



**CLAS 4000 Seminar in Classics on Seneca's *Thyestes*
and LATN 4002 Roman Drama**

<http://myweb.ecu.edu/stevensj/CLAS4000/2016syllabus.pdf>

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Objectives. Upon completion of this course, you will be able to:

- Situate Senecan tragedy in the contexts of Roman literature, history and political philosophy
- Analyze the elements of Roman Stoicism present in Seneca's *Thyestes*
- Characterize contemporary literary approaches to the play
- Evaluate the play's literary and philosophical elements as an integral whole

Writing Intensive (WI)

CLAS 4000 is a writing intensive course in the Writing Across the Curriculum Program at East Carolina University. With committee approval, this course contributes to the twelve-hour WI requirement for students at ECU. Additional information is available at: <http://www.ecu.edu/writing/wac/>. WI Course goals:

- Use writing to investigate complex, relevant topics and address significant questions through engagement with and effective use of credible sources;
- Produce writing that reflects an awareness of context, purpose, and audience, particularly within the written genres (including genres that integrate writing with visuals, audio or other multi-modal components) of their major disciplines and/or career fields;
- Understand that writing as a process made more effective through drafts and revision;
- Produce writing that is proofread and edited to avoid grammatical and mechanical errors;
- Ability to assess and explain the major choices made in the writing process.

Students are responsible for uploading the following to iWebfolio (via Courses/Student Portfolio in [OneStop](#)):

- 1) A final draft of a major writing project from the WI course,
- 2) A description of the assignment for which the project was written, and
- 3) A writing self-analysis document (a component of our QEP). The questions to be answered in this self-analysis document are included within the University Writing Portfolio.

Textbooks:

- Tarrant, R. J. 1985. *Seneca's Thyestes*. Edited with Introduction and Commentary. American Philological Association Textbook Series, No. 11. ISBN 9780891308713 (Atlanta: Scholars' Press, distributed by OUP) – required for LATN 4002, recommended for CLAS 4000.
- Seneca, *Tragedies*. Vol. II. *Oedipus, Agamemnon, Thyestes*. Seneca Volume IX, Loeb Classical Library 78. Ed. John G. Fitch. ISBN 9780674996106 (distributed by Harvard University Press) – required for CLAS 4000.

Bibliography and Online Texts:

- Biography at *Britannica.com* <http://goo.gl/IJ1EFp>
- Eliot, T.S. 1932. "Seneca in Elizabethan Translation" 65-105 in *Selected Essays 1917-1932* (London)
- Erasmo, Mario. 2004. *Roman Tragedy. Theatre to Theatricality* (U. Texas Press). <http://goo.gl/A46Kll>
- Herington, C. John, 1966. "Senecan Tragedy," *Arion* 5: 422-71. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20163042>
- Hook, Brian. 1992. *Tyranny and Cannibalism: The Thyestes Theme in Greek and Roman Literature* (Diss. Duke University) <http://goo.gl/Xg4R2F>
- Julio-Claudian Family Tree <https://goo.gl/VDkTxx>
- Morford, Mark. 2000. "Walking Tall: The Final Entrance of Atreus in Seneca's *Thyestes*" *Syllecta Classica* 11: 162-77. <http://goo.gl/oTM7t6>
- Rosenmeyer, Thomas G. 1989. *Senecan Drama and Stoic Cosmology* (U. California Press). <http://goo.gl/GjF3WD>
- Schiesaro, Alessandro. 2003. *The Passions in Play. Thyestes and the Dynamics of Senecan Drama* (Cambridge U. Press). <http://goo.gl/bLgQgw>
- Staley, Gregory. 2010. *Seneca and the Idea of Tragedy* (OUP)
- Stevens, John. 2002. "Etymology and Plot in Senecan Tragedy" *Syllecta Classica* 13: 126-53. <https://goo.gl/vdd6lJ>
- ----- 2016. "Senecan Meta-Stoicality" Under submission.
- Tarrant, Richard J., "Senecan Drama and Its Antecedents," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 82 (1978) 213-61. <http://www.jstor.org.jproxy.lib.ecu.edu/stable/10.2307/311033>

Grading:

Class Discussion / Translation	40%	Scale
Presentation	10%	A 93-100, A- 90-92
CLAS 4000 only 3pg Synthesis due 2/24	10%	B+ 87-89, B 83-86, B- 80-82
CLAS 4000 only 5pg Rough Draft due 4/6	10%	C+ 77-79, C 73-76, C- 70-72
Final paper due 5/4	30%	D+ 67-69, D 63-66, D- 60-62, F 0-59
LATN 4002 only; translation midterm 3/2	20%	

This course is a bit unique in that two classes will meet together and share a class period without strictly being combined so that students who need both courses to graduate may do so. There are also different expectations and assignments for the two sections, but the two will listen to and learn from each other and cross-participate as desired. The main assignment for LATN 4002 is the Latin translation of the text of *Thyestes* assigned for each day. CLAS 4000 has been assigned the same commentary to be able to see Tarrant's notes about what Classical models Seneca is following, but also the Loeb translation to be able to follow the Latin and English side by side. While LATN 4002 translates, CLAS 4000 will listen and may participate as desired esp. in discussion. The main assignment for CLAS 4000 is to read secondary essays about the play, including extensive excerpts from Schiesaro's 2004 monograph, study the historical and philosophical background, and read a couple of Seneca's other prose works. It is hoped that the LATN 4002 students will have some curiosity about these texts, particularly as inspiration for final papers and may read the same list, perhaps in a more cursory fashion, since it is optional for them; and they will learn a good deal from listening to the CLAS 4000 discussion. The hope is a seminar experience that combines the best of a literature course in translation with a research component, and an advanced intermediate language class with its philological contribution to interpretation.

Final Paper: Topics for both sections must be pre-approved. LATN 4002 6-8 pages (no rough draft required, but recommended) must be primarily on the Latin, using close reading. CLAS 4000 10-12 pages (5 pg rough draft due 4/6) may be on *Thyestes* alone, or may combine a close reading of Seneca's version with a model (e.g., Vergil, Horace, Ovid) or imitation, either Roman like *Octavia*, or later author, e.g., Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, *Richard II-III*, Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, Webster's *Dutchess of Malfi*, or Thomas Hughes' *The Misfortunes of Arthur*. On these you might begin with Tarrant 33-35 and T.S. Eliot's Essay on "Seneca in Elizabethan Translation" (I have a copy to lend). The only requirement is that the essay be more about Seneca than the other text, and that the inter-text tell us something about the Senecan original. That is, you must have something to say about how to read the Senecan original.

Background: Lucius Annaeus Seneca (the younger, 4BC-65AD), was the son of Marcus Annaeus Seneca (the Elder, a famous rhetorician and author of *Controversiae*, practice law cases), the brother of Lucius Junius Gallio Annaeanus (the Gallio of *Acts* 18:12-17 who dismissed the charges of the Jews against the Apostle Paul), and the uncle of Marcus Annaeus **Lucanus**, author of *Bellum Civile* or *Pharsalia*. Seneca was born in Corduba, Spain. His aunt took him to Rome as a child. There are few known facts about his life before 41 AD, but evidence suggests that he was educated by the School of Sextius, a neo-Pythagorean, which taught the blend of Stoicism, Platonism and Pythagoreanism that had been popular in Alexandria since the time of Cicero. Seneca grew ill and his aunt took him to Egypt to be with her husband, the prefect Gaius Galerius. He began his political life in the senate in Rome around 31 BC and was threatened with death by the emperor Caligula (37-41 AD) and was exiled to Corsica by his successor Claudius (41-54 AD) on a charge of adultery with Julia Livilla, Claudius' niece. There it is thought that he studied natural philosophy and wrote the *Consolationes* (to Marcia, daughter of an eminent Tiberian era historian, Aulus Cremutius Cordus, on the death of her son; to Helvia, his mother for his exile; to Polybius, Claudius' literary secretary, on the death of his brother).

