

## Nachleben of Roman Drama

### N 1. Nicholas Udall (1552), *Roister Doister* (Prologue; IV 7-8)

Nicholas Udall (1504-1556) was educated at Winchester College and then Corpus Christi College, Oxford, where he became Fellow and Lecturer in Logic and Greek. Later he was headmaster at Eton; then he undertook scholarly work for the royal court and finally returned to being headmaster of Westminster School. He wrote poetry and plays and translated religious writings; for instance, he produced the standard biblical commentary and widely used textbooks. His *Roister Doister* is regarded as the first regular English comedy and was probably first performed at Windsor Castle in September 1552 before the young King Edward VI. The play is a full-length comedy of Roman type, indebted to Plautus and Terence, but adapted for education and entertainment of boys in contemporary English schools and written in English. It is thus a logical step forward from Udall's earlier annotated translation of 'the best bits from Terence'.

*Roister Doister* is modelled upon the basic structure of Roman comedies and also draws upon two particular comedies, namely Plautus' *Miles gloriosus* and Terence's *Eunuchus* (D 8; 10). However, although the drama uses a similar plot, a significant difference is that the entire action has been transferred to a morally higher level; vulgarity, base jokes or any unacceptable behaviour have been eliminated. The most obvious sign of these changes is that a chaste, dignified Christian lady, with a name illustrating her virtues (Christian Custance), has been substituted for the original courtesan; and the soldier's rival is betrothed to Dame Custance.

The prologue, indicating the writer's intentions, and scenes that are indebted to the attack by the soldier and his 'army' on the courtesan's house in Terence's *Eunuchus* (cf. D 10b) illustrate similarities and differences in relation to Roman comedies.

The text (with its additional stage directions) has been taken from *Three Sixteenth-Century Comedies: Gammer Gurton's Needle, Roister Doister, The Old Wife's Tale*, edited by Charles Walters Whitworth, London/New York 1984 (*The New Mermaids*). It has been reprinted here by kind permission of the editor, who has also slightly revised the text for this reprint.

#### *Dramatis personae*

Prologue – Matthew Merrygreek (a mischievous flatterer and parasite, *Roister Doister's* agent) – Ralph Roister Doister (a foolish would-be soldier)

and lover) – Dobinet, Doughty, Harpax (*Roister Doister's servants*) – Dame Christian Custance (*a widow, betrothed to Gawin Goodluck*) – Madge (or Margery) Mumblecrust (*Dame Custance's old nurse*) – Tibet Talkapace, Annot Alyface (*Dame Custance's maids*) – Tom Truepenny (*Dame Custance's servant*) – Scrivener – Gawin Goodluck (*a merchant, betrothed to Christian Custance*) – Sim Suresby (*Goodluck's servant*) – Tristram Trusty (*Goodluck's friend*) – The Parish Clerk – Servants, Musicians (*members of Roister Doister's household*)

(a) Prologue

**The Prologue.**

What creature is in health, either young or old,  
But some mirth with modesty will be glad to use,  
As we in this interlude shall now unfold?  
Wherein all scurrility we utterly refuse,  
[5] Avoiding such mirth wherein is abuse;  
Knowing nothing more commendable for a man's recreation  
Than mirth which is used in an honest fashion.  
For mirth prolongeth life and causeth health,  
Mirth recreates our spirits and voideth pensiveness,  
[10] Mirth increases amity, not hindering our wealth,  
Mirth is to be used both of more and less,  
Being mixed with virtue in decent comeliness,  
As we trust no good nature can gainsay the same;  
Which mirth we intend to use, avoiding all blame.  
[15] The wise poets long time heretofore  
Under merry comedies secrets did declare,  
Wherein was contained very virtuous lore,  
With mysteries and forewarnings very rare.  
Such to write, neither Plautus nor Terence did spare,  
[20] Which among the learned at this day bears the bell;  
These, with such other, therein did excel.  
Our comedy or interlude which we intend to play  
Is named *Roister Doister* indeed,  
Which against the vainglorious doth inveigh,  
[25] Whose humour the roisting sort continually doth feed.  
Thus by your patience we inted to proceed  
In this our interlude, by God's leave and grace;  
And here I take my leave for a certain space.

(b) Act IV, Scenes 7-8

[Enter Roister Doister, Merrygreek, Doughty, Harpax, and other servants, armed, with drum, ensign, etc.]

