40–42.

12 In contrast, in the aftermath of her illness, Alexander Nowell, Dean of St Paul’s, told the Queen that her lack of succession was precisely the issue that proved a plague to the nation. In a sermon preached at the opening of parliament on 11 January 1563 and printed as an appendix to Nowell’s *Catechism*, he said that her sister’s reign had been “a terrible plague to all England . . . so now for the want of your marriage and issue is like to prove as great a plague” (Nowell, p. 228; cited McLaren, p. 283).

to be performed within the first three years of Elizabeth's reign, the Succession Act of 1534 had the side-effect of removing the Chancellor of the University, Bishop John Fisher, from his post. He would be executed less than a year later for refusing to swear the first Oath of Supremacy. He was replaced at the University by Thomas Cromwell, who proceeded to impose the oath and for a while quelled any disputes on the matter, making dismissals where he deemed it necessary (Patterson, p. 53).

During Edward VI's brief reign, while a number of further religious changes took place at the university, it became a place where debate was fairly open. In 1549, a disputation took place "on the question whether Mass were the Lord's Supper"; two German reformers, Martin Bucer and Paul Fagius, were invited by Archbishop Cranmer to the chairs of Divinity and Hebrew, respectively; and "a royal visitation" of the university under the leadership of Bishop Ridley ended in a heated debate over transubstantiation and an accusation of heresy against Bucer from one of the scholars, Dr. Young (Patterson, p. 54).

Under Queen Mary, things took a slightly more violent turn. Bucer and Fagius had died before she took the throne, although they were not to remain at rest. Stephen Gardiner was reinstated to the chancellorship. The Vice-Chancellor under Edward's protectorate, Edwin Sandys, was practically dragged from his chair by a Catholic mob and had to be restrained from using his dagger by the master of Trinity College, William Bill. All but one of the masters of the college were changed, Sandys resigned, and the mass was reinstated. Things got much worse when Reginald Pole, Archbishop of Canterbury, took over as university chancellor and began his purge of the institution. In 1556, John Hullier, a former Scholar of King's College, became the only martyr at the university when he was burned on Jesus Green. On 6 February 1557, the corpses of Bucer and Fagius were dug up, brought out to the marketplace, tied to stakes and burned.

Rather fittingly, Reginald Pole died just hours after Queen Mary. Undoubtedly, the university prepared itself for more upheaval. Many presumably feared harsh reprisals. Elizabeth made William Cecil chancellor of the university. "In January, 1559, the Oath of Supremacy was again imposed upon all graduates and wholesale evictions of Catholic Heads of Houses and Fellows ensued" (Patterson, p. 58). It was in this atmosphere that the Elizabethan college productions of Seneca were performed, and these productions often seem specifically chosen to counsel against overly aggressive treatment of defeated par-

ties, the university men perhaps fearing a return of, and violent response to, the type of bloodshed seen at the beginning of Mary's reign.

The first play, *Oedipus*, deals mostly with the incestuous relationship of a king. But the king's reason for pursuing the truth about that relationship is his discovery that the previous king was murdered and has not been afforded proper burial rites; nor has his murder been investigated. If burial and the proper treatment of corpses are a minor aspect of this play, the next play, *Troas*, is about little else.<sup>13</sup> William Hudson was responsible for staging it, again in the Christmas season at Trinity College, the following year, 1560–61 (Nelson, ed., I: 211).

Later portions of the Trojan myth, generally recognized as being pertinent to Elizabeth, were staged by the university in 1563, when a *Dido* play (now lost) was performed for the Queen's visit. Deanne Williams makes a strong case for the association of Elizabeth with Dido in the "Sieve Portrait" of 1575 but admits that "most discussions of it emphasize the connection between Elizabeth and Aeneas, not Dido" (Williams, p. 41). The connection, quite simply, stresses the duty to state above romantic affairs. In 1575, the suggestion must be that the Queen's choice of virginity and refusal to marry constitute a wise dedication to her fate as leader of the realm (like Aeneas' dedication to his fate as founder of Rome, and unlike Dido's neglect of responsibility to the state). In 1563, Robert Dudley and Lord Burleigh held the prompt books on the scaffold, "to signifye their good wille" (Nelson, ed., I: 231). In this earlier context, the myth must have provided a warning against the romantic scandal involved in the affair with Lord Robert, who, like Dido, had already been married.