Claudius' fourth wife, Julia Agrippina (Agrippina the Younger), was instrumental in winning his return to Rome in 49. He was Praetor in 50, married Pompeia Paulina who was wealthy, and become friends with the powerful, including Sextus Afranius Burrus, prefect of the Praetorian Guard. Claudius was murdered in 54 when Nero was only 16. Burrus was appointed to oversee military (foreign) affairs, and Seneca as tutor and to oversee domestic affairs and relations with the Senate. These roles, presumably the desire of Agrippina, gradually decreased until her assassination in 59 (a remarkable tale, Tac. *Ann.* XIV.3-8; Suet. *Nero* 34; Cassius Dio LIII.11-14 <https://goo.gl/jdQ663>). When Burrus died in 62 (perhaps of poison), Seneca came under attack from Nero's counselors whom Tacitus calls *deteriores* (inferior sorts), who brought accusations about the size of his personal fortune and the way he used his estates and villas to make courtiers more loyal to himself than the emperor. Tacitus says they also accused him of "writing *carmina* more frequently, after Nero developed a fondness for them" (*carmina crebrius factitare, postquam Neroni amor eorum venisset*, Ann. XIV.52). *Carmina* is a generic term for poetry, but the only poetry preserved from the Senecan corpus are his tragedies; so this may be our best evidence about the period in which they were composed. When Nero started avoiding Seneca, he sought an audience with the emperor and asked to be allowed to retire.

Seneca then avoided the city and entertaining on any large scale until his death. In 65, there was a conspiracy against Nero from many quarters named for the nobleman who was to take his place, Gaius Piso. The Pisonian conspiracy included: high ranking officers in the Praetorian Guard, and its prefect, Faenius Rufus; Lucan (because "Nero, vainly thinking himself Lucan's equal, suppressed the fame of his poems and forbid him to publicize them," Ann. XV.49); offended senators; and influential *equites*, including one of Nero's intimates, Senecio. The plot failed when one of the senators, Scaevinus, ordered too many suspicious preparations (get lots of bandages ready, sharpen a dagger, a new will) and his servant Milicho grew afraid and decided to save himself by betraying the plot to the emperor. Seneca was named by Piso's chief equestrian confidant, Natalis, as having served as their intermediary, perhaps falsely, but Lucan named his own mother Acilia as a conspirator, which suggests either that three members of the family were in on it, or that Nero really wanted all three of them dead for what Seneca and Lucan had written. Nero sent his messenger to demand Seneca's immediate suicide.

Aside from the *Consolationes*, Seneca is author of several philosophical works:

- *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*, 124 letters addressed to a certain Lucilius, described as a philosophically curious Epicurean interested in Stoicism.
- *Essays or Dialogi* on philosophical topics, including *De ira*, *De brevitate vitae*, *De otio*, *De tranquillitate animi*, *De providentia*, *De constantia sapientis*, *De vita beata*, and *De clementia*
- *De beneficiis*, seven books on the duties of the good man to benefit his fellow man
- *Naturales quaestiones*, seven books on natural phenomena such as meteorology and cosmology

He is also author of a satirical work on the apotheosis of the emperor Claudius, *Apocolocyntosis divi Claudii*. A *colocynth* is a pumpkin or gourd, so is usually translated as if Claudius is a Charlie Brown, "Apotheosis of a Pumpkin-Head"

As to the assumption that Seneca was also author of tragedies, aside from Tacitus' mention of *carmina*, we have only a few lines in a poem by the fifth century AD poet and bishop of Gaul, Sidonius Apollinaris, who says in book IX of his *Carmina* that "the alumnus of Corduba produced two branches of work that one should read, one that cultivates the bearded Plato and warns Nero in vain, the other that tramps the orchestra of Euripides etc." Of the ten titles that have come down under his name, we know that Seneca cannot have published *Octavia*, which openly speaks of Nero's tyranny, and that Seneca probably did not write it either, since both he and Nero are characters; so we assume that it was written by an imitator from the Flavian period. Stephen Harrison has argued that all the plays are not Senecan but Flavian, but that is motivated largely by the inability of critics to decide how the plays would fit in with Seneca's serious philosophical agenda. Will Calder argues in his review of the 2003

Cambridge commentary that it is an interpretation of *Thyestes*. (That would make a good paper). Another play, *Hercules Oetaeus*, about the apotheosis of Hercules, is set aside on stylistic grounds (it is much longer than any other Senecan play), and perhaps because it would make a nice allegory of the death and immortality of Seneca. The other eight, assumed to be Senecan are: *Hercules Furens*; *Troades*; *Phoenissae*; *Phaedra (Hippolytus)*; *Oedipus*; *Medea*; *Agamemnon*; and our play, *Thyestes*.