**Roister Doister.** Now, sirs, keep your 'ray, and see your hearts be stout!

But where be these caitiffs!? Methink they dare not rout?<sup>2</sup>  
How sayst thou, Merrygreek? What doth Kit Custance say?

**Merrygreek.** I am loath to tell you. **Ro.Do.** Tush! Speak, man – yea or nay?

[5] **Mer.** Forsooth, sir, I have spoken for you all that I can.  
But if ye win her, ye must e'en play the man;

E'en to fight it out, ye must a man's heart take.

**Ro.Do.** Yes, they shall know, and thou knowest I have a stomach.

**Mer.** 'A stomach', quod you? Yea, as good as e'er man had!

[10] **Ro.Do.** I trow they shall find and feel that I am a lad.

**Mer.** By this cross, I have seen you eat your meat as well  
As any that e'er I have seen of or heard tell!

'A stomach', quod you? He that will that deny

I know was never at dinner in your company!

[15] **Ro.Do.** Nay, the stomach of a man it is that I mean!

**Mer.** Nay, the stomach of an horse or a dog, I ween!

**Ro.Do.** Nay, a man's stomach with a weapon, mean I!

**Mer.** Ten men can scarce match you with a spoon in a pie!

**Ro.Do.** Nay, the stomach of a man to try in strife!

[20] **Mer.** I never saw your stomach cloyed<sup>3</sup> yet in my life.

**Ro.Do.** Tush, I mean in strife or fighting to try.

**Mer.** We shall see how ye will strike now being angry.

**Ro.Do.** Have at thy pate<sup>4</sup> then, and save thy head if thou may!

[Strikes at him]

**Mer.** Nay, then have at your pate again, by this day! [Strikes back]

[25] **Ro.Do.** Nay, thou may not strike at me again in no wise.

**Mer.** I cannot in fight make to you such warrantise;  
But as for your foes here, let them the bargain 'by.

**Ro.Do.** Nay, as for they, shall every mother's child die!  
And in this my fume, a little thing might make me

[30] To beat down house and all, and else the devil take me!

**Mer.** If I were as ye be, by Gog's dear mother,  
I would not leave one stone upon another

Though she would redeem it with twenty thousand pounds.

**Ro.Do.** It shall be even so, by his lily wounds<sup>5</sup>!

[35] **Mer.** Be not at one with her upon any amends!

**Ro.Do.** No, though she make to me never so many friends!

Not if all the world for her would undertake;  
No, not God himself neither shall not her peace make!

On, therefore! March forward! Soft! Stay awhile yet!  
[40] **Mer.** On! **Ro.Do.** Tarry! **Mer.** Forth! **Ro.Do.** Back!

**Mer.** On! **Ro.Do.** Soft! Now forward set!

[Enter Dame Custance]

**Dame Custance.** What business have we here? Out, alas! Alas!

[Exit]

**Ro.Do.** Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!

Didst thou see that, Merrygreek? How afraid she was?

Didst thou see how she fled apace out of my sight?

Ah, good sweet Custance! I pity her, by this light!

[45] **Mer.** That tender heart of yours will mar altogether;

Thus will ye be turned with wagging of a feather!

**Ro.Do.** On, sirs! Keep your 'ray! **Mer.** On! Forth, while this gear is  
hot!

**Ro.Do.** Soft! The arms of Calais<sup>6</sup>! I have one thing forgot!

**Mer.** What lack we now? **Ro.Do.** Retire, or else we be all slain!

[50] **Mer.** Back, for the pash<sup>7</sup> of God! Back, sirs! Back again!

What is the great matter? **Ro.Do.** This hasty forth going

Had almost brought us all to utter undoing!

It made me forget a thing most necessary.

**Mer.** Well remembered of a captain, by Saint Mary!

[55] **Ro.Do.** It is a thing must be had. **Mer.** Let us have it then.

**Ro.Do.** But I wot not where nor how. **Mer.** Then wot not I when.

But what is it? **Ro.Do.** Of a chief thing I am to seek.

**Mer.** Tut, so will ye be when ye have studied a week.

But tell me what it is. **Ro.Do.** I lack yet an headpiece.

[60] **Mer.** The kitchen collocavit<sup>8</sup> – the best hence to Greece!

Run fet it, Dobinet and come at once withal,

And bring with thee my potgun hanging by the wall. [Exit Doughty]

I have seen your head with it full many a time,

Covered as safe as it had been with a scrine.

