T.C.

İSTANBUL YENİ YÜZYIL UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE DEPARTMENT

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE PROGRAMME

PLAYING WITH PASSIONS:
SENECAN ECHOES IN SHAKESPEARE'S THREE TRAGEDIES

MA THESIS

ALİ KEMAL GÜMÜŞ

22131306011

İSTANBUL, MAY 2025

T.C.

İSTANBUL YENİ YÜZYIL UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE DEPARTMENT

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE PROGRAMME

PLAYING WITH PASSIONS:
SENECAN ECHOES IN SHAKESPEARE'S THREE TRAGEDIES

MA THESIS

ALİ KEMAL GÜMÜŞ
22131306011
ORCID NO: 0000-0002-2494-7042

SUPERVISOR
ASSIST. PROF. DR. SELENA ÖZBAŞ
JURY MEMBERS
PROF. DR. GÜNSELİ İŞÇİ
ASSIST. PROF. DR. TÜLAY DAĞOĞLU

İSTANBUL, MAY 2025

T.C.

İSTANBUL YENİ YÜZYIL ÜNİVERSİTESİ

SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ MÜDÜRLÜĞÜ

TEZ ONAY BELGESİ

İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Anabilim Dalı **İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı** programı, 22131306011 numaralı Tezli Yüksek Lisans öğrencisi **Ali Kemal Gümüş'ün "Playing with Passions: Senecan Echoes in Shakespeare's Three Tragedies"** adlı tez çalışması, Enstitü Yönetim Kurulunun 20.05.2025 tarih ve 2025/04 sayılı kararıyla oluşturulan jüri tarafından oy birliği / oy çokluğu ile Yüksek Lisans Tezi olarak kabul edilmiştir.

Tez Savunma Tarihi: 26.05.2025

Öğretim Üyesi Unvanı, Adı ve Soyadı		İmzası
Tez Danışmanı	Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Selena Özbaş	
Jüri Üyesi	Prof. Dr. Günseli İşçi	
Jüri Üyesi	Doç. Dr. Tülay Dağoğlu	

T.C.

İSTANBUL YENİ YÜZYIL UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

MA PROGRAMME

ETHICAL STATEMENT

I prepared my project following the thesis writing rules of the Institute of Social Sciences at Istanbul Yeni Yüzyıl University, and I hereby declare that;

- I have obtained the data, information, and documents provided within the thesis according to academic and ethical rules,
- I have submitted all information, documents, evaluations, and results under the requirements of scientific ethics and moral rules,
- I have cited all works that I have used in the project by appropriately referring to my sources,
- I have not made any changes to the data used,
- I declare that the work I present is original, and

if found otherwise, I accept all loss of rights that may occur.

26/03/2025

Ali Kemal GÜMÜŞ

ÖZET

TUTKULARLA OYNAMAK: SHAKESPEARE'IN ÜÇ TRAJEDİSİNDE SENECA YANKILARI

ALİ KEMAL GÜMÜŞ

ORCID NO: 0000-0002-2494-7042

Bu tez, Shakespeare'in üç trajedisi (*Titus Andronicus*, *Macbeth* ve *Richard III*) üzerinde Seneca etkisini incelemektedir. Yakın metin analizi yoluyla bu çalışma, Shakespeare'in Seneca geleneğini nasıl yorumladığını ve dönüştürdüğünü araştırır; karakterlerin ahlaki mücadelesine, gelişimine ve tutkuların oluşum aşamalarına odaklanır. Ayrıca çalışma kapsamında Seneca'nın tematik tercihler ve dramatik yapı bakımından Shakespeare üzerindeki etkileri vurgulanır. Çalışmada Shakespeare'in hayaletsi görünümler, gizli haberciler ve karakterlerin iç konuşmalarını nasıl kullandığı gibi sorulara da yanıt aranır. Bulgular, Shakespeare'in bu üç oyununun yalnızca Seneca'nın tematik ve stilistik unsurlarını yansıtmadığını, aynı zamanda Seneca'nın Stoacı felsefesini karmaşık insan öykülerinde özgün bir biçimde yorumladığını ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Seneca, Shakespeare, Stoacılık, Trajedi, Tutkular

ABSTRACT

PLAYING WITH PASSIONS:

SENECAN ECHOES IN SHAKESPEARE'S THREE TRAGEDIES

ALİ KEMAL GÜMÜŞ

ORCID NO: 0000-0002-2494-7042

This thesis examines the Senecan effect on Shakespeare's three tragedies: *Titus Andronicus, Macbeth* and *Richard III*. Through close text analysis, this study explores how Shakespeare engages with and reinvents Senecan tradition, focusing on characters' moral struggle, progression and stages of formation of passions. Along the way, it highlights how Seneca influences Shakespeare in thematic ways and dramatic structure. Further questions addressed in this work include how Shakespeare incorporated Senecan stock characters such as ghostly apparitions, clandestine nuntius and soliloquies. The findings reveal that these three plays do not only reflect Senecan thematic and stylistic elements, but they also reinterpret the Stoic philosophy of Seneca in complex human stories.

Keywords: Seneca, Shakespeare, Stoicism, Passions, Tragedy

It is a common practise now a daies amongst a sort of shifting companions, that runne through euery arte and thriue by none, to leaue the trade of Nouerint whereto they were borne, and busie themselues with the indeuors of Art, that could scarcelie latinize their necke-verse if they should haue neede; yet English Seneca read by candle-light yeeldes manie good sentences, as Bloud is a begger, and so foorth: and if you intreate him faire in a frostie morning, he will affoord you whole *Hamlets*, I should say handfulls of tragical speeches. (Thomas Nashe, Preface to Robert Greene's *Menaphon*)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page No.

TEZ ONAY BELGESİ ..... **i**

ETHICAL STATEMENT ..... **ii**

ÖZET ..... **iii**

ABSTRACT ..... **iv**

TABLE OF CONTENTS ..... **iv**

INTRODUCTION **1**

1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF STOICISM **4**

2. STOIC ETHICS AND PASSIONS **8**

2.1. Stoic Ethics 8

2.2. Stoic Passions 10

3. SENECAN PASSIONS **12**

3.1. De Ira (On Anger) 12

3.2. De Constantia Sapientis (On The Firmness of The Wise Person) 15

3.3. Seneca's Tragedies 16

3.3.1. Medea 18

3.3.2. Hercules Furens (Hercules Mad) 22

3.3.3. Thyestes 26

3.3.4. Agamemnon 31

3.3.5. Phaedra 32

3.3.6. Troades (Trojan Women) 33

4. SENECAN ECHOES IN SHAKESPEARE'S THREE TRAGEDIES **36**

4.1. Senecan Influence on Shakespeare's Tragedies 36

4.2. Titus Andronicus 38

4.2. Tragedy of Macbeth 46

4.3. Richard III 56

5. CONCLUSION 64

BIBLIOGRAPHY 70

INTRODUCTION

Theatre is a medium for human beings to express their opinions, anxieties and emotions. It offers a reflection for human condition. Since Ancient Greeks people have used theatre not only as an entertainment but also as a place where they can communicate their emotions and innermost thoughts.

When Roman empire enlarged their territories and encountered Greeks, they inherited theatrical tradition and adopted it to their own taste. A roman statesmen and philosopher Lucius Anneus Seneca was also one of the most prominent playwrights of the empire. As a stoic philosopher he advocated reason and control of emotions and living in accordance with nature. In his book *De Ira* (*On Anger*) he described anger as a temporary insanity and outlined the stages of anger formation. In his tragedies, however, he created passionate characters who yields to passions, committing unspeakable atrocities: mothers killing her sons, brothers feeding children to their fathers, and men slaying his family. Seneca's tragedies were closet dramas, written for recitation rather than being staged. In contrast to Greek tragedies, they are full of graphic violence and highly elevated language.

The apparent contradiction between his philosophical works and his tragedies has long puzzled scholars. For a long time, it was thought that there were two different Senecas: Seneca the dramatist and Seneca the philosopher. The consensus is that both philosophical works and tragedies were written by the same person. Seneca followed a didactic path in his tragedies and his characters serve as negative examples of unchecked ambitions and extreme emotions. Centuries later, these didactic tragedies would find new life and interpretation.

Seneca was rediscovered during the Renaissance. Renaissance humanism established ideal conditions for artists and playwrights to flourish. It started in Italy in the 14th century and reached England in the 16th century. The Renaissance encouraged intellectual exploration and study of classical texts. Restrictive ideas of Medieval times were abandoned and the emphasis on human dignity, individuality, and reason increased. Such a shift in the worldview changed the way English dramatists approached classical texts. As a result, Shakespeare and his contemporaries could move beyond simple didactic characterization.

Seneca's works inspired many playwrights including Renaissance dramatists. T.S. Eliot famously observes "No author exercised a wider or deeper influence upon the Elizabethan mind or upon the Elizabethan form of tragedy than did Seneca." (Eliot, 1932, p.65). Eliot's comment is especially meaningful considering that Greek tragedies were not widely known in England during that period. In 1581, Thomas Newton edited a collection of Seneca's translations in a book: Tenne tragedies, and before that many of Seneca's individual tragedies had already been in print from 1559 on. Early signs of his influence started with *Gorboduc* (1562), followed by many other plays written by Thomas Kyd and Christopher Marlowe and their contemporaries, including Shakespeare.

Shakespeare was influenced by Seneca in multiple ways. From Cunliffe to Robert S. Miola, many scholars studied the influence of Seneca on Elizabethan playwrights. Building on that tradition, this thesis examines three tragedies: *Titus Andronicus, Macbeth,* and *Richard III*. These three tragedies demonstrate apparent influence of Seneca on Shakespeare. This study explores technical similarities, textual parallels, and stylistic elements shared between Senecan and Shakespearean tragedies; it also examines how Shakespeare recasts Stoic philosophy through complex characters with moral depth, whilst borrowing from and extending Senecan motifs. In these three tragedies I attempt to demonstrate the process of Shakespeare's transformation.

These three tragedies of Shakespeare engage with Senecan tradition and theatrical techniques in multiple levels. *Titus Andronicus* (1593), Shakespeare's most violent play has sophisticated parallels with Seneca's Thyestes particularly in how he handles revenge and cannibalism, it even includes direct Latin quotations from Seneca. Macbeth also goes through the process of anger formation outlined in Seneca's *De Ira,* we witness his transformation from ambition to tyranny with psychological dimensions which do not exist in Seneca's tragedies. Richard is reminiscent of a typical Senecan revenger, but with self-awareness about his villainy.

The first chapter provides necessary philosophical and historical context, examining the development of Stoicism from its Greek origins to its Roman manifestations. The second chapter explores Stoic ethics and passions. The third chapter examines Senecan passions and then analyzes Senecan tragedies. This analysis establishes the

characteristic patterns, themes, and techniques that would influence Renaissance dramatists. Particular attention is paid to how Seneca's characters progress through stages of passion and how his dramatic techniques such as soliloquy, stichomythia, sententiae, and spectacular violence create a distinctive tragic style.

The fourth chapter forms the heart of the thesis, examining how Shakespeare transforms Senecan materials in the three chosen tragedies. The analysis demonstrates that while Shakespeare adopts Senecan structures and conventions, he reimagines them by creating characters who have far greater psychological complexity and moral ambiguity. While Senecan characters often embody single passions or philosophical principles, Shakespeare's tragic figures emerge as fully realized individuals whose moral struggles engage our sympathies even as we condemn their actions.

This thesis, using close text analysis, reveals that Senecan influence on Shakespeare goes beyond mere imitation. The Senecan transformations contribute to a new kind of tragedy, one that combines classical structure with Renaissance humanism.

1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF STOICISM

Stoicism is an ancient philosophy founded by Zeno of Citium who lived circa 300 BCE. Stoicism is generally classified into three phases: early Stoicism, middle Stoicism and late Stoicism or Roman Stoicism (Sedley, 2003). Early Stoicism spans the period from Zeno (the founder) to the late second century BCE. This period includes one of the most poignant figures of Stoicism; namely, Chrysippus. Middle Stoicism is from the late 2nd to the 1st century BCE, overlapping with the time of Panaetius and Posidonius. Late Stoicism, on the other hand, refers to the period between the 1st and the 2nd centuries CE, including figures such as Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius (Sedley, 2003). The important figures of each of these three phases of Stoicism are introduced below.

Zeno, the founder of the school, was from Citium, Cyprus, and he worked as a tradesman. On one of his commercial voyages, his ship was wrecked near Athens, and, as a result, he went bankrupt. Following this event, he visited a bookshop in Athens, where he met Crates of Thebes, a Cynic philosopher, which marked the start of his relationship with philosophy. His early studies with Cynic Crates had a significant impact on Stoic philosophy (Sedley, 2003). Polemo, the head of the Platonic Academy, and Megaric Philosopher Stilpo were among Zeno's other mentors. Around 300 BCE, Zeno started to form his own group of followers. At first, they were called "Zenonians", and they were later known as Stoics, which is named after *Stoa Poikile* (Painted Stoa), a place where they held their gatherings. Zeno gained considerable popularity and attracted many followers. His philosophy was a comprehensive system incorporating elements from physics, logic and ethics. Zeno lived in Athens until he died in 262 BCE. His first successor was Cleanthes, followed by Chrysippus, who was one of the most salient philosophers of all times (Jedan, 2009).

Following the death of Zeno, Cleanthes, who was from Assos (in modern Western Turkey), became the head of the Stoic school. Cleanthes is generally not considered as influential as Zeno and his successor Chrysippus. His book *Hymn to Zeus* is the earliest Stoic text, which survived to present day. This work of his was compiled by John Stobaeus. According to Stobaeus, Cleanthes was not very skilled

in physics, although he wrote two volumes on Zeno's physics and four volumes on Heraclitus (Sellars, 2006).

Cleanthes was succeeded by Chrysippus, who was one of the most prominent philosophers of the Hellenistic era. He was born in Soli (in Southern Turkey). Chrysippus became the head of the school around 232 BCE and died at the age of 73. He was a major figure in Stoic philosophy. As Diogenes Laertius says, "If there had been no Chrysippus, there had been no Stoa" (Annas & Schofield, 2016). Chrysippus was a highly productive author, as more than seven hundred books are said to have been written by him. All that remains from his writings are fragments written by later writers such as Plutarch and Galen, who were critical of Chrysippus' works (Sedley, 2006). After Chrysippus, Diogenes of Babylon became the head of the school, followed by Zeno of Tarsus.