If, in 1563, the scholars of Cambridge were associating the destinies of Aeneas as founder of Rome and Elizabeth as ruler of England, then it is highly probable that the association was also current when they staged *Troas* two years earlier. *Troas* begins at the end of the ten-year-long Trojan War and deals with

13 The later part of the myth that becomes the subject of Sophocles' *Antigone* (a translation of which was printed by Thomas Watson in 1581) is also about the treatment of corpses. After the war that sees the two brothers destroy each other, Creon decrees that Polyneices (for raising an army against Thebes, whatever about his claim to the throne) should not receive proper burial, but should instead be left as carrion for crows. Again, there is a question of marriage in this play, as Antigone is left with the choice to marry Haemon, Creon's son, and submit to his will regarding her brother's corpse, or to oppose it, bury her brother, and effectively (and poetically, in Sophocles' rhetoric) marry death. She chooses the latter, and in the context of Elizabeth's marriage question, it would be quite tempting to see her as analogous to Elizabeth, who chose rather to wed England than any of her many suitors.

the aftermath of the conflict between the Greeks and the Trojans. It is Seneca's version of the story dramatised by Euripides in *Hecuba* (which was performed the previous year in the same college along with *Oedipus*). If the Trojan heritage of Britain was by now a well-established tradition, and one that had been particularly adapted to those who insisted on England's independence from Rome, then the staging of *Troas* in the context of a reformed university should be read as a lament for those who have fallen under the Catholic oppressors during the attempt to stamp out Protestantism in England and the purge of the university under Mary's reign. *Troas*, moreover, in the Astyanax plot (the part unique to Seneca's play, as opposed to Euripides') is about the Greeks' attempt to kill off the final male heir of Hector. That Elizabeth survived her sister's reign and was able to take the throne must have seemed similar to Aeneas' escape from Troy and his descendent Brute's eventual ability to establish Troy Novant at London, and by extension the British nation.

However, at a university that had already seen human sacrifice and the desecration of corpses in its grounds by the ruling faction, *Troas* would just as likely have been taken as a sympathetic look at the defeated party and a plea for leniency in victory. The play opens with a warning, as well as a lament for the destruction and death that have occurred. Hecuba says, "Anyone who trusts in royal power, anyone who rules supreme in a great palace without fear of the fickle gods, anyone who surrenders his trusting heart to happiness, should look upon me, and upon you, Troy" (ll. 1-4).<sup>14</sup> The initial mourning of the Trojan faction is ended by Achilles' ghost, who demands further sacrifice. The Trojan princess, Polyxena, is his promised bride, and he insists on the marriage in the form of a sacrificial marriage-in-death. His brutal son Pyrrhus insists on adhering to his father's ghost's demand, but the Greek captain, Agamemnon, voices a call for moderation in victory that in 1560-61 may have sounded a warning note to those newly reinstated at the heads of the University, and in the state at large:

First one should understand what actions the conqueror may rightly take, and the conquered endure. Power used violently is held by no one for long; used with restraint, it lasts. The higher Fortune raises and exalts human might, the more the fortunate should humble themselves and tremble at shifting circumstance, fearing overly favourable gods. (*Troas*, ll. 256-63)

14 Fitch, in his edition of Seneca, notes (p. 66) that these lines are echoed in Marlowe, 1 *Tamburlaine*, "Those that are proud of fickle empery / And place their chiefest good in earthly pomp— / Behold the Turk and his great emperess!" (V.ii.353-355); and in Thomas Storer, *Life and Death of Thomas Wolsey*: "Never did Fortune greater instance give / In what frail state proud magistrates do live" (ll. 13-14).

In the play, of course, his pleas fall on deaf ears, and both Polyxena and Astyanax are butchered.