[65] And I warrant it save your head from any stroke,

Except perchance to be amazed with the smoke.

I warrant your head therewith, except for the mist,

As safe as if it were fast locked up in a chest.

And lo, here our Dobinet cometh with it now!

[Enter Doughty with a pail and a pistol]

[70] **Doughty.** It will cover me to the shoulders well enow.

**Mer.** Let me see it on. **Ro.Do.** In faith, it doth meetly well.

**Mer.** There can be no fitter thing. Now ye must us tell

What to do. **Ro.Do.** Now, forth in 'ray, sirs, and stop no more!

**Mer.** Now Saint George to borrow! Drum, 'dub-a-dub' afore!

[*Enter Trusty*]

[75] **Trusty.** What mean you to do sir? Commit manslaughter?

**Ro.Do.** To kill forty such is a matter of laughter!

**Tru.** And who is it, sir, whom ye intend thus to spill?

**Ro.Do.** Foolish Custance here forceth me against my will.

**Tru.** And is there no mean your extreme wrath to slake?

[80] She shall some amends unto your good ma'ship make.

**Ro.Do.** I will none amends. **Tru.** Is her offence so sore?

**Mer.** And he were a lout, she could have done no more.

She hath called him fool, and dressed him like a fool,

Mocked him like a fool, used him like a fool.

[85] **Tru.** Well, yet the sheriff, the justice or constable

Her misdemeanour to punish might be able.

**Ro.Do.** No, sir! I mine own self will in this present cause

Be sheriff and justice and whole judge of the laws;

This matter to amend, all officers be I shall,

[90] Constable, bailiff, sergeant – **Mer.** And hangman and all.

**Tru.** Yet a noble courage and the heart of man

Should more honour win by bearing with a woman.

Therefore take the law, and let her answer thereto.

**Ro.Do.** Merrygreek, the best way were even so to do.

[95] What honour should it be with a woman to fight?

**Mer.** And what then? Will ye thus forego and lose your right?

**Ro.Do.** Nay, I will take the law on her withouten grace!

**Tru.** Or if your ma'ship could pardon this one trespass –

I pray you, forgive her. **Ro.Do.** Ho! **Mer.** Tush, tush, sir, do not!

[100] **Tru.** Be good master to her. **Ro.Do.** Ho! **Mer.** Tush, I say, do

not!

And what, shall your people here return straight home?

**Ro.Do.** Yea, levy the camp, sirs, and hence again, each one.

But be still in readiness if I hap to call;

I cannot tell what sudden chance may befall.

[105] **Mer.** Do not off your harness, sirs, I you advise,

At the least for this fortnight, in no manner wise.

Perchance in an hour when all ye think least,

Our master's appetite to fight will be best.

But, soft! Ere ye go, have once at Custance's house!

[110] **Ro.Do.** Soft! What wilt thou do? **Mer.** Once discharge my

harquebouse,

And for my heart's ease, have once more with my potgun.

**Ro.Do.** Hold thy hands! Else is all our purpose clean fordone!

**Mer.** And it cost me my life – **Ro.Do.** I say thou shalt not!

**Mer.** By the matte<sup>9</sup>, but I will! Have once more with hail shot!  
[115] I will have some pennyworth, I will not lose all!

Scene 8

[Enter Dame Custance]

**Dame Custance.** What caitiffs<sup>1</sup> are those that so shake my house  
wall?

**Merrygreek.** Ah, sirrah! Now, Custance, if ye had so much wit,  
I would see you ask pardon and yourselves submit.

**Da.Cu.** Have I still this ado with a couple of fools?

[5] **Mer.** Hear ye what she saith? **Da.Cu.** Maidens, come forth with  
your tools!

[Enter Tibet Talkapace, Annot Alyface, Madge Mumblecrust and Tom  
Truepenny, armed, with drum, ensign, etc.]

**Roister Doister.** [To his men] In array! **Mer.** 'Dub-a-dub',  
sirrah! **Ro.Do.** In array!

They come suddenly on us! **Mer.** 'Dub-a-dub'! **Ro.Do.** In array!  
That ever I was born! We are taken tardy!

**Mer.** Now, sirs, quit ourselves like tall men and hardy!

[10] **Da.Cu.** On afore, Truepenny! Hold thine own, Annot!

On toward them, Tibet, for 'scape us they cannot!

Come forth, Madge Mumblecrust! So stand fast together.