Middle Stoa is mostly known in connection with two philosophers: Panaetius and Posidonius. Panaetius was born in Rhodes around 185 BCE (Dorandi, 1999). He studied in Pergamum and Athens, where he was a pupil of Diogenes of Babylon and Antipater of Tarsus. Although he was a Stoic, he deviated from it at certain points (Sellars, 2006). Posidonius was born in 135 BCE in Syria. He did not stay in Athens and moved to Rhodes, where he taught philosophy. Similar to Panaetius, Posidonius also deviated on certain points from early Stoa. He studied and benefitted from the works of Aristotle and Plato (Sellars, 2006).

Stoicism also flourished in Rome. According to Gill (2003), in Roman Stoa, there is a noticeable shift from theoretical components of Stoicism like physics and logic. Instead, Roman Stoics gravitated towards a pragmatic approach to ethics. Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius are major figures of Roman Stoicism.

Stoic Roman philosopher Lucius Annaeus Seneca was born in Cordoba, Spain. His father, Seneca the Elder, was a nobleman. Seneca came to Rome when he was about five years old. He started his education there, which mainly focused on languages (Latin and Greek) and traditional texts. When he was 41, he was exiled to the island of Corsica with the accusation of adultery. He spent eight years of his life there until he returned to Rome and became a tutor for Nero. In the year 65 CE, Nero accused Seneca of treason and ordered him to commit suicide (Wagoner, 2024). As a

writer, Seneca was prolific, producing many works, the most famous one of which is *Moral Letters to Lucillius* (*Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium),* consisting of 124 letters written to his friend Lucillius. In this work, he discusses issues about ethics, virtue, and the importance of reason. He also wrote other philosophical works, which include three Consolations (*Consolation to Marcia, Consolation to Helvia, Consolation to Polybius).* His philosophical treatises on specific questions, topics, or themes are *On Anger, On Mercy, On Leisure, On the Constancy of the Wise Person, On Providence, On Benefits*. He also wrote about natural philosophy. *The Natural Questions* is a book about questions on physics and meteorology.

In addition to non-fiction on Stoic philosophy, Seneca also wrote fiction. There are eight tragedies written by him: *Agamemnon, Hercules Furens, Medea, Thyestes, Oedipus, Phaedra, Phoenisse,* and *Troades.* The relationship between his philosophical works and tragedies is debatable. Seneca's philosophical works focus on avoiding anger and other excessive emotions. The tragedies center on the devastating nature of anger and other emotions.

Another major figure of Roman Stoicism, Epictetus was born as a slave in *Hierapolis* in Western Anatolia. He got his education in Rome from Musonius Rufus. He obtained his freedom after the death of Nero. He started teaching his own classes in Rome, but as with all other philosophers at the time, he was banished from the Italian Peninsula by the order of Emperor Domitian. He went to Nicopolis, Greece, and founded his own philosophy school there. The works that are attributed to him, *Enchiridion* and *Discourses,* were written by his student Arrian of Nicomedia (Graver, 2021).

Core ideas of Epictetus' philosophy were derived from the works of early Stoics Zeno, Cleanthes and Chrysippus of Soli (Graver, 2021). Epictetus set three fields of study for a philosopher to follow. The first one is desires (*orexeis*) and aversions (*ekkliseis*). A rational agent, according to him, should not only have the knowledge of how nature works, he should also train his desires so that he can desire those which are in accordance with nature. The second field of study pertains to ethics, and the impulse to act and not to act. The third field is being free from hasty judgement and deception (Sellars, 2003).

The third major figure of Roman Stoicism, Marcus Aurelius, was a Roman Emperor and an eminent Stoic philosopher. He was born in 121 CE. He was educated in rhetoric and philosophy, and was influenced by the *Discourses* of Epictetus (Sellars, 2006). Marcus Aurelius is well-known for his work the *Meditations*. It is written in the form of a notebook containing his personal and philosophical opinions. In his book, Marcus Aurelius focuses on themes that are probably the results of his own experiences such as inevitability of death and the shortcomings of people around him (Kamtekar, 2018).

In summary, Stoicism, which was born in Athens, was founded by Zeno, and expanded by Chrysippus. Then, it moved to Rome and flourished there in the hands of Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius and continues to have substantial influence on modern thought and philosophy.

2. STOIC ETHICS AND PASSIONS

2.1. Stoic Ethics

Stoicism is characterized by a distinct and unique understanding of ethics. Stoic ethics has eudaimonistic structure, placing *eudaimonia* (happiness) at the centre of human life. Happiness is defined as an ultimate goal or *telos* for a rational adult human. Everything that is done is for its sake. Stoics hold that every individual wishes to achieve happiness and live a happy, flourishing life. Unfortunately, according to Stoics, people hold false opinions about what their happiness comprises of and what is good for them.

The first question that comes to mind is how to achieve *telos*. To achieve *telos,* one must live in accordance with nature. As Stobaeus reports:

> Zeno represented the end as: 'living in agreement'. This is living in accordance with one concordant reason, since those who live in conflict are unhappy... Cleanthes, [Zeno's] first successor, added 'with nature', and represented it as follows: 'the end is living in agreement with nature' (Stobaeus, 63B, trans. Sedley, 1987).

From a Stoic standpoint living according to nature has more than one meaning: one's living according to his own nature and according to nature as a whole; that is, the entire cosmos (Stephens, 2025). To achieve a state of agreement in our minds the only thing we need, Stoics maintain, is virtue. Virtue is the only good and can help individuals to obtain happiness. Seneca argues that virtue is the highest state of human reason. (Durand et al., 2023). To better understand this argument, it is essential to clarify what is good, evil and indifferent. Zeno divides things into three categories: good things, bad things and indifferents (Sellars, 2006). Good things belong with virtue and contribute to virtue. Bad things belong with vice and contribute to vice. Everything else falls into the group called "indifferents" (*adiaphoron*) such as wealth, health, poverty, reputation, and life itself. If someone accepts this classification, he should focus on preserving virtue, which is the only good.

Indifferents have subdivisions, which are preferred indifferents (*proēgmenon*) and non-preferred indifferents (*apoproēgmenon*). Some preferred indifferents are wealth, fame and health, while sickness and poverty are non-preferred indifferents. Preferred indifferents have value (*axia*). From a Stoic viewpoint, it is acceptable for a rational agent to choose health over sickness and choosing wealth over poverty. (Sellars, 2003). Preferred indifferents contribute to our well-being, yet they are not good in the same sense as virtue. A rational agent might pursue indifferents such as wealth and health, but they do not increase or decrease his level of happiness.

Epictetus formulates an ethical way to navigate life replete with preferred and non-preferred indifferents. From the standpoint of Epictetus' philosophy, things might be divided into two categories: things that "are up to us" (*ta eph' hēmin*) and things that are "not up to us" (*ta ouk eph' hēmin*).

> Some things are up to us, while others are not up to us. Up to us are conception, choice, desire, aversion and, in a word, everything that is our own doing; not up to us are our body, our property, reputation, office and, in a word, everything that is not our own doing. Furthermore, the things up to us are by nature free, unhindered and unimpeded; while the things not up to us are weak, servile, subject to hindrance and not our own (*Ench*. 1.1–2, Seddon, 2025).

One can infer from the quotation that whether it is preferred or non-preferred, all indifferents belong to the category of "not up to us". Some indifferents might be slightly better than other indifferents. However, they do not deserve our close attention (Sellars, 2006). If an agent ascribes too much attention to things like wealth, fame, and the likes of it, frustration is the probable outcome when they are not achieved. Instead, one should focus on achieving and promoting *virtue,* which is the only good (Sellars, ibid).

Stoics produced a complex term to support their thesis that *virtue* is good. It is called *oikeiôsis*. It is difficult to translate properly but it roughly means

appropriation or *familiarization*. Human beings, by nature, have an innate desire to preserve their existence. Every action we commit and every choice we make is based on what we think will support or harm our self-preservation. At first, it might seem a selfish or at least a self-centered attitude. However, the Stoics argue that it aligns with the natural instincts of humans and non-human animals (Durand, Shogry, & Baltzly, 2023).

The things that help animals with their self-preservation are rather obvious: food, water, shelter and others. For a rational human being it is more complicated. Apart from those things that preserve their physical existence, humans also seek things that help them preserve their rationality. Stoics argue one must even consider committing suicide to preserve his rationality. If a dictator orders someone to do an action that is against virtue and reason, one must resist the dictator even if it means death for him. That action might physically harm or end his physical constitution, but he will preserve his rationality. Seneca serves a good example for this. When Nero orders him to commit suicide, he accepts his fate and ends his life to preserve his rationality. Life itself, as noted above, is not a virtue but an indifferent. Consequently, one's choosing to end his physical existence rather than losing his rational constitution is compatible with Stoic philosophy.

2.2. Stoic Passions

In Stoic philosophy, a virtuous person does not feel any passions (*pathē).* By doing so, he will achieve happiness. The opposite of virtue is vice and it needs to be avoided at all times. How can "*passion*" be defined exactly?

> "They [the Stoics] say that passion is impulse which is excessive and disobedient to the dictates of reason, or a movement of soul which is irrational and contrary to nature; and that all passions belong to the soul's commanding-faculty." (Stobaeus, 65A, trans. Sedley, 1987)

When a person experiences passions, he disobeys the dictates of reason, the rationality of cosmos, and the universal law. Experiencing a passion is being at odds with nature; therefore, it hinders a person's progress towards *telos*; i.e., end or goal.

In his famous analogy, Chrysippus compares a person in the state of passion to a runner; as the runner cannot stop immediately when he is running very fast, a passionate person cannot stop himself and come back to his reason swiftly (Graver, 2023).

There are four main types of passions: distress, fear, pleasure and appetite. Distress is defined as belief in present evil and pleasure (delight) is defined as belief in a present good. Fear and desire (lust, appetite) are about future. Appetite is a belief in future good and fear is a belief in future bad (Durand, 2023).

Some passions which fall under the categorization of distress are jealousy, pity, grief, sorrow, annoyance, and malice. Those classified under the category of fear are expectation of something negative, dread, terror, agony, hesitation, shock, shame, panic, and superstition. Those which fall under desire (appetite) are want, yearning, quarrelsomeness, intense sexual craving, and spiritedness. Those which belong to the category of pleasure are reveling in other's sorrows, enchantment, rapture and self-gratification (Stephens, 2025). All these passions are caused by a person's perceptual error regarding the value of the intentional object; in other words, an error that leads to failure to live in agreement with nature. A wise agent is not completely emotionless, as he might have good emotions (*eupatheia*i). These are joy (*chara*), caution (*eulabeia*), and wish (*boulêsis*) (Stephens, ibid.). *Joy* is something rationally judged to be good in the present and *wish* is a rational belief in future good, and *caution* is a rational belief in a future bad. There is no rational equivalent of *distress*.

3. SENECAN PASSIONS

3.1. De Ira (On Anger)

Seneca, in his book *De Ira* (*On Anger*), maintains that anger is "the ugliest and most savage of all emotions" (Romm, 2019) and gives a detailed description of anger. He puts anger in the category of desire, describing it as a strong desire to take revenge. He considers anger "an inhuman desire to inflict pain in combat and shed blood in punishment", adding that some wise men have said that anger is *a brief madness* (Seneca, 2010). He explains the formation of anger in three stages. First, a person has proto-emotions (*propatheia*), which resemble emotion but actually are not. This is an involuntary reaction; an agent has no control over it. Seneca recounts instances of the first stage as follows:

> …shivering when we're sprinkled with cold water, or revulsion at touching certain things, or the way our hair stands on end at bad news, or the blush that spreads when we hear obscene words, or the dizziness that comes over us when we look down from a cliff (Nussbaum, 2010).

The second stage of anger includes judgement. For something to be qualified as an emotion, it must be endorsed by the human mind. The third stage is the action over which an agent has no control at all. The first and third stages are not within the control of reason; in the second stage, however, anger can be averted through reason, as Stoics claim that emotions are judgements; thus, they are within full control of agents. Without a person's giving assent, emotions cannot occur. The agent's control with respect to the stages of formation of anger is explained by Seneca as follows:

> …there's a second movement accompanied by an expression of will not stubbornly resolved, to the effect that "I should be avenged, since I've been harmed" or "this man should be punished, since he's committed a crime." The third movement's already out of control, it desires

> vengeance not if it's appropriate but come what may, having overthrown reason (Seneca, *On Anger*, 2.4.1, 2015).

The meaning derived from the above-mentioned quotation from Seneca can be explained in the form of a syllogism: Doing something that is good for me is right. Seeking vengeance when I am harmed unjustly is good. I have been harmed unjustly. Therefore, it is acceptable and necessary for me to take vengeance.

The second proposition here, as Stoics maintain, is wrong since virtue is the only good. Consequently, the last proposition, which is based on the second proposition, is a false judgement. Subsequently, Seneca cautions about the dangers of anger.

> It causes whoever has come into its clutches to forget his duty: make a father angry, he's an enemy; make a son angry, he's a parricide. Anger makes a mother a stepmother, a fellow-citizen a foreign enemy, a king a tyrant (Seneca, *On Anger*, 2.4.1, 2015).

Seneca rejects taming emotions, and recommends eradicating them, claiming that "moderate emotions" sound as absurd as "moderate insanity" (Seneca, Letters on Ethics, 85.9, 2015). He goes further and says that a person should not get angry and taken over by emotions even if his father is killed and his mother is raped. He explains that he will do what he is supposed to do and defend their parents. He will act as such out of duty and devotion not out of anger. Reason, in itself, is sufficient to act correctly (Seneca, 2010).

Seneca not only devises a theoretical base for anger, but also offers a system of therapy suggesting ways to avoid anger. He emphasizes the importance of raising a child. If a child, he claims, is raised in a certain way, emergence of anger will be prevented from the beginning. For adults, he strongly advises assessing one's perception of injuries and not acting hastily. He also recommends keeping in mind that the wrongdoer also suffers by his very own actions and underscores that doing harm to another person is not in conformity with human nature (Seneca, *On Anger*, 3.1.1., 2010).

Apart from anger, Seneca also focuses on fear and grief. In *Natural Questions*, he claims that a rational agent needs to overcome his fear of death:

> So, Lucilius, as far as you are able, exhort yourself against the fear of death. This fear is what demeans us; this is what disturbs and ruins the very life it spares; this exaggerates it all, the earthquakes and the lightning-bolts. You will face all that without flinching if you consider that there is no difference between a short time and a long one. (Seneca, *Natural Questions*, 2010)

He points out that fear makes people lose their rationality:

> So the weakest temperaments generally reach such a pitch of terror that they lose their heads. No one can panic without some loss of sanity, and anyone who is afraid resembles a madman. But fear soon restores some people to their normal selves, while it disturbs others more deeply and drives them mad. (Seneca, *Natural Questions*, 2010)

To overcome fear, he advises to count on rationality and recognize nature by reason, adding that ignorance incites fear:

> When we are ignorant of the truth, everything is more terrifying, especially when rarity increases the fear. Familiar things affect us less severely, but alarm caused by something unusual is more intense. Yet why do we find anything unusual? Because we grasp nature with our eyes, not our reason, and we do not consider what she can do but what she has done. So we are punished for this carelessness when terrified as if by something new, although it is not new but unusual. (Seneca, 2010)

Seneca, in his 63rd letter to *Lucilius*, makes it clear that prolonged lamentation for the dead is against being in conformity with nature. Protracted grief harms a rational agent rather than heals him (Seneca, *Letter on Ethics,* 2015).