The background of *Thyestes* concerns the house of Atreus. <https://goo.gl/LSCMHX> Tantalus was the forefather, who dared to cook his son and serve him to the gods in his ambition to become an Olympian. The gods put Pelops back together, all but his shoulder, which Demeter ate in distraction over her missing daughter Persephone. For his crime, Tantalus was condemned never to be satisfied by food or drink in hell. Trees would lower their fruits, then as he neared, snatch them out of reach; rivers would come up to his lips, then vanish, leaving him plunging his mouth into dust. Pelops grew up and sought a bride; he accepted the challenge of Oenomaus for the hand of his daughter, Hippodameia. The challenge was that she would only go to the man who could beat his horses from Neptune in a race; while the heads of losers decorated his gates. Pelops conspired with Oenomaus' chariot-master, Myrtilus, and convinced him to replace the spokes of his wheels with wax. Myrtilus did so, the wax melted, and Oenomaus crashed. But Pelops refused to pay Myrtilus the agreed price, *prima nocte* with Hippodameia, and instead threw him in the sea. As he sank, Myrtilus uttered a curse upon the house, which thereafter suffered from faithless marriages and the enmity of brothers. Pelops and Hippodameia begat Atreus and Thyestes. Atreus marries Aerope who possesses the golden fleece that gives the bearer the right to rule (same golden fleece as Jason and the Argonauts). She has an affair with Thyestes, gives him the fleece, and he is chosen king. Atreus has to fight to recover the fleece, his throne, and his wife; he exiles Thyestes, but doubt has been cast upon the paternity of his sons Agamemnon and Menelaus.

In Seneca's play, which comes from a well-developed Greek and Roman tradition, we begin with a ghostly (spiritual) element, as a fury summons Tantalus from the underworld to re-haunt the house. This grim "invitation" corresponds to Atreus' invitation to Thyestes to return and share the throne. Atreus debates what to do with him and comes up with an idea related to the curse of Tantalus, to force Thyestes to eat nothingness – the privation of his own children. Thyestes knows better than to trust, but his creepy imperial host allays his fears, and Thyestes is made comfortable. Atreus gets his hands on the children by stealth and a messenger describes how he slew them in a "sacrificial" manner, perfect in every detail. The climax of the myth and most versions of the play, is that the sun reverses course in the heavens in horror at the crime. Philosophers use associate this element with tyranny. For Atreus, however, the sacrifice is not the revenge. It is rather the eating, playing upon the etymology of Thy-estes, the "eater of the (corrupt) sacrifice." The play ends with a complex and sometimes confusingly detailed recognition scene (*anagnorisis*). Our task will be to discover all that Atreus thinks has been recognized.

The play is written in a very different literary environment than earlier Roman literature or indeed Greek literature. In the Neronian era, drama is openly meta-theatrical, as if characters are conscious of playing a part. The play is overtly rhetorical, and Senecan tragedy was thought for most of the 20th century to have been recited rather than acted. The question remains what rhetoric adds to the plays. T. S. Eliot deprecated Senecan tragedy by saying, "the drama is in the word, and the word has no further reality behind it." The tragic world of the play is steeped in the oddities of Roman Stoicism, in which all things in the universe (nature, we and our thoughts, and god) are interconnected by a material divine soul, which in us takes the form of a moist breath or *pneuma*. Through this form of pantheism, Stoicism could accommodate both the butterfly effect and the pathetic fallacy, with nature affecting human emotions and vice versa. In the play, what happens in the spiritual or divine world of the prologue migrates through the emotions of Atreus and Thyestes, through their language, and onto the stage in action, resulting in the sacrilegious murder of innocents, and culminating not merely in the horrible banquet of Thyestes, but also in the fall of constellations from the heavens and the implied end of divine moral order.