**Mer.** God send us a fair day! **Ro.Do.** See, thy march on hither!

**Tibet.** But, mistress – **Da.Cu.** What sayst thou? **Tib.** Shall I go fet  
our goose?

[15] **Da.Cu.** What to do? **Tib.** To yonder captain I will turn her loose.  
And she gape and hiss at him as she doth at me,  
I durst jeopard my hand she will make him flee!

**Da.Cu.** On! Forward! **Ro.Do.** They come! **Mer.** Stand!

**Ro.Do.** Hold! **Mer.** Keep! **Ro.Do.** There! **Mer.** Strike!  
**Ro.Do.** Take heed!

**Da.Cu.** Well said, Truepenny! **True.** Ah, whoresons! **Da.Cu.** Well  
done, indeed!

[20] **Mer.** Hold thine own, Harpax! Down with them, Dobinet!

**Da.Cu.** Now, Madge! There, Annot! Now stick them, Tibet!

**Tib.** All my chief quarrel is to this same little knave

That beguiled me last day – nothing shall him save!

**Doughty.** Down with this little quean<sup>10</sup> that hath at me such  
spite!

[25] Save you from her, master! It is a very sprite!

**Da.Cu.** I myself will Monsieur Grand Capitaine undertake!

**Ro.Do.** They win ground! **Mer.** Save yourself, sir, for God's sake!

**Ro.Do.** Out, alas! I am slain! Help! **Mer.** Save yourself!

**Ro.Do.** Alas!

**Mer.** Nay then, have at you, mistress! **Ro.Do.** Thou hittest me, alas!

[30] **Mer.** I will strike at Custance here! **Ro.Do.** Thou hittest me! **Mer.** So I will!

Nay, Mistress Custance! **Ro.Do.** Alas, thou hittest me still!

Hold! **Mer.** Save yourself, sir! **Ro.Do.** Help! Out, alas! I am slain!

**Mer.** Truce! Hold your hands! Truce, for a pissing while or twain!

Now, how say you, Custance? For saving of your life,

[35] Will ye yield and grant to be this gent'man's wife?

**Da.Cu.** Ye told me he loved me! Call ye this love?

**Mer.** He loved a while, even like a turtledove.

**Da.Cu.** Gay love, God save it! So soon hot, so soon cold!

**Mer.** I am sorry for you. He could love you yet, so he could.

[40] **Ro.Do.** Nay, by Cock's precious, she shall be none of mine!

**Mer.** Why so? **Ro.Do.** Come away! By the matte<sup>9</sup>, she is mankine<sup>11</sup>!

I durst adventure the loss of my right hand

If she did not slay her other husband!

And see if she prepare not again to fight!

[45] **Mer.** What then? Saint George to borrow, our Lady's knight!

**Ro.Do.** Slay else whom she will, by Gog, she shall not slay me!

**Mer.** How then? **Ro.Do.** Rather than to be slain, I will flee!

**Da.Cu.** To it again, my knightesses! Down with them all!

**Ro.Do.** Away, away, away! She will else kill us all!

[50] **Mer.** Nay, stick to it, like an hardy man and a tall!

**Ro.Do.** Oh, bones! Thou hittest me! Away, or else die we shall!

**Mer.** Away, for the pash<sup>7</sup> of our sweet Lord Jesus Christ!

**Da.Cu.** Away, lout and lubber, or I shall be thy priest!

*Exeunt* [Roister Doister, Merrygreek and their men]

So, this field is ours; we have driven them all away.

[55] **Tib.** Thanks to God, mistress, ye have had a fair day.

**Da.Cu.** [*To her servants*] Well, now go ye in and make yourself some good cheer.

**All.** We go. [*Exeunt* Tibet, Annot, Madge and Truepenny, *their drum, ensign, etc.*]

**Trusty.** Ah sir, what a field we have had here!

**Da.Cu.** Friend Tristram, I pray you be a witness with me.

[60] **Tru.** Dame Custance, I shall depose for your honesty.

And now fare ye well, except something else ye would

**Da.Cu.** Not now, but when I need to send, I will be bold.

I thank you for these pains. *Exit* [**Tru.**] And now I will get me in.

Now Roister Doister will no more wooing begin! *Exit.*

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1 i.e. villains. 2 i.e. assemble. 3 i.e. satiated. 4 i.e. head. 5 by Christ's lovely wounds. 6 i.e. the location of a large arsenal. 7 i.e. passion. 8 i.e. kitchen pail or tub. 9 i.e. mass. 10 i.e. whore. 11 i.e. furious, mad.