3.2. De Constantia Sapientis (On The Firmness of The Wise Person)

In this essay, Seneca explains how a Stoic is impervious to harm, saying it is impossible for a wise person to receive injury or insult. To be more convincing for the addressee of the work, Serenus, he illustrates his argument in the example of Cato the Younger. As a wise man, Cato the Younger, despite being spat on and insulted, suffered no harm. Seneca goes deeper and categorizes his theme as *iniuria* (injury) and *contumelia* (insult). He explains how a wise person is supposed to feel:

> The wise person, by contrast, is not disrespected by anyone: he knows his own greatness, and he informs himself that no one has that much power over him. And as for all these things that I would call not miseries of the mind but rather annoyances, he does not defeat them: rather, he does not even feel them. (Seneca, *On The Firmness of The Wise Person*, 10.3, 2014)

In Chapter 3, a distinction is made between a wise man and a non-wise man: the former is struck but not harmed while the latter is struck and harmed, which makes the former invulnerable.

Seneca also emphasizes that a wise person remains unmoved by external events because he is immune to any kind of injury and insult. He maintains that a wise person is not only immune to *iniuria and contumelia,* he is also immune to *iniuria* from fortune:

> Do you think I mean injury from human beings alone? Not even from fortune: whenever fortune has come into combat with virtue, it never walks away virtue's equal. If we receive with calm and placid mind the biggest thing of all, beyond which angry laws and the cruelest masters

> have nothing further with which to threaten us, and in which fortune uses up its power; if we know that death is not a bad thing, and thus that it is not even an injury—then we will tolerate other things more easily: losses and griefs, dishonors, changes of location, deaths of kin, and separations. These things do not submerge the wise person, even if they encircle him all at once. (Seneca, *On The Firmness of The Wise Person*, 8.3, 2014)

He underscores the significance of virtue saying that fortune steals what it gives and since it does not give virtue, it cannot take it away. In the light of this logic, a wise person is always happy since only virtue leads to happiness.

3.3. Seneca's Tragedies

We have eight surviving tragedies of Seneca excluding spurious *Octavia* and *Hercules Oetaeus*. It is a common consideration that his tragedies were written for recitation and not performed on stage (Birch & Hooper, 2012). Subjects of Seneca's tragedies are based on Greek plays; however, his style differs from Greek counterparts. His plays are full of violence and blood with a heightened rhetorical language. He uses ghosts, magic and other supernatural elements. (Birch & Hooper, 2012). In his plays, Seneca often uses *stichomythia*, a literary device used in plays generally involving a quick exchange between two characters. Although Seneca's plays are modeled on Greek Dramatists, they are not poor imitation of their Greek counterparts; they are original on their own. In Seneca's tragedies, we see characters full of passion committing horrible, unspeakable actions. At first glance, it seems Seneca's tragedies are in contradiction with his prose writings in which he advises eradicating passions, having tranquility and equanimity against adversities of life and any kind of fear or sorrow. However, Seneca's tragedies serve as cautionary exemplars displaying what happens when one is overwhelmed by passion and loses his reason. Seneca warns us of excessive emotions. As Staley puts it "There Seneca states that men will control their passions if only he sets before their eyes what a monster a man is when he rages against his fellow man" (Staley, 1975, p.166).

Seneca notes, in his *De Ira*, that the first stage of anger is experienced by people, also by wise men, even when watching theatre and reading:

> This sensation comes upon us even when we're watching shows at theatrical games and reading ancient history: we often seem to become angry with Clodius as he drives Cicero into exile, or with Antony as he orders his death. Who's not stirred when faced with Marius' arms or Sulla's proscriptions? Who doesn't hate Theodotus and Achillas and the actual child who dared a grown-up crime? (Seneca, *On Anger*, 2.2.3, 2010)

Seneca states that those are pre-emotions and are not considered full-fledged anger. This distinction helps explain his dramatic style. He wrote tragedies full of violent and vivid images because they do not lead to real emotions, as they are merely theatrical representations. He thought those were for educational purposes. For that reason, he did not limit the savagery and atrocity in his fictive works. As Herrington observes (1966), Seneca's plays have a basic structure consisting of three steps of evil: the first evil sets the tone over the entire play; the second evil evokes the struggle between reason and passion; and in the last step reason is defeated by passion. Herrington also points out that:

> A Senecan tragedy, by similar means, tells what evil feels like to an acutely sensitive mind under abnormally evil conditions. The perpetual criticism that Seneca's characters and situations are unrealistic seems to me to miss the point. He is not trying, even in the sense that Aeschylus did (let alone Sophocles and Euripides), to present the actions of human beings. His emphasis is on the action of Evil, and of the emotions which generate it; the human actors, the palaces, the landscapes, the starry heavens themselves, are subordinate to this action; they are its external

> manifestations. If to us they seem pictorially exaggerated, the Stoic moralist will probably have his answer ready: "You cannot exaggerate the shape of Evil, if you have ever confronted it in your own soul; it fills your heaven. (Herrington, 1966)

Herrington's explanation is in accord with Seneca's philosophy. Extreme portrayal of violence and evil is not for mere sensational purpose. He deliberately wants to confront his readers with pure nature of unchecked ambitions.

3.3.1. Medea

Seneca's *Medea* is a tragedy which draws on *Medea* written by ancient Greek playwright Euripides. It follows the story of a former-Colchis princess who seeks revenge against her unfaithful husband. The play explores passion versus reason, fate, the concept of revenge and the destructive nature of unchecked emotions. When Jason decides to marry Creusa, daughter of Creon, the king of Corinth, Medea gets jealous and outraged, and the play begins with her speech bidding for revenge.

Medea, as a play, does not explicitly promote Stoic philosophy and ideals. However, Stoic elements are reflected throughout the play. It illustrates conflicts between passionate impulses and rational thoughts. The titular character deviates from Stoic ideals and totally gives in to her passions. She kills her own sons to make her husband suffer. Medea, by committing filicide, disrupts the natural order of universe, contrasting with one of the cardinal values of Stoicism; that is, the principle that one should live according to nature.

The first act begins with Medea's incantation to the Gods. She pleads to the god of marriage, Hecate, and the Furies. She prepares her mind for the atrocities she will commit, reminding her soul of the previous brutal actions in Colchis, and showing willingness to do more:"I did this as a girl. Let my rage well up more strongly;/ now that I'm a mother, what befits is—greater crimes." (48-50)

The chorus also calls out to Gods in the first act; however, their wish poses a contrary position to Medea's invocation. While Medea seeks revenge against Jason,

the chorus wishes for a happy marriage for Jason and Creusa. It is possible to see signs of Stoic philosophy throughout the play: “Fortune fears the brave and treads the cowards under foot” (159). This line, though it seems stoic at first glance, is representative of perversion of Stoicism. Similarly, in another line, Medea seems to echo the Stoic principle of inner strength, “Fortune can take my wealth, but not my spirit” (176); however, she perverts the notions of Stoic beliefs. Seneca says, “Fate leads the willing, but drags the reluctant” (*ducunt volentem fata, nolentem trahunt*), (Seneca, *Letters on Ethics* 107.11, 2015). Although this statement by Seneca emphasizes inner strength, Medea exhibits a twisted interpretation of Stoicism, using it to fuel her anger and desire for revenge.

In the second act, Medea’s *nutrix* (nurse) does what a Stoic would do. She tries to calm her *ira* (anger) and advises equanimity. Medea refuses her *nutrix*’s pleas strongly and indicates a clear sign of determination. Her *nutrix* fails to convince her. The dialogue is in *stichomythia* technique:

“**Nurse:** You’ll die.

Medea: I want to.

Nurse: Flee! Medea

I wish I never had.

Nurse: Medea—

Medea: —I will become her!” (170-175)

In Line 175, she uses only one word: *fiam* (third person singular passive future). In Latin it means “I will become”, “I will be made to” or “I shall be”. Medea’s interruption with one intense word shows how determined and decisive she is.

In her dialogue with the Corinthian king Creon, Medea accuses the king of passing judgement without listening to her. She also reminds him that she made it possible for Argo to return home safe and sound. In addition, she demands her husband and ship to be able to leave. Creon refuses her wishes, but grants her one day to say farewell to her sons (2.192, 300). In act three, the betrayed princess makes

her confrontation with Jason. She reminds Jason of all the things she did for him, begging him to flee with her, which Jason refuses to do (3.447,543).

In act four, Medea prepares a poisoned and enchanted gift for Creusa, the daughter of Creon and the future wife of Jason.

The chorus describes her condition:

Her cheeks blaze and flush red,

then pallor routs crimson.

No color stays long

on her changing complexion.

She rushes this way and that,

as a tigress deprived of her cubs

roams through the jungles by Ganges

at a mad pace.

How to check her anger,

Medea doesn't know; her love's the same.

Now her love and her anger have joined

their causes; what will come next? (858-869)

Making physical descriptions and metaphorical comparisons, intensity of her emotions and inner turmoil are evident in the imagery used by Chorus. She is compared to a tigress deprived of her cubs, emphasizing her desperation and primal fear.

In act five, the messenger informs King Creon and his daughter Creusa are dead. She feels happy and says she is now “truly Medea”. She wants to hurt Jason more; therefore, she kills one of his sons, although Jason comes and begs her not to do it. When Medea understands that Jason really loves her sons, she kills the second son, too. She clarifies that she is much happier now that she has an audience. Medea is aware that she is taken over by *ira*:“…Anger: where you lead, I follow.” (954)

Pratt (1948) comments on how Medea is presented in *Medea*:

> In his *Medea*, Seneca presents the theme as a study in criminal psychology. The play is constructed to show how Medea's rage rises in crescendo to a frenzied madness which allies itself with everything evil in nature and destroys all in its path. (p. 4)

Staley (1975) argues that Seneca’s plays should be interpreted in the light of his work *De Ira (On Anger).* Formation of anger in Medea has parallels to definition of anger in *De Ira*. Since Seneca defines anger with the impression that someone has been wronged, it can be seen from the long monologue of Medea at the beginning of the play that Medea feels she has been wronged. This is the first stage of anger according to Seneca. As a rational agent she is supposed to not engage with this impulse (*impetus*).

After the chorus informs the reader about the marriage, Medea completes her first stage of anger. She now believes she has been wronged. Then, in the second stage of anger, we see that she struggles with herself and her mind falters. She goes and comes back from passion to reason. She thinks about her love for Jason and tries to excuse him. Her *nutrix* tries to comfort her and advises her to be calm. Nevertheless, Medea ignores her love for Jason and *nutrix*’s cautionary remarks. In act four, she enters the third stage of anger. Now, Medea is completely overwhelmed by passion. Nutrix describes her condition:

Nutrix:

My soul fears and trembles: a huge atrocity is near.

It’s monstrous how her anger grows and fans

itself afire and renews its past brutality.

I’ve often seen her raging and taking on the gods,

drawing down the sky: she’s planning something

greater, an abomination worse than these. (670-675)

Medea in *Medea* acts like a Stoic in the opposite direction. She is a good example of what happens when a person fails to control her reason and gives into passion. She feels wronged, she ignores her love for her husband and children, she refuses what her reason dictates and, in the end, fails in a Stoic fashion.

3.3.2. Hercules Furens (Hercules Mad)

Seneca’s *Hercules Furens* is modelled on Euripides’ *Heracles* (Konstan, 2017). It recounts Hercules’ descent into madness and the consequences of his actions. After completing his twelve labors, Hercules comes back home wishing to reunite with his family. He realizes that, in his absence, tyrant Lycus had taken control of his family and threatens to kill them. Hercules heroically saves his family. The goddess Juno sends madness to him. In his delusional state, he thinks his wife Megara and his children are his enemies and slays them.

The play starts with a long prologue of Goddess Juno, wife of Jupiter, who is angry with her husband and Hercules. She is full of *ira*. She curses Hercules and invokes some other Goddesses to cast a spell on him. She clearly expresses her fear that Hercules is full of might and confidence and might steal power from Jupiter and rule the Heaven (65-69). She also complains about her husband’s unfaithfulness. In line 109, she exhorts herself as Medea does in *Medea*: “Why, Juno, do you not yet rage?” (Medea,109). It is clear to the readers that she is dominated with fear, jealousy and anger.

Of all the protagonists in Seneca’s tragedies, Hercules is the closest one to being a Stoic figure. Unlike Medea and the others, we do not see the three-stage

formation of *ira* in *Hercules Furens*. Hercules does not exhort himself to do violent acts. His violent actions happen in an abrupt fashion. Amphitrion, Hercules' human father, takes the position of reason and gives advice to Hercules about his actions. When Hercules sets on to make sacrifices, he warns his son to clean his sword from Lycus's blood. He also warns Hercules at the beginning of his hallucinations:

> "Banish those thoughts
>
> unspeakable; repress the crazy impulse of
>
> your mind that's barely sane, however great." (973-975)

Hercules kills his wife Megara and his children when he is under the spell of Juno. He sees hallucinations, and imagines that he is attacking his enemies. Amphitryon vividly describes what happens during this scene of madness:

> **Amphitryon**
>
> See, he begs,
>
> voice piteous, stretching tender hands to a father's knees.
>
> A vile crime, grim, horrible to see!
>
> He's seized the child as he pleads, spun him madly
>
> two, three times and hurled him; his head makes contact,
>
> the roof is wet with his spattered brain. But wretched
>
> Megara, protecting in her bosom her smaller son,
>
> flees like a mad one from her hiding place. (1002-1008)

He continues:

> Where are you going, madman? Will you shed your own

blood? The frightened babe dies at his father's

fiery look, before the wound: fear's snatched

his soul. The heavy club's now aimed against his wife.