We will begin with Nero and his manipulation of his imperial image. After a 10 year stalemate over Armenia, Nero agreed to the principle that Armenia would be ruled by Parthians, but its princes approved by Rome. The prince, Tiridates came to Rome to be crowned by Nero in 66, and performed the first *proskynesis*, the full obeissance that implied worship of a deity, and called Nero *τὸν ἐμὸν θεὸν* (Dio Cassius 62.23.3, 63.2.4-3.1, 63.4.3-5.4). After the great fire of 64 AD Nero began to build an imperial palace so grand as to suggest his control of the universe. The sheer scale, grandeur, and presumption of his construction seems to have led to his downfall that coincides with its completion. In 68, with revolts in Gaul over taxation to pay for his excesses, joined by General Galba from Spain, the Praetorian Guard defected, and Nero fled the city. The senate pronounced him public enemy and Nero committed suicide with the line *qualis artifex pereo*. The Stoic concept of the artist as a rational "craftsman," and thus Jupiter as an *artifex* of the world, was important to understanding what Nero was doing with his "Golden House," the name given to his imperial palace building project. As if enacting *Aeneid*, he seems to have thought he was creating a new perfect little model Rome out of the ashes of Troy, a cloistered universe fit for his divinity.

Assignments:

- 1/13 Introduction. .pptx on the Neronian Age
Julio-Claudian Family Tree <https://goo.gl/VDkTtX>
House of Atreus <https://goo.gl/LSCMHX>
- 1/20 Presentations: Suetonius' Life of Nero <http://goo.gl/aDWcl2>
Seneca's Retirement and Death, Tac. *Ann.* XIV.51-57 <http://goo.gl/C612j3> XV.60-64 <http://goo.gl/LQuy3t>
Erasmio. Nero Scaenicus <http://goo.gl/cUOHGM>
THYESTES TEXT: Tarrant's introduction and *Thy.* 1-85
- 1/27 Presentations.
Hook Ch. 2. Representations of Tyranny <http://goo.gl/Xg4R2F>
Hook Ch. 3. Thyestes and Greek Tragedy
Hook Ch. 1, 4. Thyestes among the Philosophers
Hook Ch. 6. Seneca's *Thyestes*. Main Themes
Erasmio. Thyestes on the Roman Stage <http://goo.gl/A46Kll>
THYESTES TEXT: *Thy.* 86-175
- 2/3 Philosophy of Mind and Stoic Physics 2.
at Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy <http://www.iep.utm.edu/stoicmind/#H2>
THYESTES TEXT: *Thy.* 176-256 <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/stoicism/#Phys>
- 2/10 Philosophy of Mind and Stoic Logic 3.
Chrysippus' Epistemology 3a. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/stoicmind/#H3>
Chrysippus on Freedom and Necessity 5d. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/chrysipp/#SH3a>
at Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy <http://www.iep.utm.edu/chrysipp/#SH5d>
THYESTES TEXT: *Thy.* 257-335 <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/stoicism/#Log>
- 2/17 Philosophy of Mind and Stoic Ethics 4.
at Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy <http://www.iep.utm.edu/stoicmind/#H4>
THYESTES TEXT: *Thy.* 336-420 <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/stoicism/#Eth>
- 2/24 Seneca *Epistulae ad Lucilium* 65 <http://goo.gl/F13V7C>; 84 <http://goo.gl/o76LVO>
THYESTES TEXT: *Thy.* 421-511
- 3/2 Seneca *De Clementia* <http://goo.gl/y4ZDr>
THYESTES TEXT: *Thy.* 512-95
- 3/9 **Spring Break. No class.**
- 3/16 Rosenmeyer Ch. 4. <http://goo.gl/GjF3WD>
THYESTES TEXT: *Thy.* 596-689
- 3/23 Herington, esp. 433ff. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20163042>
THYESTES TEXT: *Thy.* 690-788
- 3/30 Schiesaro Ch. 2 <http://goo.gl/oh0vco>
THYESTES TEXT: *Thy.* 789-884
- 4/6 Schiesaro Ch. 4 <http://goo.gl/oh0vco>
THYESTES TEXT: *Thy.* 885-969
- 4/13 Schiesaro Ch. 6 <http://goo.gl/oh0vco>
THYESTES TEXT: *Thy.* 970-1051
- 4/20 Morford <http://goo.gl/oTM7t6>
THYESTES TEXT: *Thy.* 1052-end
- 5/4 **Final Paper Due.**