While I have focussed on Cambridge University, where Seneca was performed, the Oxford scholar and Catholic, Jasper Heywood, was contemporaneously publishing translations of *Troas*, *Thyestes*, and *Hercules Furens*. His first two plays are worth a moment's consideration in a Catholic context. In Heywood's first translation, *Troas* (1559), Winston notes an embellishment of the suffering of Hecuba and a consequent accentuation of the sympathy she evokes. She further sees a potential identification of Hecuba and the Trojan women of the play's title with Mary and "Catholics such as Heywood, whose fate was, like the women of Troy, subject to a new leader" (Winston, p. 46).<sup>15</sup> That the Cambridge scholars chose to follow Heywood in producing *Troas* the year after indicates not only the popularity of his translation but also a certain sympathy with his position.

Heywood's *Thyestes* (1560) in its turn dramatises a conflict between two brothers (Atreus and Thyestes), who are incapable of sharing the rule of one city. The root cause of the problem is again an ancestral sin (that of Tantalus), and the statutory incest between Thyestes and his brother's wife is also a factor (one of the motives for Atreus' vicious revenge in feeding Thyestes his own sons). Once again, the focus on warring royal siblings must bring to mind Elizabeth and her late sister Mary. The primary victims of the play are the innocent children of Thyestes, and Heywood must have seen himself and his fellow Catholics shadowed in these innocent victims caught in the crossfire. Since his first translation, Heywood had been ejected from Merton because of his religious belief. At the same time, he was awarded a Fellowship at All Souls, but he was not allowed to keep it very long because he refused to recant his faith. He moved very briefly to Gray's Inn in 1561, but at last fled to Rome, where he became a Jesuit priest (Spearing, pp. 437-38). While his translations contained appeals for leniency towards Catholics, his scholarship could not, in the end, protect him.

If Seneca's *Thebais* is a dramatic model for Sackville and Norton, then it has a feature that proved beneficial to those adapting the material at this stage in the tradition: as an unfinished play, it offers those who adapt it the opportunity to write their own ending. Effectively, in Elizabeth's reign the association of the

15 She also postulates that Hecuba may also "shadow" Elizabeth, as a monarch who must be wary of "capricious fortune" and "who had to maintain the fragile political consensus that had brought her to power" (Winston, pp. 45-46).

myth with the Tudor line is incomplete. How authors complete their adaptations of *Thebais* will reflect their interpretation of the current political situation. In 1566, the authors of *Jocasta* choose to end the play, not with the Sophoclean ending, which sees Antigone sentenced to death, but with a five-scene act that is like a miniature version of Sophocles' *Antigone*, with the heroine threatening to defy Creon and bury her brother, refusing a marriage alliance with Creon's son Haemon, but then electing to go into exile with her disgraced father. In Gascoigne and Kenwelmershe's version, then, there is a suggestion that there is something wicked in Antigone's refusal of the marriage alliance offered, most pointedly in her threat to kill Haemon if the marriage is forced upon her. Gillian Austen looks at some of the political implications of this play, and in particular the final act. She again highlights the problem of the succession (and of Elizabeth's "absolute and arbitrary power over the succession" [Austen, p. 61]) and also notes the "threat of civil war", which she sees as the "overriding fear associated with an unsettled succession" (p. 56). She sees in Oedipus a figure of Death, brought forth by Jocasta, whom she sees as Truth (a figure adopted by Elizabeth). But if Oedipus represents Death here, then within the Senecan tradition, that figure recalls the other dead characters who are summoned forth from the "darkesome denne" of the underworld, like Tantalus in *Thyestes* or Thyestes in *Agamemnon*, haled forth by furies to prophesy the continuation of the curse and the repetition of their sins. In *Jocasta*, the civil war has already happened; what follows is not civil war but the reign of a tyrant, Creon (moulded here out of Sophocles' *Antigone*, not Seneca). From a Protestant perspective, Henry's sin in allowing the Catholic child of incest, Mary, a place in the succession might be repeated if Elizabeth fails to take action and remove the threat posed to the line by the Catholic Mary, Queen of Scots.