He's smashed her bones, her maimed body lacks a head,

it's nowhere to be seen. (1021-1026)

Then he falls into a deep sleep. After he wakes up, he feels so upset. He takes responsibility for his atrocities and seeks redemption unlike Medea, Atreus, Clytemnestra and others. These hallucinations indicate Hercules's unstable state of mind. He talks about gods like "any brother of mine who lives in heaven" (907). His prideful remarks reveals his megalomaniac nature:

I who fetched it, she who ordered. Earth's not

wide enough for to punish me with labors,

given Juno's hate. I saw things inaccessible

to all, unknown to Phoebus, the dark spaces that

the lower pole granted the infernal lord; and if

I'd liked the third lot's place, I could have

reigned. (604-610)

Whether the murder is caused by madness sent by Juno or Hercules' own propensity to violence and savagery has been debated by scholars. Fitch (1987) suggests that Although Hercules is a powerful person defeating evils, he is also an arrogant figure, and the madness arises from his own psyche. He adds Hercules is full of aggression, ambition and megalomania. Fitch (1974) suggests that cumulative effects of his labors and his megalomania caused by conquest of underworld

contributed to his violence. In act three, Theseus' narration about the underworld occupies a large part in the play. He gives a vivid description of events. This lengthy narration might be another signal for Hercules' background of violence. Theseus, for instance describes Hercules' fight with Cerberus in detail. Its fierce look with snake-covered head, its menacing barks, bravery of Hercules and his striking the dog with his powerful club.

Shelton (1977) argues that, unlike Euripides, Seneca examined an irrational man (Hercules) in a rational universe rather than examining the problems of a rational man. His father Amphitryon tries to soothe Hercules several times, clarifying it is Juno's fault, and he should not feel guilty. "The grief is yours/the crime's your stepmother's; this calamity lacks guilt" (1200-1201). "Whoever's given error the name of crime?" (1237). Juno shot this arrow with your hands (1295). Hercules does not feel convinced and decides to commit suicide. However, Amphitryon threatens Hercules with his own suicide and puts it to him that he will also be responsible for his father's death. Hearing this, Hercules backtracks on his decision and decides to live.

From a Stoic viewpoint, Hercules fails to meet the standards of a virtuous agent by succumbing to madness and dismembering his family. On the one hand, he is a great hero with great might and courage; on the other hand, he fails to stop the formation of anger in his mind. At the end of the play, his backtracking from suicide is in line with Stoic philosophy since Seneca says a person should not commit suicide if they need him:

> A good man should live not as long as it pleases him but as long as he ought to. The person who does not think enough of his wife or his friend to prolong his life—who insists on dying—is thoroughly self-indulgent. When the interest of loved ones demands it, the mind should require even this of itself: even if one not only wants to die but has actually begun to do so, one should interrupt the process and give oneself over to their needs (*Letters on Ethics*, 104.3).

Despite his guilt and intense desire, Hercules does not commit suicide because he has responsibility for his father. His moral duty to his father superseded his individual desire. By doing so, he acted in accordance with Stoic philosophy and thus with nature. Once again, Seneca shows that unchecked impulses cause destruction, disorder and disaster.

In addition, the disruption of the cosmic order is in question. Juno complains in lines 55-59 that Hercules opens the path to the underworld, that the secrets of death are exposed, and that he parades Cerberus (a three-headed dog) through the Argive towns. Hercules' actions represent violation of cosmic order. In Stoic philosophy, the order of the universe is a central theme and it is essential for happiness and virtue.

3.3.3. Thyestes

Thyestes is one of the most renowned tragedies written by Seneca. It is known for its dark themes and exploration of intense emotions, revenge and the corrupting nature of power. It centers on how Atreus, the king of Mycenae, takes revenge on his own brother Thyestes by making him eat his own sons. There is a backstory to the play. Atreus is in extreme outrage and jealousy due to his brother's usurpation of the throne and seduction of his wife.

The first act starts with Fury forcing the ghost of Tantalus, grandfather of Atreus and Thyestes, to drive the Atreus family mad. Tantalus himself, when he was alive, tried to serve his murdered son Pelops to Gods and as a punishment for this atrocious deed, he was sentenced to an eternity in Hades. Seneca here emphasizes the cycle of violence, implying that violence begets violence.

It is possible to infer that the dialogue between the ghost of Tantalus and Fury is a struggle between reason and passion. The ghost of Tantalus does not want to comply with the wishes of Fury. Fury asks him to drive Atreus' House crazy, and curse them to eternal damnation: "Go on, you hated shade, and spur the wicked house-gods with your rage" (24-25). Tantalus struggles to resist but he fails. His last sentence is: "I follow your command" (100). This could be interpreted as the defeat of reason against passion, foreshadowing the events to follow.

In many lines, it is possible to see Stoic reflections. In lines 388-389 “A king is a man who fears nothing / a king is a man who wants nothing*”*. As Stoic philosophy advises eradication of any kind of passion, these lines are in perfect compatibility with it in two ways. As Seneca points out in his *Naturales quaestiones*, Fear removes our ability to think rationally (Seneca, 2010). It is understandable from the Stoic viewpoint that a king wants nothing since it is enough for a rational agent to be in possession of virtue for happiness.

Chorus:

A king is not made by his riches,

the purple shade of his robe,

a royal brow sporting a crown,

or roof- beams shining with gold:

a king can lay aside fear

as well as the heart’s ugly urges,

can’t be moved by maddened ambition,

nor the favor of volatile mobs. (344-351)

In Stoic philosophy, a true king controls his impulses and urges, and despises ambition. He knows that wealth, public approval, power and status are “indifferents” and possess a transitory nature.

In lines 449-61, it seems, at first glance, that Thyestes behaves like a true Stoic:

It’s a blessing

to stand in no one’s way, to eat your meal safely

while sitting on the ground. Crimes don’t enter hovels,

the fare upon a humble table's safe to eat;

poison comes in cups of gold. I speak of what I know:

it's possible to choose bad fortune over good.

I have no house set upon a mountain's peak

to cast a shadow on the lowly, trembling plebs,

pale ivory doesn't gleam upon my lofty ceiling,

there's no man standing guard over my sleep.

I don't use a fleet to fish, I don't drive back the sea

by building massive piers, I don't stuff a sinful belly

with the tribute of the world, no field is harvested for me. (449-61)

Thyestes expresses his contentment in having a humble existence. He advises peace of mind that comes with not striving for status or power so that one does not need excessive protection and enjoys one's simple meal without fear. A true stoic considers money, wealth and fame as indifferent. They are not sought after or avoided since they do not contribute to the overall happiness of a person.

Thyestes seems happy in his exile: "No one fears me, my house is safe without a sword,/a great tranquility pervades my humble home./Not to need a kingdom is itself a massive kingdom." (468-470)

Atreus' offer to share the kingdom and Young Tantalus, then, influences him. Young Tantalus tells his father that he is not seeking kingship that his brother offers him. If God grands it to him, he can accept the offer (471-472). Tantalus uses Stoic language but in a perverted way: "Whatever stands in the way and blocks your will— defeat it,

and see what great rewards await on your return./Father, you can be king!" (440-442)

Atreus appeals to Thyestes' ambition for power to deceive and bring him back to his palace, by pretending to offer sharing the kingdom. Young Tantalus' remarks also undermine his agency. Thyestes fails to resist this offer. He falls prey to his *impetus* (impulse).

Another Senecan convention is the dialogue between Atreus and his servant, which represents the struggle between reason and ambition. The servant representing reason makes Atreus question himself:

Servant

Let a king want what's right: everyone will want the same.

Atreus

Whenever "right" alone is granted to a master, he rules

on sufferance alone.

Servant

When neither self- control

nor care for law exists, nor human feeling, trust, and sanctity,

the kingdom can't stand firm.

Atreus

Human feeling, trust, and sanctity

are private goods. Let kings go where they please.

Servant

Believe it wrong to hurt a brother, even if he's evil. (213-219)

As usual in Senecan tragedies, human reason fails to persuade human passion. Atreus gives a long and detailed answer in lines 220-241 and exhorts himself to commit the crime. The servant changes his position, and he also becomes an accomplice and recommends ways to the crime.

Demonstrating his inner turmoil, Atreus even deplores himself for being hesitant in his decision:"You're stalling: why? Call up/some strength of mind, begin at last, and look at Tantalus, at /Pelops:/these are the archetypes my hands are called to match./Tell me how to crush his loathsome life." (242-243)

These lines remind us of Medea when she exhorts herself to take revenge on her husband. Atreus tells himself that Tantalus and Pelops are the examples that he needs. He kills the last remnant of reason in his soul and totally gives in to passion.

Tantalus

"But if a god is granting it, you shouldn't reject power.

You don't need to pursue it: your brother asks you to be king.

Thyestes

He asks? Then be afraid. Some treachery's to hand." (470-473)

Young Tantalus tries to influence his father. He is not seeking power as a stoic is supposed to do but only accepts what is offered to him by his brother. Thyestes is hesitant to go to his brother, as he senses trickery.

After a fleeting moment of doubt, he goes to Atreus, and lets his son convince him to meet his brother. He fails to resist wealth and fame that accompany kingship. It can be inferred that by accepting his brother's offer, Thyestes is not a true stoic. Although he keeps claiming that he is indifferent to kingship, wealth and political power, he accepts his brother's invitation to return to Argos. His stance is a mere façade, given that he actually likes comfort, luxury and power.

Thyestes fails the Stoic fashion as he makes the wrong choice and gives in to ambition instead of pursuing what *ratio* (reason) and *natura* (nature) dictate. Atreus remains triumphant. He takes revenge from his brother in the most horrible way

possible. He pretends to be his loving brother and invites him for a feast. At the end of the meal, Atreus shows Thyestes his sons' heads and says that the rest is in his stomach. He thus derives pleasure from the violent acts that he commits against his brother.

3.3.4. Agamemnon

Agamemnon tells the story of Clytemnestra murdering her husband Agamemnon, son of Atreus, for the death of Iphigenia. Agamemnon sacrificed his own daughter for his ships to sail easily to Troy. He won the Trojan war, came back to his palace, and brought Cassandra, the daughter of the Trojan King, as a concubine. His bringing Cassandra with him intensifies Clytemnestra's grievances.

The play starts with Thyestes, Agamemnon's uncle, emerging from the underworld and reminding the audience that he was tricked into eating his own children and prophesies the death of his nephew.

> But at long last, after death, the oracle's uncertain
>
> promise finally responds to people wearied by calamity:
>
> that king of kings, Agamemnon, chief of chiefs,
>
> his banner followed by a thousand ships
>
> that hid the seas of Ilium with their sails,
>
> after ten of Phoebus' cycles, with Ilium defeated—
>
> he is here— to give his throat to his own wife.
>
> Any moment now the house will swim with blood in
>
> retribution:
>
> I see swords and spears and axes, and the royal skull

split by heavy blow of double-bladed axe;

now crimes are near, now treachery, carnage, gore—

the feast is being readied. (37-49)

This prophetic opening foreshadows the impending tragedy and, thus, establishes a sense of fate in the mind of the audience.

In lines 101-102, the Chorus warns of the dangers of power and ambition in a Stoic sense:“Whatever Fortune raises up high,/ she lifts it so she can hurl it down.” (101-102)

Seneca, in line with Stoic ideals, emphasizes excessively that fame, wealth and health, as well as other indifferents, do not take a rational agent to virtue and happiness. When a person gets *lifted up by Fortune*, one should keep in mind that it is a mere indifferent.

As is the case in Medea, we see how Clytemnestra exhorts herself to passions by saying: “My craven spirit, why seek out tactics that are safe? Why waver? The better path’s already closed now.” (108-109). Her nurse takes the role of reason, warns, and advises Clytemnestra: “My queen, control yourself and halt your passions and consider the enormity of your plan.” (203-204). Overwhelmed with anger and jealousy, Clytemnestra kills Agamemnon and Cassandra. She even threatens to kill her own children Electra and Orestes. Once again, Seneca, exploring the vile consequences of passions, warns us of its dangers.

3.3.5. Phaedra

The play deals with conflict between reason and passion, which is a common concept in Stoic philosophy. Phaedra is another example of how passion overcomes reason. The main topic of Phaedra is incestuous passion. The play starts with Hippolytus going out for a hunt. Phaedra, in her husband’s absence, falls in love with her stepson Hippolytus.

Phaedra confesses her feelings about her son to her nurse. Her nurse pleads with her to control her impulses, but she cannot. When Hippolytus comes back from

hunting, Phaedra admits her feelings about him. Hippolytus feels disgusted and leaves. Phaedra faints and comes back to herself after a while. Her nurse reacts: "Let's rebound the blame on him and take the lead in charging him with unfilial lust. Crime must be veiled by crime." (Lines 720-721). When Theseus comes home, he asks his wife why she is like that. She then accuses Hippolytus of raping her. Theseus gets furious and invokes Neptune; later he learns from a messenger that Hippolytus died in the forest.

To sum up, Phaedra lets herself overwhelmed by passion and lust. Moreover, Theseus does not take his time to think about her wife's accusations about his son and curses him immediately, thus getting overwhelmed by another passion, anger. In the Euripidean version of the play *Hippolytus*, there are divine characters such as Artemis and Aphrodite. Seneca removes them from the play and puts the blame and responsibility on human actions, namely passions.

3.3.6. Troades (Trojan Women)

The play starts with Hecuba, queen and wife of the former king Priam of the fallen Troy, lamenting the loss of the city. She grieves for her dead husband Priam and son Hector. Her lamentation sets the tone for the play. Pyrrhus, son of Achilles, demands that Polyxena, daughter of Hecuba, be sacrificed to appease the spirit of Achilles. At first Agamemnon tries to change his idea:

Aga.: And now in compassion do you look for a girl for the tomb?

Pyr.: So you think virgin sacrifice an atrocity now?

Aga.: Country over children is the king's right view.

Pyr.: No law spares captives or impedes their punishment.

Aga.: What the law does not forbid is forbidden by decency.

Pyr.: Whatever he wants, the conqueror is permitted.

Aga.: The man permitted the most should want the least. (330-336)

Agamemnon fails to be effective in his attempt and Polyxena gets killed.

Andromache, the wife of the dead Hector, suffers from the pain that her son Astyanax is hurled from the city walls. One can notice stoic elements in the brave responses by Polyxena and Astyanax in the face of death. Astyanax, in line 792, cries out “Mother, pity me!”; however, Messenger reports that he was fearless and did not cry when he is about to jump to his death:

> that child, taken in the enemy’s hand,
>
> was lordly and contumacious. He moved the mob,
>
> its leaders, and even Ulysses. Of all the crowd,
>
> he only, for whom they wept, wept not. While Ulysses
>
> declaimed
>
> the words and prayers of the fate- dealing prophet and summoned
>
> the savage gods to the rites, of his own accord
>
> the boy leapt into Priam’s kingdom. (1097-1104)

Andromache reports:”See how her mighty spirit hears death with joy!/She reaches for the beauteous raiment of royal dress/and deigns to let a hand arrange her tresses. (945-947)

It is clear that Polyxena, in her final moments, welcomes death with joy and dignity. She even reaches her royal dress and arranges her hair. Both of these characters’ actions remain in line with Stoic doctrines which advocate tranquility in the face of death.