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**N 2. William Shakespeare (early 1590s), *The Comedy of Errors*  
(III 1)**

*Although Ben Jonson famously described William Shakespeare's (1564-1616) education as consisting of 'small Latin and less Greek', he also acknowledged that Shakespeare equalled and perhaps even surpassed ancient Greek and Roman dramatists. Indeed it is beyond doubt that many of Shakespeare's plays (tragedies, comedies and history plays) have been influenced by ancient examples, in both motifs and structural elements, since Shakespeare was familiar with classical texts (cf. also Hamlet II 2: Polonius: 'Seneca cannot be too heavy, nor Plautus too light.'). His Comedy of Errors (early 1590s, before 1594) uses classical, romantic and biblical sources, but a major inspiration comes from two famous and much imitated pieces by Plautus: Menaechmi as the main model and Amphitruo (cf. D 7) as a secondary source. Both ancient plays deal with mistaken identity, as they include two characters of the same name, who are identified wrongly by others and are confused when they meet each other.*

*With two pairs of identical characters (twins) on the level of both the masters and the slaves Shakespeare has emphasized the element of confusion and error. A lively encounter between one of the Antipholuses and the two Dromios, full of misunderstandings due to confused identities, takes place in the first scene of the third act. This scene also features common comedy themes (such as desire for food and women or the fate of slaves) and formal structures (such as verbal puns and banter). And, as characters demand entry into a house, it is reminiscent of the attack on the courtesan's house in Terence's Eunuchus (cf. D 10b), but also of a scene in Plautus' Amphitruo, since it is the husband (Antipholus of Ephesus) who cannot get into his own house. He therefore goes off to seek entertainment elsewhere.*

*The text is taken from The New Cambridge Shakespeare: The Comedy of Errors, edited by T.S. Dorsch, Cambridge / New York / New Rochelle / Melbourne / Sydney 1988. © Cambridge University Press 1988, reproduced with permission.*

*Dramatis personae*

*Solinus, Duke of Ephesus – Egeon, a merchant of Syracuse – Antipholus of Ephesus, Antipholus of Syracuse, twin sons of Egeon and Æmilia –*



Dromio of Ephesus, Dromio of Syracuse, *twin slaves of the Antipholuses* – Balthasar, *a merchant* – Angelo, *a goldsmith* – Doctor Pinch, *a school-master (or conjurer)* – First Merchant – Second Merchant – An Officer – A Jailer – A Messenger – Æmilia, *wife of Egeon and Abbess of the Priory in Ephesus* – Adriana, *wife of Antipholus of Ephesus* – Luciana, *Adriana's sister* – Luce (or Nell), *her maid* – A Courtesan – Officers, Headsman, Attendants

**Act III, Scene 1**

*Enter Antipholus of Ephesus, his man Dromio, Angelo the goldsmith, and Balthasar the merchant.*

**Antipholus E.** Good Signior Angelo, you must excuse us all.

My wife is shrewish when I keep not hours.

Say that I lingered with you at your shop

To see the making of her carcanet<sup>1</sup>,

[5] And that tomorrow you will bring it home.

But here's a villain that would face me down

He met me on the mart, and that I beat him,

And charged<sup>2</sup> him with a thousand marks in gold,

And that I did deny my wife and house.

[10] Thou drunkard, thou, what didst thou mean by this?

**Dromio E.** Say what you will, sir, but I know what I know:

That you beat me at the mart I have your hand to show.

If the skin were parchment and the blows you gave were ink,

Your own handwriting would tell you what I think.

**Ant.E.** I think thou art an ass.

[15] **Dro.E.** Marry, so it doth appear

By the wrongs I suffer and the blows I bear.

I should kick, being kicked, and, being at that pass<sup>3</sup>,

You would keep from my heels, and beware of an ass.

**Ant.E.** You're sad<sup>4</sup>, Signior Balthasar. Pray God our cheer<sup>5</sup>

[20] May answer my good will, and your good welcome here.

**Balthasar.** I hold your dainties cheap, sir, and your welcome dear.

**Ant.E.** O, Signior Balthasar, either at flesh or fish

A table full of welcome makes scarce one dainty dish.

**Bal.** Good meat, sir, is common. That every churl affords.

[25] **Ant.E.** And welcome more common, for that's nothing but words.