*Gorboduc* is a slightly different story, at least in its conclusion, and the threat of civil war is presented as more immediate. In the aftermath of the deaths of Ferrex and Porrex, the realm is made literally devoid of leadership: "The people loe forgetting trouth and loue, / Contemning quite both law and loyall hart, / Euen they haue slaine their soueraigne lord & queene" (V.i.5-7). The murder of Gorboduc and Videna by this lawless mob seems pointless, as the heirs of the house are already slain, but the popular revolt does not stop there:

Euen yet they cease not, caryed on with rage,  
In their rebellious routes, to threaten still

A new bloud shed vnto the princes kinne,  
To slay them all, and to vproote the race  
Both of the king and queene. (V.i.9-13)

This popular uprising in the play may recall the actual Protestant rebellion in Scotland, aided by Elizabeth in 1559, against Mary of Guise. This rebellion was religious in nature and was waged against a female ruler.<sup>16</sup> The ambiguity of the scene most likely reflects the ambiguity felt by English Protestants, who supported the general cause of this Scottish revolt but may have seen in it the spectre of another potential future uprising against their own queen, Elizabeth, by Catholic forces who had the support of a foreign queen (*i.e.*, Mary Stuart).

The remaining counsellors of Gorboduc's former realm, the nobility, consider policy and rhetoric as a means of suppressing the revolt, but (significantly for the Master of the Horse, Robert Dudley) they determine to prepare

Such band of horsemen as ye may [prepare].  
Horsemen (you know) are not the commons strength,  
But are the force and store of noble men,  
Wherby the unchosen and vnarmed sort  
Of skillesse rebelles, whome none other power  
But nombre makes to be of dreadfull force,  
With sodeyne brunt may quickly be opprest. (V.i.100-6)

They determine with this armed force to wreak "such slaughter" (110) that future generations will be filled with "horror of reuenge" (112) at the thought of rebellion. If this rebellion against the ruling faction is suggestive of a potential Catholic revolt, then this passage seems to counsel allowing Robert Dudley to pursue a more vigorous suppression of Catholicism than the Act of Uniformity currently allowed.<sup>17</sup> This type of violent pursuit of recusants seems to have been exactly the kind of response that the university men at Cambridge must have expected when they performed Seneca's sympathetic *Troas* a year earlier.<sup>18</sup>

16 See McLaren, p. 273.

17 The act is sometimes referred to as Act of Religious Settlement and is reprinted in Tanner, ed., (pp. 135-39).

18 Zim resists any religious reading of Sackville's contribution to this play (which includes this final act). She reads a religious moderation throughout his career that indicates that he was less concerned with public religious statement (as opposed to private belief) than with political expediency and peaceful moderation. However, the one exception to this trend that she observes (pp. 913 ff.) is when religious matters threaten political concerns.

The critical consensus is that succession is the issue at the heart of *Gorboduc*. James and Walker have shown conclusively that this was originally understood by a contemporary audience in terms of the competing offers of marriage from Robert Dudley and the King of Sweden. The play also portrays a realm that, by association with Brute's kingdom at the end of his reign, lacks a clear male line and by extension is effectively acephalous. This headless realm is incapable of defence against the foreign threat of the Duke of Albany (Scotland) in Gorboduc's time, or of Mary, Queen of Scots in Elizabeth's. It is a realm that has not the stomach to put down with violence the potential threat of Catholic rebellion or plotting from within. If the Cambridge plays counsel a *via media* rather than violent revenge in the change of religious regime, then *Gorboduc* implies that Elizabeth's measured approach leaves her open to the threat of religious civil war. The play certainly recommends that she settle the succession, perhaps by marriage, perhaps by announcing her heir, but it does so by implying that her family has caused civil discord throughout the realm that she as a monarch has failed to deal with, with the result that the realm is now open to invasion or internal unrest.