Even at the beginning of the play, we are exposed to one of the main concerns of Stoic passions: the transitory nature of power:

Hecuba

Whoever puts his faith in sovereignty and rules great halls

with power, whoever has no fear of fickle gods

and credulously yields his mind to prosperous times,

should take a look at me and you, Troy. Fortune has never

offered greater proof of how fragile the foundation is

on which the haughty stand. Overthrown and toppled is

the pillar of powerful Asia, that eminent labor of the gods! (1-7)

According to Stoic thought, power is not a secure position and is vulnerable to change since it is granted by fortune or fate. Since it is already in the category of indifferent, a sage person should not depend on it; otherwise, he/she will suffer disappointment.

The characters in the play Hecuba; that is, Polyxena, and all captive women, suffer intense pain, death of their loved ones, and destruction of their city Troy. From a Stoic perspective, one should acknowledge the transient nature of life and endure pain and grief with reason rather than emotional despair. As Epictetus says, external events are not up to us. Therefore, no matter how tragic and painful they are, they should be treated with virtue. As Seneca emphasizes in his works, one should cultivate resilience in the face of adversities of life.

4. SENECAN ECHOES IN SHAKESPEARE'S THREE TRAGEDIES

4.1. Senecan Influence on Shakespeare's Tragedies

The influence of Seneca on Shakespeare is substantial and multifaceted. While English people knew little about ancient Greek playwrights, tragedies of Seneca were known much better than Greek counterparts in the 16th century England (Dillon, 2007). That was possible due to a series of translations of Seneca's tragedies. A scholar from Oxford, Jasper Heywood, translated *Troas* in 1559, *Thyestes* in 1560 and *Hercules Furens* in 1561 (Cunliffe,1907). John Studley translated *Medea* and *Agamemnon* in 1566. In 1581, Thomas Newton published a collected edition of Seneca's tragedies in a book called *Tenne tragedies*. Translations of Senecan tragedies are considered mostly accurate, though not entirely correct (Cunliffe, 1907). Challenging lines are translated in a literal and meaningless way. In addition, Jasper Heywood made various alterations in *Troas* and added a lengthy soliloquy at the end of *Thyestes* (Cunliffe, ibid.). The influence of translations soon appeared. *Gorboduc* (also known as *Ferrex and Porrex*), which can be considered as the first extant tragedy in Elizabethan era, was written by Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton in 1561-2 and put on stage (Charlton, 1946). Nevertheless, Dillon (2007) notes that Thomas Preston's *King Cambyses* (c.1558-69) might have preceded *Gorboduc*. Classical features of *Gorboduc* are a five-act structure, a moralizing chorus and a revenge-based theme (Dillon, 2007). Violence takes place off-stage and recounted by a messenger as in Seneca's plays. Philip Sydney (1595/2014) praises *Gorboduc* for its Senecan features, noting that "Excepting Gorboduc (again I say of those that I have seen), which notwithstanding, as it is full of stately speeches, and well-sounding phrases, climbing to the height of Seneca his style, and as full of notable morality". This chorus passage from Act 4 demonstrates how Norton and Sackville adapted Senecan conventions:

Whan greedy lust in royall seate to reigne

Hath reft all care of Goddes and eke of men,

And cruell hart, wrath, treason, and disdaine

Within ambicious brest are lodged, then

Beholde how mischiefe wide her selfe displayes

And with the brothers hand the brother slayes.

When bloud thus shed, doth staine the heauens

face, Crying to Joue for vengeance of the deede.

(4.1320-7, Norton and Sackville, 1581, 1883)

Brotherly violence echoes classical precedents like the conflict between Thyestes and Atreus. In addition, blood staining the heavens, greedy desire for crown and cosmic disruption by human crime are all reminiscent of Seneca.

Later in the period, *Misfortunes of Arthur* (1588) by Thomas Hughes also had some features of Senecan drama; however, it was not considered as successful as *Gorboduc* (Bowers, 1940). In popular theatre, Thomas Kyd and Christopher Marlowe also drew heavily from Seneca. *Spanish Tragedy* (1592), which is a revenge tragedy written by Kyd was also significantly influenced by Seneca. The impact is so evident that Kyd makes direct quotations from him: "Per scelus semper tutum est sceleribus iter." (Kyd, *Spanish Tragedy,* 3.13.6). Christopher Marlowe's Tamburlaine manifests Senecan features, as well. Among the other tragedies of the era are John Marston's *Malcontent* (c.1603) and *Antonio and Mellida* (1599), John Webster's *The White Devil* (1611-2)*, Duchess of Malfi* (1612-3*),* Thomas Middleton's *Revenger's Tragedy* (1607-8), and John Marston's *Antonio's Revenge* (1600-1). In these plays it is possible to see highly elevated language and rhetoric, elaboration of violence and revenge, and psychological torment of the characters, features reminiscent of Senecan Tragedies.

Shakespeare, among many playwrights of his period, exhibits the most intense influence by Seneca. Rhetorical devices, use of violence and themes of revenge, elevated language, use of stock characters such as messengers and supernatural elements and sometimes direct quotations from Seneca's plays are all

indicators of this influence. His major works from *Richard III* and *Macbeth* to *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, and *Titus Andronicus* demonstrate features of Senecan conventions. While adopting multiple Senecan conventions, Shakespeare transcends Seneca. He makes a notable divergence from Seneca in treatment of evil. Herrington (1966) notes that "A Senecan tragedy tells what evil feels like to an acutely sensitive mind under abnormally evil conditions, with characters and settings serving merely as 'external manifestations of evil itself". Senecan characters are representations of evil, whereas Shakespeare pushes evil to the background and makes it part of a larger human experience. In addition, unlike Senecan characters who do not repent and remain unwavering in their evil actions, Shakespeare's characters reflect on their actions, reveal moral struggle and inner turmoil. In the following section, three tragedies of Shakespeare will be studied in the light of Seneca's Stoic philosophy and his tragedies.

4.2. Titus Andronicus

Titus Andronicus was first published in 1594 (Dillon, 2007). The play's authorship has been subject to debate. Although some have claimed that it was co-written by George Peele (Dillon, 2007), it is generally agreed upon that Shakespeare wrote the entire play (Oxford Reference, 2025). It is a play full of violence, betrayal and revenge. While T.S. Eliot thinks that "It is the stupidest and the most uninspired play I have ever read" (Eliot, 1932), it firmly demonstrates how unchecked emotions lead to a cycle of revenge and destruction.

In the play, Titus, as a victorious Roman general, returns home with his war prisoners: Tamora, the queen of Goths, and her sons. A cycle of violence and revenge begins. As with Atreus, Titus makes Tamora eat his sons. He falls prey to his passions, especially anger. Tamora herself is not without passion. At the beginning of the play, Titus sacrifices the eldest son of Queen Tamora. By doing so, he sows the seeds of revenge in Tamora's heart. With the help of her lover Aaron, Tamora seeks revenge through horrific means. Titus' daughter gets raped, and her tongue gets cut off. To put it briefly, *Titus Andronicus* involves violence stemming from passions at multiple levels.

Titus Andronicus recalls *Thyestes* in many ways. Atreus feeds Thyestes' sons to him and Titus does the same to Tamora. Thus, revenge is the central theme in both plays. In Seneca's play, the revenger is one person, Atreus. However, in *Titus Andronicus*, revenge involves three people: Titus, Aaron and Tamora. At the opening Tamora begs Titus:

> Stay, Roman brethren! Gracious conqueror,
>
> Victorious Titus, rue the tears I shed,
>
> A mother's tears in passion for her son:
>
> And if thy sons were ever dear to thee,
>
> O, think my son to be as dear to me!
>
> Sufficeth not that we are brought to Rome,
>
> To beautify thy triumphs and return,
>
> Captive to thee and to thy Roman yoke,
>
> But must my sons be slaughter'd in the streets,
>
> For valiant doings in their country's cause?
>
> O, if to fight for king and commonweal
>
> Were piety in thine, it is in these.
>
> Andronicus, stain not thy tomb with blood:
>
> Wilt thou draw near the nature of the gods?
>
> Draw near them then in being merciful:
>
> Sweet mercy is nobility's true badge:

Thrice noble Titus, spare my first-born son (1.1.107-123).

Dismissing her lengthy pleas, Titus kills her son, saying that it is not personal revenge, but a religious sacrifice, adding that it is done to satisfy the ghosts of the dead. Thus, the first stage of passion, revenge in this case, has been established. Tamora's begging Titus to spare his son's life by trying to invoke his paternal love and empathy recalls Andromache's lines asking for mercy from Ulysses:

Let the wretched boy

die anywhere else before the father should bury

the son and son ruin father. I fall to your knees, Ulysses,

in supplication, and with this hand that no feet

have felt, I now reach out to touch your feet.

Pity a mother; accept devoted prayers

with gentle tolerance (689-695).

Arkins (1995) points out that in Act 2 and 4, there are lines modelled from *Phaedra*. When Demetrius talks about his Lust for Lavinia, he shouts: "Sit fas aut nefas, till I find the stream/To cool this heat, a charm to calm these fits./Per Styga, per manes vehor (2.1.143-145).

This echoes Seneca's Phaedra: per Styga, per amnes igneos amens sequar :'I'll trail you frenzied through the waves and lakes/ of Tartarus, through the Styx and streams of fire (1179-1180).

Later, in Act 4, when Titus learns Tamora's sons raped and mutilated Lavinia he cries out in Latin:"Magni Dominator poli,/Tam lentus audis scelera? tarn lentus vides?" (4.1.81-82) (Ruler of great heaven, art thou so slow to hear crimes, so slow to see them?")

These lines recall Hippolytus when he hears his stepmother's love for him: "Magne regnator deum,/tam lentus audis scelera? tarn lentus uides?(O great ruler of the gods,

can you hear this outrage and be so slow to act? See it, and be slow?)" (672-673)

Miola (1992) notes the alteration in wording. In Hippolytus' lines *Magne regnator deum* means Great ruler of the gods. Shakespeare changes it to a monotheist tone. *Magni Dominator poli*, which translates as *great ruler of the sky*. Shakespeare uses a paraphrase that fits the Christian culture.

Both in *Troades* and *Titus Andronicus*, grieving family members voice objections against the Scythian brutality of the conquerors. In the first Act When Alarbus was killed as a sacrifice, Chiron and Demetrius lament their brother's death. Chiron exclaims "Was ever Scythia half so barbarous?" (1.1.134). In addition, Demetrius cries out "Oppose not Scythia to ambitious Rome" (1.1.135). Titus himself evokes Troy, noting that his sons are 'Half of the number that King Priam had' (1.1.83).

There is shade of Tantalus in Thyestes and a shade of Thyestes in Agamemnon. There is no fury or ghost in *Titus Andronicus*, but Tamora takes on the role of revenge and goes to Titus:

I am Revenge: sent from the infernal kingdom,

To ease the gnawing vulture of thy mind,

By working wreakful vengeance on thy foes.

Come down, and welcome me to this world's light;

Confer with me of murder and of death: (5.2.30-34)

Moila also draws a comparison between the hunting scene in *Titus* and that in *Phaedra*. Act 2 Scene 2 starts with a hunting scene. Titus, his brother Marcus and Titus' sons prepare for the hunt:

The hunt is up, the morn is bright and grey,

The fields are fragrant and the woods are green:

Uncouple here and let us make a bay

And wake the emperor and his lovely bride

And rouse the prince and ring a hunter's peal,

That all the court may echo with the noise.

Sons, let it be your charge, as it is ours,

To attend the emperor's person carefully:

I have been troubled in my sleep this night,

But dawning day new comfort hath inspired. (2.2.1-9)

The first two lines present a vivid imagery describing an idyllic nature and pose a contrast with the events that will come later in the play. Titus addressing his sons, saying *Uncouple here and let us make a bay*, suggests an auditory imagery. Hounds baying and hunter's peal will probably wake Saturninus and Tamora. In Seneca's *Phaedra* there is also a hunting scene which has parallels with Titus and his family's hunting scene (Miola, 1992). In Act 1 of *Phaedra*, Hippolytus orders to uncouple the hounds and says "A moment will come, when the rocks of the dell will resound" (38).

Titus, as with Atreus Medea and Clytemnestra, falls prey to his passions. He ignores the dictates of reason. He is committed to taking revenge at all costs. In act 3, on the other hand, Titus' brother Marcus assumes the stoic position and advises reason to his brother, urging him to use reason for his sorrow:

Marcus

O brother, speak with possibilities,

And do not break into these deep extremes.

Titus

Is not my sorrow deep, having no bottom?

Then be my passions bottomless with them.

Marcus

But yet let reason govern thy lament.

Titus

If there were reason for these miseries,

Then into limits could I bind my woes:

When heaven doth weep, doth not the earth o'erflow?

If the winds rage, doth not the sea wax mad,

Threatening the welkin with his big-swoln face?

And wilt thou have a reason for this coil? (213-223)

Revenge consumes both the perpetrator and the victim. Titus kills Alarbus. Tamora, by manipulating Saturninus, seeks revenge for her son's death, which leads to more violence. Titus seeks revenge again by outdoing his crime. The Roman general starts out as a respected commander, but loses his rationality after his daughter Lavinia gets raped and mutilated. He feels that he has been wronged. As a Senecan hero, he seeks revenge to the end.

In the last Act, Titus serves pies to Tamora and Emperor Saturninus. He kills his own daughter Lavinia saying that she has been dishonored because Tamora's sons raped her. Saturninus demands Chiron and Demetrius to be brought out, but Titus says that they are already present; that is, on their plates, and that they are eating them. After revealing this information, Titus kills Tamora, whereupon

Saturninus kills Titus and Lucius kills Saturninus to avenge his father. Not a single character achieves complete satisfaction. Thus, we see what happens when passions take control of reason. However, the play does not end here; Marcus and Lucius go to the public and ask for forgiveness. They explain everything and recount the events that happened. They promise restoration for the state of Rome.

The bloody banquet scene in *Titus Andronicus* is readily reminiscent of *Thyestes*. Atreus takes revenge on his brother in a similar fashion. He tricks his brother Thyestes into eating his sons as a punishment for seducing his wife and usurping the throne. However, there are some differences between the scenes. At the end of Thyestes, Atreus feels victorious and triumphant. He deeply enjoys his brother's suffering. When Thyestes keeps asking about his sons, Atreus opens the lid off the platter and shows their heads: *Father, open wide your arms: they're here. Do you recognize your sons at all?* (1005-1006) He does not reveal the truth right away:

Atreus

What's left over from your sons

you have; what's not left over, you have as well.

Thyestes

Do their bodies lie outside as food for birds of prey?

Are they being saved for lions, are they nourishment for beasts?