**Bal.** Small cheer and great welcome makes a merry feast.

**Ant.E.** Ay, to a niggardly host and more sparing guest.

But though my cates<sup>6</sup> be mean, take them in good part.

Better cheer may you have, but not with better heart.

[30] But soft, my door is locked. Go bid them let us in.

**Dro.E.** Maud, Bridget, Marian, Cicely, Gillian, Ginn!

**Dromio S.** [*Within*] Mome<sup>7</sup>, malthorse<sup>8</sup>, capon, coxcomb, idiot, patch<sup>9</sup>,  
Either get thee from the door or sit down at the hatch.

Dost thou conjure for<sup>10</sup> wenches, that thou callest for such store,

[35] When one is one too many? Go, get thee from the door.

**Dro.E.** What patch is made our porter? My master stays in the

**Dro.S.** [*Within*] Let him walk from whence he came, lest he catch  
street.  
cold on's feet.

**Ant.E.** Who talks within, there? Ho, open the door.

**Dro.S.** [*Within*] Right, sir, I'll tell you when and you'll tell me where-  
fore.

[40] **Ant.E.** Wherefore? For my dinner. I have not dined today.

**Dro.S.** [*Within*] Nor today here you must not. Come again when you  
may.

**Ant.E.** What art thou that keepest me out from the house I owe<sup>11</sup>?

**Dro.S.** [*Within*] The porter for this time, sir, and my name is Dromio.

**Dro.E.** O, villain, thou hast stolen both mine office and my name.  
[45] The one ne'er got me credit, the other mickle<sup>12</sup> blame.

If thou hadst been Dromio today in my place,  
Thou wouldst have changed thy face for a name, or thy name for an  
ass.

*Enter Luce [above]*

**Luce.** What a coil<sup>13</sup> is there, Dromio! Who are those at the gate?

**Dro.E.** Let my master in, Luce.

**Luce.**

Faith, no, he comes too late,

And so tell your master.

[50] **Dro.E.** O lord, I must laugh.

Have at you with a proverb: 'Shall I set in my staff?'

**Luce.** Have at you with another. That's 'When? Can you tell?'

**Dro.S.** [*Within*] If thy name be called Luce, Luce, thou hast answered  
him well.

**Ant.E.** Do you hear, you minion<sup>14</sup>? You'll let us in, I trow.

**Luce.** I thought to have asked you.

[55] **Dro.S.** [*Within*] And you said no.

**Dro.E.** So come - help. Well struck! There was blow for blow.

**Ant.E.** Thou baggage, let me in.

**Luce.**

Can you tell for whose sake?

**Dro.E.** Master, knock the door hard.

**Luce.**

Let him knock till it ache.

**Ant.E.** You'll cry for this, minion, if I beat the door down.

[60] **Luce.** What needs all that, and a pair of stocks in the town?

Enter Adriana [above]

**Adriana.** Who is that at the door that keeps all this noise?

**Dro.S.** [Within] By my troth, your town is troubled with unruly boys.

**Ant.E.** Are you there, wife? You might have come before.

**Adr.** Your wife, sir knave? Go get you from the door. [Exit with Luce]

[65] **Dro.E.** If you went in pain, master, this knave would go sore.

**Angelo.** Here is neither cheer, sir, nor welcome. We would fain have  
either.

**Bal.** In debating which was best, we shall part<sup>15</sup> with neither.

**Dro.E.** They stand at the door, master. Bid them welcome hither.

**Ant.E.** There is something in the wind, that we cannot get in.

[70] **Dro.E.** You would say so, master, if your garments were thin.

Your cake is warm within. You stand here in the cold.

It would make a man mad as a buck to be so bought and sold<sup>16</sup>.

**Ant.E.** Go fetch me something. I'll break ope the gate.

**Dro.S.** [Within] Break any breaking here, and I'll break your knave's  
pate.

[75] **Dro.E.** A man may break a word with you, sir, and words are but  
wind;

Ay, and break it in your face, so he break it not behind.

**Dro.S.** [Within] It seems thou wantest breaking. Out upon thee,  
hind<sup>17</sup>!

**Dro.E.** Here's too much 'Out upon thee.' I pray thee, let me in.

**Dro.S.** [Within] Ay, when fowls have no feathers, and fish have no  
fin.

[80] **Ant.E.** Well, I'll break in. Go borrow me a crow.