## Bibliography

### Primary sources

- FITCH, John J., ed. and trans. *Seneca: Tragedies*. 2 vols. Loeb Classical Library 62, 78. London: Heinemann; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002, 2004.
- GASCOIGNE, George, and Francis Kenwelmersh. *Jocasta* (1566). *Early English Classical Tragedies*. Ed. John W. Cunliffe. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912.
- HEYWOOD, Jasper, trans. *The sixt tragedie of the most graue and prudent author Lucius, Anneus, Seneca, entituled Troas*. London, Richard Tottel, 1559.
- MARLOWE, Christopher, *Tamburlaine*. Ed. J. S. Cunningham. The Revels Plays. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981.
- NEVILLE, Alexander, trans. *Oedipus* (1563). *Seneca's Tragedies: Oedipus, Troas, Agamemnon*. Ed. Eric C. Baade. London: Macmillan, 1969.
- NICHOLS, John Gough, ed. *The Chronicle of Queen Jane, and of Two Years of Queen Mary, and Especially of the Rebellion of Sir Thomas Wyatt*. Camden Society, OS 48. London: for the Camden Society, 1850.
- NOWELL, Alexander. *A Catechism* (1563). Trans. Thomas Norton. Ed. G. E. Corrie. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1853.
- SACKVILLE, Thomas, and Thomas Norton. *Gorboduc, or Ferrex and Porrex* (1561). Ed. Irby B. Cauthen, Jr. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970.
- STORER, Thomas. *The Life of T. Wolsey: Reprinted from the Edition of 1599: With an Introduction and Notes*. Oxford: Talboys and Wheeler, 1826.
- TANNER, J. R., ed. *Tudor Constitutional Documents A.D. 1485-1603 with an Historical Commentary*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951.
- WALPOLE, Horatio. *A Catalogue of the Royal and Noble Authors of England, Scotland, and Ireland*. Ed. Thomas Park. 5 vols. Vol. 1. London: John Scott, 1806.

### Secondary sources

- AUSTEN, Gillian. *George Gascoigne*. *Studies in Renaissance Literature*, 24. Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008.
- AXTON, Marie. *The Queen's Two Bodies: Drama and the Elizabethan Succession*. London: Royal Historical Society, 1977.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Robert Dudley and the Inner Temple Revels". *The Historical Journal* 13.3 (1970): 365-78.

- BOEHRER, Bruce Thomas. *Monarchy and Incest in Renaissance England*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992.
- CUNLIFFE, John W. *The Influence of Seneca on Elizabethan Tragedy*. New York: Gordon, 1893.
- DORAN, Susan. "Juno versus Diana: The Treatment of Elizabeth I's Marriage in Plays and Entertainments, 1561-1581". *The Historical Journal* 38.2 (1995): 257-74.
- ELLIOT, John R., Jr., Alan H. Nelson, Alexandra F. Johnston and Diana Wyatt, eds. *Records of Early English Drama, Oxford*. 2 vols. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004.
- FORKER, Charles R. *Fancy's Images: Contexts, Settings and Perspectives in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990.
- JAMES, Henry, and Greg Walker. "The Politics of *Gorboduc*". *The English Historical Review* 110.435 (1995): 109-21.
- MCCABE, Richard. *Incest, Drama, and Nature's Law 1550-1700*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- McLAREN, Anne. "The Quest for a King: Gender, Marriage, and Succession in Elizabethan England". *The Journal of British Studies* 41.3 (2002): 259-90.
- MALEY, Willy. *Nation, State and Empire in English Renaissance Literature: Shakespeare to Milton*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
- MARTÍNEZ, Zenón Luis. *In Words and Deeds: The Spectacle of Incest in English Renaissance Tragedy*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2002.
- MOTTRAM, Stewart. *Empire and Nation in Early English Renaissance Literature*. Studies in Renaissance Literature, 25. London: D. S. Brewer, 2008.
- NELSON, Alan H., ed. *Records of Early English Drama, Cambridge*. 2 vols. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989.
- PATTERSON, Lawrence K. "The Reformation at Cambridge". *The Catholic Historical Review* 16.1 (1930): 51-63.
- SPEARING, Evelyn M. "The Elizabethan *Tenue Tragedies of Seneca*". *Modern Language Review* 4.4 (1909): 437-61.
- WILLIAMS, Deanne. "Dido, Queen of England". *ELH* 73.1 (2006): 31-58.
- WINSTON, Jessica. "Seneca in Early Elizabethan England". *Renaissance Quarterly* 59 (2006): 29-58.
- ZIM, Rivka. "Religious and Political Counsellor: Thomas Sackville, 1536-1608". *The English Historical Review* 122.498 (2007): 892-917.