Atreus

It was you— you ate this foul feast, you ate your flesh and blood. (1030-134)

Horrified, Thyestes wishes to die but his brother denies the sword. Then, he makes a detailed speech describing how he killed his sons.

Unlike Seneca, Shakespeare provides restoration and reconciliation. Everybody who is embroiled in the cycle of vengeance dies, but Marcus and others address the Roman people, they come clean and promise restoration and stability.

> Now you have heard the truth, what say you, Romans?
>
> Have we done aught amiss,—show us wherein,
>
> And, from the place where you behold us now,
>
> The poor remainder of Andronici
>
> Will, hand in hand, all headlong cast us down.
>
> And on the ragged stones beat forth our brains,
>
> And make a mutual closure of our house.
>
> Speak, Romans, speak; and if you say we shall,
>
> Lo, hand in hand, Lucius and I will fall. (5.3.127-135)

Roman people support Lucius, who becomes the emperor. He thanks Roman people, and Titus and Lavinia are buried in the family tomb.

Revenge-driven plot, bloody banquet, children being fed to parents, the struggle of reason and passion and ultimate failure of reason to passion, presence of rhetorical speeches and borrowing direct Latin quotations all reflect Seneca's tragic influence. However, Shakespeare moves beyond Seneca's bleak vision. At the end of the play, he offers a path towards restoration through the rise of Lucius as a just ruler and return to public order. In Seneca's *Thyestes* vengeance leads to endless suffering and the villain feels triumphant. In *Titus Andronicus* there is still hope for renewal. Shakespeare transforms Senecan tragedy into a political drama that warns against the dangers of passion but leaves room for justice and healing.

4.2. Tragedy of Macbeth

Macbeth was written and first performed in 1606 (Oxford reference, 2025). As is the case with *Richard III*, *Macbeth* is also about ambition. Macbeth is also a fool who lets himself be overwhelmed by ambition. This is consistent with Epictetus' definition of tragedy, which is "A tragedy is what happens to a fool in the chance events" (Epictetus, 1904).

At the beginning of the play, Macbeth is a good person. He is a praised commander loved by many. We see his transformation throughout the play. He eventually goes down the path of evil, killing King Duncan and disrupting the order of the cosmos. This is despite the fact that he had no reason to kill Duncan. Duncan, indeed, trusts and likes him. Duncan is not a tyrant; on the contrary, he is a good king. Macbeth, by killing him, gives in to passion. Spurred by weird sisters and his own wife Lady Macbeth, he kills King Duncan.

In alignment with Seneca's stages of anger, in this case ambition, Macbeth kills King Duncan. First, he encounters the witches. Then, Lady Macbeth sowes the seeds of passion into him. He fails in a stoic fashion. As a rational agent, he should have known that wealth and power are indifferents, and, hence, they do not hold true value. He lets chance events alter his agency. He admits to this at the end in his famous soliloquy:

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,

Creeps in this petty pace from day to day

To the last syllable of recorded time,

And all our yesterdays have lighted fools

The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player

That struts and frets his hour upon the stage

And then is heard no more. It is a tale

Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,

Signifying nothing. (5.5.19-28)

This is at first glance a nihilist remark, but it is difficult to deny that it is stoic as well. It focuses on the transient nature of life. “Full of sound and fury”; that is, life is full of emotions and passions. It could be love or hatred or other things, but full of passions. It is our choice what kind of emotions we use to fill it with. In either case, our life will end, and all those passions will be meaningless.

In act III Macbeth says: “Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill’ (*Macbeth* 3.2.55). This reminds us of Clytemnestra of *Agamemnon*: “per scelera semper sceleribus tutum est iter / for crimes the way ahead is always safe through crimes” (Agamemnon, 115). Macbeth utters a similar remark: “I am in blood / Stepp'd in so far that, should I wade no more, / Returning were as tedious as go o'er” (3.4.161–3.).

In act 5, Lady Macbeth summons spirits and asks for riddance of her womanly nature:

Come, you spirits

That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,

And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full

Of direst cruelty. Make thick my blood.

Stop up the access and passage to remorse,

That no compunctious visitings of nature

Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between

The effect and it! (1.5. 38-45)

These lines remind us of a female figure from Seneca's plays (Muir, 1977). This summoning by Lady Macbeth echoes Medea's incantation in *Medea*:

> If ought of auncient corage still doe dwell within my brest,
>
> Exile all foolysh Female feare, and pity from thy mynde….
>
> What euer hurly burly wrought doth Phasis vnderstand,
>
> What mighty monstrous bloudy feate I wrought by Sea or Land
>
> (Tenne tragedies- 1927, 2.57)

Remarks by Lady Macbeth indicate that she identifies womanhood with weakness and wishes to be *unsexed* and filled with ruthless cruelty so that she can carry out her plan. A similar tone can be traced in Medea's utterances. *Foolysh Female feare* indicates that Medea associates fear and pity with womanhood and weakness.

In Act 3, guilt-swollen Macbeth yells in despair to an empty stool: "Thou canst not say I did it. Never shake / Thy gory locks at me" (3.4.60). He sees Banquo's ghost, which indicates the psychological torment he goes through. His wife says, "What, quite unmanned in folly?" (3.4.86), again criticizing his masculinity. Shakespeare also uses Senecan techniques of using supernatural apparitions to show Macbeth's inner turmoil. Later in Act 4 of Macbeth, Macduff learns the terrible news about his wife's and children's murder. To comfort him Malcolm says:"What, man! Ne'er pull your hat upon your brows./Give sorrow words. The grief that does not speak/Whispers the o'erfraught heart and bids it break." (4.3.208-210)

He asks Macduff to put his emotions into words so that he can reduce the burden of pain and emotional turmoil. Malcolm's remarks, as Cunliffe (1907) notes, echo Phaedra from *Phaedra*: "Small worries find expression, huge ones are stricken dumb" (2.607). This Senecan maxim recurs in many parts of Shakespeare's plays (Miola, 1992). In act 5 Macbeth says: "Cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff Which weighs upon the heart?" (5.3.43-44). When he says this to the doctor, he stresses the difficulty of getting rid of sorrow in one's mind.

Shakespeare borrowed Seneca's *domina-nutrix* convention. However, he flipped it. Generally, in Seneca's plays there are characters full of passion and some other characters who represent reason and advise passionate characters restraint and tranquility. However, Shakespeare used this convention in a different way. He used Lady Macbeth as a passionate character and Macbeth as her antithesis. Lady Macbeth spurred her husband: "when you durst do it then you were a man" (1.7.54). Contrary to Medea and other passionate characters of Seneca, Lady Macbeth regrets her actions and turns into an insomniac with guilt. Macbeth, who initially wavers his passionate actions, takes a full-fledged passionate tone. He even exhorts himself when his mind slips and deliberates on his plan:

> Time, thou anticipat'st my dread exploits.
>
> The flighty purpose never is o'ertook
>
> Unless the deed go with it. From this moment
>
> The very firstlings of my heart shall be
>
> The firstlings of my hand. And even now,
>
> To crown my thoughts with acts, be it thought and
>
> done:
>
> The castle of Macduff I will surprise,
>
> Seize upon Fife, give to th' edge o' th' sword
>
> His wife, his babes, and all unfortunate souls
>
> That trace him in his line. (4.1.143-152)

At the end of the play, Macbeth regrets his actions and falls into despair and makes his famous soliloquy and reflects on his actions and contemplates the emptiness of

life. He has similar tones to Hercules in *Hercules Furens*. He is driven to madness and violence and laments his actions:

How is ’t with me when every noise appals me?

What hands are here? Ha! They pluck out mine eyes.

Will all great Neptune’s ocean wash this blood

Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather

The multitudinous seas incarnadine,

Making the green one red. (2.2.72-77)

When Macbeth sees Duncan’s blood on his hands, he feels deep horror and guilt. His feeling of guilt is so intense that he wonders whether the powerful Roman God of sea, Neptune, can clean the blood in his hands. Here, Shakespeare uses another Senecan convention, hyperbole. The answer to his rhetorical question is a clear “no”. Macbeth expresses his guilt by implying that his bloody hands would turn the ocean red. Macbeth, by killing Duncan, commits an act which is against nature and virtue. His atrocious act is so horrible that it disrupts the natural order. It even has the capacity to change the colour of the oceans. Hercules also, after he killed his wife and children under the spell of Juno, utters similar remarks:

What Tanais or Nile, what Tigris ripping

with Persian waves, ferocious Rhine or

turbulent Tigris awash with Spanish gold

can cleanse this hand? Even if cold Maeotis

pours its arctic sea on me and all of

Ocean cascades through my hands, the crime will

stick deep. (1323 -1329)

We see similar remarks from another Senecan play *Phaedra*. Hippolytus talks with rage, when his stepmother Phaedra tries to seduce him:

What Danube's stream will wipe me clean, what Maeotis

flushing barbarous waters into the Pontic sea?

Not even the Great Father of the Gods himself, using all

the ocean, could purge this massive crime. O woods, O wild

animals! (715-718)

Lady Macbeth, like her husband, feels a similar guilt and utters similar remarks: "Here's the smell of the blood still. All the perfumes/of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh, Oh, Oh! (5.2.44-45)

Arkins (1995) points out the similarities between the end of Macbeth to Hercules at the end of *Hercules Furens*, suggesting that in both plays it is possible to see the despair of the characters and their confrontation with the consequences of their actions. Hercules conveys his state of mind in agony:

No reason why I should detain my life

or linger longer in this light. I've lost

all goods: mind, arms, fame, wife, sons, hands,

even madness. No one can heal a polluted

soul; the crime must be cured by death. (1258-1262)

And Macbeth also reflects on his loss and the things which gave meaning to his life, and he exhibits acceptance of his fate and inevitable downfall:

I have lived long enough. My way of life

Is fall'n into the sere, the yellow leaf,

And that which should accompany old age,

As honor, love, obedience, troops of friends,

I must not look to have, but, in their stead,

Curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honor, breath. (5.3.22-27)

Theseus, in *Hercules Furens*, says:"What each has done he suffers; the crime seeks out/its author, the guilty's punished by his own example./I've seen bloody generals locked in jail,/a headstrong tyrant's back torn by commoners'/hands." (735-738)

Arkins (1995) points out that these lines have echoes in Macbeth:"that we but teach/Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return/To plague th' inventor: this even-handed justice/Commends the ingredients of our poisoned chalice/To our own lips." (8-12)

In both plays, the same idea is conveyed. Namely, violent actions and wrongdoings somehow come back and punish the perpetrator. Those who commit crimes are eventually plagued by their own crimes.

Also in Act 4 *Hercules Furens* (Lines 1065-1082), the Chorus recounts benefits of sleep:

You too, O Sleep, tamer of evils,

the mind's repose,

the better part of human life,

winged off spring of star- bearing mother,

sluggish brother of harsh Death,

mixing false with true, sure herald

of the future, yet the worst," (1065-1071)

These lines are echoed in Macbeth's remarks in Act 2 after he kills Duncan:

Methought I heard a voice cry, "Sleep no more!

Macbeth does murder sleep"—the innocent sleep,

Sleep that knits up the raveled sleave of care,

The death of each day's life, sore labor's bath,

Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,

Chief nourisher in life's feast. (2.2.38-43)

These lines indicate a troubled state of mind in Macbeth. He is overwhelmed by guilt, and knows the consequences of killing the king. He feels that he will not be able to find tranquility and rest. In these lines, sleep is described as an innocent and restorative power. By committing murder, he does not only kill Duncan, he also kills his innocence and his ability to sleep. In line 50 it is also described as "chief nourisher in life" (2.2.43). This means that sleep sustains sanity and health. Macbeth's murder is against the natural order. Here sleep is utilized as a metaphor; that is, since sleep is a nourisher in life's feast, it is, from the stoic perspective, in accord with nature and cosmic order. These lines have a striking resemblance to what we see in *Hercules Furens*. Macbeth thinks that sleep is "Balm of hurt minds" (2.2.42). The chorus in Hercules Furens describes it as tamer of evils and the mind's repose (1064-5). In both lines, the restorative nature of sleep is emphasized. Hercules falls asleep after his act of murder. Since it is described as tamer of evil, when he wakes up he is healed unlike Macbeth. Macbeth, on the other hand, has trouble sleeping, as his mind is not at ease and, thus, his evil is not tamed. When compared with Macbeth, Hercules' universe has deities, Juno casts a spell on him out of jealousy and he kills his family in a frenzy, after which he sleeps and finds healing. However, *Macbeth* as a play has more human components. It is not easy for Macbeth to get rid of his guilt. Seneca borrows the story from Euripides and reduces

the agency of Gods in *Hercules Furens* and puts the emphasis on the individual's responsibility to a great extent. Even if Hercules commits his atrocious acts under the spell of Juno, he still has *hubris* and his violence is extension of his war-like nature and he is unable to control his emotions. Shakespeare takes it one step further and puts the blame on the individual and his actions. However, Shakespeare also retains Seneca's supernatural elements. While Seneca uses Fury and shades of Tantalus and Thyestes, Shakespeare replaces them with weird sisters.

Although Macbeth is also a child-slayer like Hercules, his situation is different. While Macbeth orders the murder of the children with a conscious decision, Hercules kills his children under the spell of Juno. Formation of passion in Macbeth is also different from Seneca's plays. Seneca, as noted above, defines passion in three stages. In his plays, the characters first have the feeling that they have been wronged; secondly, they form a judgement, and, in the final stage, they give in to passion completely. In *Macbeth,* we also see the process of passion sprouting but it is somewhat different.

When Macbeth and Banquo encounter three witches in Act 1 Scene 3, three witches, weird sisters, hail Macbeth first as Thane of Glamis, Thane of Cawdor, and then "king hereafter*"* (1.3.51). Seeds of ambition were sown into Macbeth's heart. He is curios and wants to ask more, so he wishes them to stay more: "Into the air, and what seemed corporal Melted, as breath into the wind. Would they had stayed*"* (1.3.83-84). Then, Banquo asks Macbeth why he looks afraid of those words that prophesy good things, which reinforces Macbeth's ambition even further. He does not repress his first impulse *impetus.* In the same scene, messengers come and tell Macbeth that he will be given the title of Thane of Cawdor. He questions himself: "My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical, Shakes so my single state of man" (141-142). In Scene 4 of the same Act, when Duncan proclaims Malcolm the heir to the throne, Macbeth's mind stirs again, but this time he attempts to repress his thoughts: *Stars, hide your fires; Let not light see my black and deep desires* (59-60). When Macbeth arrives at Inverness, Lady Macbeth expresses her delight about the letter that Macbeth sent recounting the things about prophesying witches. She welcomes him saying "Great Glamis, worthy Cawdor, Greater than both, by the all-hail hereafter*"* (1.5.52-53). When Macbeth says that Duncan will leave the

following day, Lady Macbeth proclaims that it will never happen. Macbeth does not ask her to stop talking like that, instead says "We will speak further" (1.5.69). He does not actively resist the idea. Murderous thoughts which were just *fantastical* in Act 1, Scene 3 come closer to being a reality. He confronts his inner conflict, and admits to himself that he has no legitimate reason to kill Duncan except his ambition:

I have no spur/To prick the sides of my intent, but only/Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself/And falls on th' other. (1.7.25-28)

He lets her wife reinforce his already planted emotion. In Scene 7, he seems to waver and says that they will not kill Duncan, whereupon Lady Macbeth mocks his manhood. He replies: "Prithee, peace: I dare do all that may become a man; Who dares do more is none" (1.7.45-47). She asks him to act on his desires and says: "When you durst do it, then you were a man" (1.7.49) She says she would even kill a baby to get what she deserves:

I have given suck, and know

How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me.

I would, while it was smiling in my face,

Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums

And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn as you

Have done to this. (1.7.54-59)

These lines remind us of Medea, who kills her own children. Lady Macbeth also shows her fierce determination as Medea does. As noted above, both characters consider womanhood as weakness and associate ruthlessness and brute force with manhood. In Latin, *vir* means man (Ridler, 1968) and *virtus* means manliness, courage, excellence character and, virtue. Seneca, in his prose, makes it clear that real virtue is not physical power or violence but self-control of emotions and living according to nature. Both Medea and Lady Macbeth misguide versions of manhood.

In Act 2 Scene 1, Macbeth sees the illusion of a dagger floating in the air. He prepares his mind for the murder, tries to expel ideas that dictates him not to commit murder and he exhorts himself to murder. He says: "Whiles I threat, he lives. Words to the heat of deeds too cold breath gives*"* (2.1.60-61). After the murder, the guilt takes its toll on him and his wife. As with Medea, Clytemnestra and Atreus, they go through the process of passion, in this case ambition. When Macbeth's mind wavers, his wife persuades him to commit the deed. Sometimes Macbeth exhorts himself along the lines of self-extortions of Medea, Clytemnestra and Atreus. Macbeth fails to repress his passionate impulses. In *Thyestes*, his ambitions are spurred by young Tantalus remarks *Father, you can be king!* (440-442). In *Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth assumes this position, impels her husband to be a real man, and do what is necessary to get what he desires. Macbeth does not reject those impulses as a true Stoic is supposed to do and fails in a Stoic fashion. Since he lacks a moral framework, he turns into "a poor player", or a bad actor who does not know what he is actually doing, "That struts and frets his hour upon the stage" (5.5.27). He does not play the role properly which fate assigned him. Rather than controlling his impulses and passions, Macbeth falls prey to his excessive emotions.

4.3. Richard III

The full title of the play is *The Tragedy of King Richard the Third*. It was written by Shakespeare in 1592. It is about an ambitious villain-hero Richard, Duke of Gloucester. The play is set during the civil war called the War of Roses. We see the rise and fall of this Machiavellian character through manipulation, betrayal, lie, and murder. He is a typical Senecan tyrant who is ready to do anything to achieve what he desires including murdering children. The play opens with Richard's famous soliloquy, which lasts for 41 lines. It sets the tone for the rest of the play:

Now is the winter of our discontent

Made glorious summer by this son of York,

And all the clouds that loured upon our house

In the deep bosom of the ocean buried.

Now are our brows bound with victorious wreaths,

Our bruisèd arms hung up for monuments,

Our stern alarums changed to merry meetings,

Our dreadful marches to delightful measures. (1.1.1-8)

House of York, which Richard belongs to, is victorious from the War of Roses. Everybody is happy and celebrating except for Richard. He feels excluded and unhappy. He complains about his deformity and ugliness and blames nature for it:

But I, that am not shaped for sportive tricks,

Nor made to court an amorous looking glass;

I, that am rudely stamped and want love's majesty

To strut before a wanton ambling nymph;

I, that am curtailed of this fair proportion,

Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,

Deformed, unfinished, sent before my time

Into this breathing world, scarce half made up,

And that so lamely and unfashionable

That dogs bark at me as I halt by them—

Why, I, in this weak piping time of peace,

Have no delight to pass away the time,

Unless to see my shadow in the sun

And descant on mine own deformity. (1.1.14-27)

His lengthy monologue tries to invoke empathy from the audience. Finally, he reveals his evil plan to set his brother King Edward IV against his other brother Clarence. He adds that he cannot be a lover, so he will be a villain: And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover/To entertain these fair well-spoken days,/I am determined to prove a villain. (1.1.28-30)

These lines by Richard recall another child-killer Medea of Seneca at the beginning of *Medea*. Medea, at the beginning of the play, prepares her mind to her heinous crimes. She recounts how she has been wronged by Jason by marrying another woman despite her sacrifices. Like Medea, Richard shows self-creation in his lengthy monologue. He explains his feelings and discontent about society, his brother Edward and his physical appearance and gives reasons for his future crimes. Their motivations are different, though. While Medea's revenge is personal, Richards's anger is at nature and society. Though their motivations are different, both of them disregard human life to achieve their goals.

Miola (1992) notes that wooing of Anne by Richard recalls tyrant Lycus' wooing of Megara in *Hercules Furens*. Richard's rhetorical tactic mirrors Lycus' coercive tactics:

Richard:

Fairer than tongue can name thee, let me have

Some patient leisure to excuse myself.

Anne:

Fouler than heart can think thee, thou canst make

No excuse current but to hang thyself

Richard:

By such despair I should accuse myself. (1.2.79-83)

Anne

And thou unfit for any place but hell.

Richard

Yes, one place else, if you will hear me name it.

Anne

Some dungeon.

Richard

Your bedchamber.

Anne

Ill rest betide the chamber where thou liest!

Richard

So will it, madam till I lie with you.

Anne

I hope so. (1.2.106-112)

These lines are written in the *stichomythia* technique, which is often used by Seneca. Arkins (1995) notes that both scenes from *Hercules Furens* and *Richard III* have similar structure. Lycus, in the absence of Hercules, forces Megara to marry him,

intending to seize the throne. First, he uses kind and elegant language, but then changes the tone. He tries to justify his violent actions. Richard follows a similar structure. He explains why he committed the murders: Your beauty was the cause of that effect—/Your beauty, that did haunt me in my sleep/To undertake the death of all the world,/So I might live one hour in your sweet bosom. (1.2.119-122)

Both Megara and Anne wish for the tyrant's death:"**Lycus:** Say rather what royal gift/I should prepare for our wedding.**Megara:**Your death or mine (*Hercules Furens*, 425-427).**Anne:**Arise, dissembler. Though I wish thy death,/I will not be the executioner. (*Richard III*, 1.2.170-171)

Arkins (1995) also points out that the sword sequence of wooing Anne has parallels to *Phaedra*. When Phaedra confesses her love for his stepson, she says she wishes to be killed by his hands. She exhibits a perverse satisfaction in being killed by Hippolytus' sword. Richard also eroticizes the killing. He opens his shirt to show his chest and asks Anne to kill him with a sword.

Richard:

Nay, do not pause; for I did kill King Henry—

But 'twas thy beauty that provokèd me.

Nay, now dispatch; 'twas I that stabbed young Edward—

But 'twas thy heavenly face that set me on.

Take up the sword again, or take up me. (1.2.165-169)

Both Anne and Hippolytus give the same reaction: They drop their swords. While Phaedra was sincere in her remarks, Richard is clearly manipulating Anne to marry her and come to the throne one step closer.

Richard in Act 4 uses a familiar Senecan maxim which is reminiscent of Agamemnon:"But I am in/So far in blood that sin will pluck on sin./Tear-falling pity dwells not in this eye." (4.2.61-63)

These lines indicate the acknowledgment of the vicious cycle of violence. Macbeth also makes similar remarks: “Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill” (*Macbeth* 3.2.55). Richard ignores, just as Macbeth does, the dictates of reason and does not repent.

As Cunliffe (1907) pointed out, one of the things that Shakespeare borrowed from Seneca is ghosts. As in *Macbeth*, Richard is also visited by ghosts. In Act 5 Scene 4, ghosts visit both Richard and Richmond before the battle of Bosworth Field. Eleven ghosts who were murdered by Richard appear to him and condemn him saying, “Despair and die” (5.3.125, 215). Ghosts change the atmosphere of the play. Richard feels afraid and disempowered unlike Richmond. The psychological influence of the dream is evident in his monologue:

> What do I fear? Myself? There’s none else by.
>
> Richard loves Richard; that is, I and I.
>
> Is there a murderer here? No. Yes, I am.
>
> Then fly! What, from myself? Great reason why:
>
> Lest I revenge. What, myself upon myself?
>
> Alack, I love myself. Wherefore? For any good
>
> That I myself have done unto myself?
>
> O, no! Alas, I rather hate myself
>
> For hateful deeds committed by myself.
>
> I am a villain. Yet I lie. I am not.
>
> Fool, of thyself speak well. Fool, do not flatter. (5.3.180-190)

When Richard wakes up from his ghost-filled dream, he shows signs of disturbance and unsettlement, yet he does not choose to repent of his crimes. Richard

poses contrast to his brother Clarence in his reaction to his dream. In Act 1, Scene 4, Clarence recounts his dream to his jailer and says that the ghost of Edward, Prince of Wales, appeared to him and reminded him of his crime. Unlike Richard, his brother shows remorse:

Clarence:

O Brakenbury, | have done those things

Which now bear evidence against my soul,

For Edward's sake, and see how he requites me.

I pray thee, gentle keeper, stay by me.

My soul is heavy, and | fain would? sleep. (1.4.63-67)

Richard is a Senecan tyrant who seeks power at any cost. He kills his brother and nephews to achieve what he covets. He is a child killer like Medea, Atreus, and Hercules. He dares to disrupt natural order of things by usurping the throne. He projects his own shortcomings to society and ignores the idea that externals are not virtuous and are of no value. He fails in a stoic fashion as Titus and Macbeth do. He disrupts the cosmic order, but Richmond (future Henry VII), by defeating Richard, restores order in England.

Richard's ambition leads to his downfall, as does Macbeth's. He faces the consequences of his actions in the end. In his self-revealing monologue, at the beginning of the play, he explains and justifies his future atrocities by blaming his deformity. During the play, we see his rise and fall. There is a similar situation in *Macbeth*; however, *Macbeth* has its differences. Richard, at the beginning of the play, is a bad person and remains bad at the end of the play. However, Macbeth, in the beginning, is a good commander and an obedient thane to the king, and he is loved by his friends. He goes through a transformation, turns into a Machiavellian tyrant, and dies as a nefarious character.

Senecan influence is evident on *Richard III* in multiple ways. Richard follows a typical Senecan villain. He starts, as Medea does, in a self-exhortation speech and shows manipulative tyrant tactics like Lycus. However, Shakespeare adopts Senecan tragic tradition in this play. Unlike Senecan characters, Richard faces consequences of his actions and dies. He is killed by Richard who represents reason. Ghostly visitation before the Battle of Bosworth Field shows transformation of Senecan supernatural element into a psychological revelation. His defeat by Richmond shows restoration of order after the disruption of cosmic order, which is absent from Seneca's plays.

5.CONCLUSION

From Ancient Greece to present time, tragic writers used the craft of "playing with passions. Seneca is no exception. As a person who lived under the tyranny of Nero, he experienced the destructive nature of passions firsthand. In his works, one can clearly see the influences of the era he lived in. His personal experience shaped his philosophy and his tragedy. In each play he wrote, we see what happens when you lose reason and overcame by passions.

Philosophical background of Seneca's tragedies based on Stoicism. Stoicism advocates the use of reason to control emotions and reach *apatheia*. Seneca, in his plays, shows what happens if you fail at this. Every character is consumed by passions in his plays. It is possible to see his moral frameworks that he outlined in his work *De ira*. At first the stage, the character gets the initial impulse and feel the emotion. At the second stage He or she decides to act on it. At the final stage comes to total surrender to passion.

Thyestes demonstrates mechanical progression of passion. First, Atreus shows the signs of injury, he believes he has been wronged by his own brother and he desires vengeance. He makes an elaborate plan, pretending reconciliation to lure Thyestes back. He kills his brother's sons and feeds them to him. Atreus shows no sign of conscience and enjoys every step of his revenge. He remains totally unrepentant at the end of the play.

Medea is another striking example of unchecked passion. The play uses child-killing motif as an ultimate expression of vengeful act. Medea, who thinks she has been wronged, slays her own children just to get at her husband. Another child-killer is Hercules in *Hercules Furens*. Although Hercules' passion is caused by divine intervention, the play suggests that his madness is partly caused by his natural tendencies to violence. One can see that even mighty heroes can fail at controlling passions. Agamemnon is another play that follows the pattern of a betrayed wife. Phaedra is also another example of how unchecked passions lead to destruction and pain. In all these plays, Seneca's consistent approach is evident. He depicts passion with precision and shows its mechanical progression. Shakespeare borrows and departs from Seneca in some aspects. He transforms this moral framework. Medea,

who is totally unrepentant and determined in her actions, turns herself into an instrument of vengeance. Lady Macbeth, however, commits similar acts but she feels guilt and remorse. Medea says "now I am Medea" but Lady Macbeth turns into a sleepwalking person and says All Arabia's perfumes cannot wash the blood on her hands.

Early English Senecan influence first emerges with *Gorboduc* (1562). Although it is criticized for being static in dramatic structure and devoid of emotional intensity, it is generally considered as the first English tragedy. It has five-act structure, revenge-driven plot, brotherly violence and ambitious characters. In the play, it is possible to see reflections of contemporary anxieties of royal succession as Elizabeth I had no heir for the throne. Senecan influence continued with Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* which features a revenge plot and bloody ending. Christopher Marlowe wrote *Doctor Faustus* which has supernatural elements and *Tamburlaine* which features an extremely ambitious character.

Shakespeare also borrows and departs from Seneca. One can see this transformation in these three plays: *Titus Andronicus*, *Macbeth* and *Richard III*. Titus in *Titus Andronicus* mirrors Atreus *Thyestes* in many ways. Both characters are full of ambition and feed children to their parents. While Atreus remains unrepentant in his actions and feels completely triumphant, there is a different resolution in *Titus Andronicus*. Although Titus is also completely overwhelmed by passion, he dies at the end of the play. Another divergence from Senecan counterpart is *Titus Andronicus* offers a restoration and reconciliation at the end of the play. Lucius becomes ruler, speaks to Roman people and asks for forgiveness. Order is ultimately restored. In addition, Seneca's Thyestes focuses more on the process of passion formation, whereas Shakespeare also shows broader consequences of revenge. Tamora's character also shows Shakespeare's innovation. Tamora, who is a victim of revenge at the beginning of the play, turns into a revenger after she witnesses her son's execution. That makes her transformation more plausible.

Macbeth needs special attention. He resembles Hercules in certain ways. Both of them are warrior heroes who commit familial violence. While Hercules kills his children and wife under the spell of Juno, Macbeth makes a conscious decision to

order the killing Macduff's family. Shakespeare gives more agency to the character. Although Macbeth's ambition is spurred by the witches and his wife, he chooses to kill King Duncan and thereby disrupts the cosmic order. Shakespeare's departure in supernatural formula is also noteworthy. Juno is a clear external force controlling Hercules, but witches in *Macbeth* are ambiguous creatures. They prophecy yet do not control Macbeth entirely. The sleep theme further reveals this difference. While Hercules collapses into sleep after his murderous act, Macbeth hears voices saying "Sleep no more".

Lady Macbeth's development shows another departure from Senecan archetypes. Like Medea's invocation, Lady Macbeth makes an invocation to spirits saying "unsex me here". Although she initially shows determination in her actions, she fails to be an absolute revenge machine like Medea. After the murder of King Duncan, she feels intense guilt and becomes a sleepwalker. She sees imaginary blood on her hands which cannot be cleaned. Eventually, she cannot bear the guilt and commits suicide.

In *Richard III*, Shakespeare reimagines the child-killer villain. At the end of the play, he dies in a miserable way unlike Senecan villains like Medea, and Atreus. Richard's wooing of Anne reminds us of tyrant Lycus who tries to marry Megara. While Lycus uses physical threat to convince Megara, Richard uses verbal manipulation. By doing this Shakespeare adds a layer to Richard's character. Renaissance audiences hate him for his actions but also like him for his skills. Shakespeare even humanizes his villains through psychological complexity rather than showing them as simple evils.

This analysis demonstrates that Shakespeare's engagement with Seneca goes far beyond simple borrowing. Shakespeare does not just imitate, but he transforms. He inherits simple Senecan characters and turns them into morally ambiguous characters with psychological complexities. Shakespeare transforms Seneca's philosophical demonstrations into psychological explorations. While Senecan characters live in a universe with a pre-ordained structure, Shakespeare's characters live in a universe where good and evil are not clear-cut and they face real moral struggles.

Shakespeare follows Seneca the dramatist rather than Seneca the philosopher. He inherits dramatic conventions like five-act structure, revenge plots, characters with

extreme passions, tyrants, supernatural elements, messengers, stichomythia. He even incorporates direct Latin quotations from Seneca's plays, particularly in *Titus Andronicus*. He takes and transforms Seneca's philosophy rather than adopting it. He keeps theatrical framework but finds his philosophical determinism insufficient for the Renaissance audiences who need character development, moral agency and dramatic resolution.

Treatment of supernatural reveals how Seneca and Shakespeare use them in different ways. Seneca uses ghosts as plot devices to progress the plot and as external manifestations of disrupted cosmic order. Shakespeare, on the other hand, uses them for psychological explorations. Shade of Tantalus at the beginning of Thyestes appears and informs the audience about the background of the play and sets the tone of the play. Ghosts function differently in Shakespeare's *Richard III* and *Macbeth*. Banquo's ghost is only visible to Macbeth, which shows his guilt and inner turmoil. Similarly, ghosts of Richard's victims visiting him before the Battle of Bosworth Field remind him about his crimes.

Beyond structural changes, Shakespeare's real innovation lies in his character transformation. He takes two-dimensional characters like Atreus, Medea, Lycus and Hercules and turns them into complex and three-dimensional characters like Titus, Macbeth and Richard. While making this transformation he retains dramatic intensity of classical theatre. Shakespeare does not make this transformation to make his plays more interesting. He makes these changes for Renaissance audiences who hold different worldviews on human nature, individual agency and moral responsibility. Senecan characters are representations of certain passions and they have no real choices. On the other hand, Shakespeare's characters are people experiencing passions and they constantly make decisions.

Description of anger formation outlined in *De ira* provides us with insights about how Shakespeare developed his characters. Shakespeare in these three plays focuses on moral agency rather than deterministic progression. Titus follows Seneca's model with initial grief about his sons and his daughter; he goes through rational assent and ultimately complete surrender to anger. In contrast to Seneca, Shakespeare goes deeper into Titus' mental state, his suffering and moral awareness. He also

emphasizes the toll passion takes on Titus as individual and on Roman People as a society. Macbeth's ambition starts with initial impulse from witches reinforced by his wife. He brings his own demise through Senecan formula. However, Shakespeare focuses on his progress from initial doubt to murderous act of regicide, emphasizes his moral awareness and inner struggle during his descent into tyranny.

This moral consciousness connects to a larger pattern: possibility of redemption. Senecan tragedies end in despair, but Shakespeare's tragedies end in hope. Lucius in *Titus Andronicus* offers political restoration for Roman people and healing. Malcolm in *Macbeth* shows the signs of stability and order. Similarly, Richmond, who represents reason, gives hope of restoration for England. Shakespeare retains Senecan theatrical traditions but transforms Senecan themes. This implies that Shakespeare values Senecan tragic conventions, but finds his philosophy insufficient for Renaissance audiences who need moral responsibility and divine redemption.

Seneca presents cautionary tales about what happens when reason fails to control passions. Shakespeare also shows the consequences of extreme passions, but he does not center his plays on this. He puts passions into a larger human experience. He keeps the strength of classical theatre and includes love, political concern, family bonds. This reflects the influence of Renaissance humanism which values human dignity. Seneca also includes themes like love political concern, family bonds etc., but these elements serve to passion story. Everything is subordinate to demonstrating philosophical point about destructive emotions. In Shakespeare's plays, these elements have independent value and complexity. Renaissance thought considers humans as individuals with many aspects. Humans are multidimensional beings rather than souls that need to be saved. Macbeth is not just an ambitious person. He is a warrior, a husband, a friend, a poet, a killer, a thinker, a subject, a king-slayer and a king. He is a whole person with contradictory impulses, relationships and capacities. Renaissance audiences needed more than Seneca's single-passion characters and Shakespeare gave them that.

To fully understand these transformations, we should consider their historical context. Shakespeare's reimagining reflects political, religious and cultural traits of his time. During Elizabeth I's rule (1558-1603), England had relatively tolerant

atmosphere and this gave way to an environment in which Classical thought and Christian values co-exist. This setting allowed writers like Christopher Marlowe, Shakespeare and many others to flourish. It enabled Shakespeare to refine and transform Senecan tragedy. Under James I's rule, Shakespeare includes sensitive topics like regicide, legitimacy of monarchy and divine right. To prevent criticism, he uses Senecan theatrical conventions as a shield. He shows regicide in Macbeth; the audience might consider it as encouraging regicide. The audience might also question whether Malcolm is more legitimate than Macbeth or Richmond has a better claim than Richard. Shakespeare, in Macbeth, ensures the regicide, leads to disaster thereby supporting James I's legitimacy.

In brief, Shakespeare's borrowing goes beyond mere imitation of Seneca. Shakespeare reinvents what he borrows from Seneca through the lens of the Renaissance humanist philosophy. Drawing from Seneca's style, dramatic conventions, themes of unchecked ambition and revenge, he creates more nuanced characters who have moral and psychological complexities. Thus, Shakespeare achieves not a mere adaptation of Seneca's tragedies, but he also transforms the characters in a way that they have moral agency and responsibility for their actions, thereby creating characters that reflect Renaissance beliefs about human dignity and moral responsibility

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Arkins, B. (1995). Heavy Seneca: his influence on Shakespeare's tragedies. In *Classics Ireland* (Vols. 2–2, pp. 1–16). Classical Association of Ireland.

Asmis, E., Bartsch, S., & Nussbaum, M. C. (Eds.). (2014). *Hardship and happiness* (E. Fantham, H. M. Hine, J. Ker, & G. D. Williams, Trans.). The University of Chicago Press. https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226108353.001.0001

Birch, D., & Hooper, K. (2012). (Eds.), The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature. : Oxford University Press. Retrieved 16 Feb. 2025.

Bowers, F. (1940). *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy*. Princeton University Press.

Charlton, H. B. (1946). The Senecan tradition in Renaissance tragedy : a re-issue of an essay published in 1921. In *UT Back-in-Print Service eBooks*.

Cunliffe, J. W. (1907). *The influence of Seneca Elizabethan tragedy*. Macmillan and Co. (Original work published 1893)

Dillon, J. (2007). *Shakespeare's tragedies*. Cambridge University Press.

Dorandi, T. (1999). Chronology. In *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy* (p. 41). Cambridge University Press.

Durand, Marion, Simon Shogry, and Dirk Baltzly, "Stoicism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2023 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.)

Epictetus. (1904). *Discourses of Epictetus* (G. Long, Trans.; J. L. Spalding, Intro.). D. Appleton and Company.

Eliot, T. S. (1932). *Selected Essays* (Second Edition Revised And Enlarged). Faber And Faber Limited.

Fitch, J. G. (1974). *Character in Senecan tragedy*. Cornell University.

Fitch, J. G. (1987). *Seneca's Hercules Furens: A Critical Text with Introduction and Commentary*. Cornell University Press.

Frangoulidis, S. (2020). From victor to victim: metadrama and movement of plot in seneca's hercules furens. Eugesta, (10).

Graver, M. (2023). *Seneca: The Literary Philosopher*. Cambridge University Press.

Graver, M., "Epictetus", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2021/entries/epictetus/>.

Herington, C. J. (1966). Senecan Tragedy. *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics*, *5–5*, 422–471. http://www.jstor.com/stable/20163042

Jedan, C. (2009). Stoic virtues. In *Continuum Studies in Ancient Philosophy*.

Kamtekar, Rachana, "Marcus Aurelius", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.)

Konstan, D. (2017). Introduction. In *The Complete Tragedies, Volume 2: Oedipus, Hercules Mad, Hercules on Oeta, Thyestes, Agamemnon* (pp. 51-58). Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Long, A. A. and D. N. Sedley, 1987, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 2 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press [LS]

Macbeth. In Birch, D., & Hooper, K. (Eds.), The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature. : Oxford University Press. Retrieved 2 Mar. 2025, from https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199608218.001.0001/acref-9780199608218-e-4707.

Miola, R. S. (1992). Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy: The Influence of Seneca [Book]. In Oxford Scholarship Online (pp. 68–121).

Norton, T., & Sackville, T. (1883). *Gorboduc or Ferrex and Porrex* (K. Vollmöller & L. T. Smith, Eds.).

Pratt, T., Jr. (1948). The stoic base of Senecan drama. *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, *79–79*, 1–11.

Ridler, V. (1968). vir. In *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (p. 2069). Clarendon Press.

Seddon, K. H. Epictetus. Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Retrieved January 20, 2025, from https://iep.utm.edu/epictetu/

Sedley, D. (2023). The School, from Zeno to Arius Didymus. In B. Inwood (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics* (p. 9). Cambridge University Press.

Sellars, J. (2003). *The Art of Living*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Sellars, J. (2006). Stoicism. In *Ancient Philosophies*. Acumen.

Seneca, L. (2017). Thyestes. In *The Complete Tragedies, Volume 2: Oedipus, Hercules Mad, Hercules on Oeta, Thyestes, Agamemnon* (pp. 191-230). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Seneca, L. (2017). Agamemnon. In *The Complete Tragedies, Volume 2: Oedipus, Hercules Mad, Hercules on Oeta, Thyestes, Agamemnon* (pp. 243-278). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Seneca, L. (2017). Hercules Furens. In *The Complete Tragedies, Volume 2: Oedipus, Hercules Mad, Hercules on Oeta, Thyestes, Agamemnon* (pp. 59-104). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Seneca, L. (2017). Medea. In *The Complete Tragedies, Volume 1: Medea, The Phoenician Women, Phaedra, The Trojan Women, Octavia* (pp. 11-50). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Seneca, L. (2017). Phaedra. In *The Complete Tragedies, Volume 1: Medea, The Phoenician Women, Phaedra, The Trojan Women, Octavia* (pp. 95-138). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Seneca, L. (2017). Troades. In *The Complete Tragedies, Volume 1: Medea, The Phoenician Women, Phaedra, The Trojan Women, Octavia* (pp. 149-190). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Seneca L. A. (2019). *De Ira How to keep your cool* (J. Romm, Trans.). Princeton University Press.

Seneca, L. A. (2010). *De Ira* (R. A. Kaster & M. C. Nussbaum, Trans.). University of Chicago Press.

Seneca, L. A. (2010). *Natural Questions* (E. Asmis, S. Bartsch, & M. C. Nussbaum, Eds.; H. M. Hine, Trans.). The University of Chicago Press.

Seneca, L. A. (2015). *Letters on Ethics To Lucilius* (E. Asmis, S. Bartsch, & M. C. Nussbaum, Eds.; M. Graver & A. A. Long, Trans.). The University of Chicago Press.

Seneca, L. A. (2015). Letters on ethics: To Lucilius (M. Graver & A. A. Long, Trans.). University of Chicago Press.

Shakespeare, W. (2015). *Macbeth*. In S. Greenblatt, W. Cohen, J. E. Howard, K. E. Maus, G. McMullan, & S. Gossett (Eds.), The Norton Shakespeare (3rd ed., pp. 2709–2778). W. W. Norton & Company. (Original work published 1606)

Shakespeare, W. (2015). *Richard III*. In S. Greenblatt, W. Cohen, J. E. Howard, K. E. Maus, G. McMullan, & S. Gossett (Eds.), The Norton Shakespeare (3rd ed., pp. 547–636). W. W. Norton & Company. (Original work published 1592)

Shakespeare, W. (2015). *Titus Andronicus*. In S. Greenblatt, W. Cohen, J. E. Howard, K. E. Maus, G. McMullan, & S. Gossett (Eds.), The Norton Shakespeare (3rd ed., pp. 417–486). W. W. Norton & Company. (Original work published 1594)

Sidney, P. (1595). *A defence of poesie and poems* (H. Morley, Ed.). Project Gutenberg.

Staley, G. A., 1948-. (1975). *Ira: Theme And Form In Senecan Tragedy* (By Princeton University & Xerox University Microfilms) [Thesis]. Xerox University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106.

Stephens, W.O. *Stoic ethics*. Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Retrieved March 3, 2025, from https://iep.utm.edu/stoiceth/

Titus Andronicus. In Birch, D., & Hooper, K. (Eds.), The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature. : Oxford University Press. Retrieved 2 Mar. 2025, from https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199608218.001.0001/acref-9780199608218-e-7522.

Wagoner, R. (2024). *Lucius Annaeus Seneca*. Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Retrieved July 28, 2024.