**Dro.E.** A crow without feather, master? Mean you so?

For a fish without a fin, there's a fowl without a feather.

If a crow help us in, sirrah, we'll pluck a crow together<sup>18</sup>.

**Ant.E.** Go, get thee gone. Fetch me an iron crow.

[85] **Bal.** Have patience, sir. O, let it not be so.

Herein you war against your reputation,

And draw within the compass of suspect<sup>19</sup>

The'unviolated honour of your wife.

Once this<sup>20</sup>: your long experience of her wisdom,

[90] Her sober virtue, years, and modesty,

Plead on her part some cause to you unknown.

And doubt not, sir, but she will well excuse<sup>21</sup>

Why at this time the doors are made<sup>22</sup> against you.

Be ruled by me. Depart in patience,

[95] And let us to the Tiger<sup>23</sup> all to dinner,

And about evening come yourself alone

To know the reason of this strange restraint.

If by strong hand you offer to break in  
Now in the stirring passage<sup>24</sup> of the day,  
[100] A vulgar<sup>25</sup> comment will be made of it,  
And that supposed by the common rout  
Against your yet ungalled estimation<sup>26</sup>  
That may with foul intrusion enter in  
And dwell upon your grave when you are dead.  
[105] For slander lives upon succession,  
For ever housed where it gets possession.  
**Ant.E.** You have prevailed. I will depart in quiet,  
And in despite of mirth mean to be merry.  
I know a wench of excellent discourse,  
[110] Pretty and witty; wild and yet, too, gentle.  
There will we dine. This woman that I mean,  
My wife (but, I protest, without desert)  
Hath oftentimes upbraided me withal.  
To her will we to dinner. [*To Angelo*] Get you home  
[115] And fetch the chain<sup>27</sup>. By this, I know, 'tis made.  
Bring it, I pray you, to the Porpentine<sup>28</sup>,  
For there's the house. That chain will I bestow –  
Be it for nothing but to spite my wife –  
Upon mine hostess there. Good sir, make haste.  
[120] Since mine own doors refuse to entertain me,  
I'll knock elsewhere, to see if they'll disdain me.  
**Ang.** I'll meet you at that place some hour hence.  
**Ant.E.** Do so. – This jest shall cost me some expense. *Exeunt.*

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1 i.e. a jewelled necklace. 2 i.e. entrusted. 3 i.e. in such a predicament. 4 i.e. serious. 5 i.e. fare. 6 i.e. provisions. 7 i.e. blockhead. 8 i.e. stupid fellow. 9 i.e. fool. 10 i.e. bring into being by magic incantations. 11 i.e. own. 12 i.e. much. 13 i.e. commotion. 14 i.e. hussy. 15 i.e. depart. 16 i.e. tricked. 17 i.e. boorish fellow. 18 i.e. settle our quarrel. 19 i.e. suspicion. 20 i.e. in short. 21 i.e. explain. 22 i.e. shut. 23 i.e. presumably an inn. 24 i.e. bustling traffic. 25 i.e. public. 26 i.e. unsullied reputation. 27 i.e. the carcanet, mentioned above (cf. n. 1). 28 i.e. Porcupine, the Courtesan's house.

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### N 3. Matthew Gwinne (1603), *Nero* (II 3)

*The English translation of the Tenne Tragedies ascribed to Seneca, published in 1581 included the pseudo-Senecan praetexta Octavia, rendered into English by Thomas Nuce. Octavia was performed at Christ Church, Oxford, in 1588, at a time when the chronicle play had become popular in the wake of Thomas Legge's Richardus Tertius (performed at St John's*

College, Cambridge, in 1579), the first representative of its kind and one of the first history plays in England more generally. Matthew Gwinne's (c. 1558-1627) *Nero* (1603), a slightly later university drama, a *tragoedia nova* written in Latin (full title: *Nero. Tragædia nova. Matthæo Gwinne Med. Doct. Collegij Diui Joannis Præcursoris apud Oxonienses Socio collecta è Tacito, Suetonio, Dione, Seneca*), then applied the interest in historical drama to the *Nero* theme, the only event from Roman history that could build on a classical dramatic precedent. Gwinne's drama was soon followed by tragedies on *Nero* in English. The topic then became popular in opera as well, the most famous version being *L'incoronazione di Poppea* of 1642/43 (libretto by Giovanni Francesco Busenello and music attributed to Claudio Monteverdi).

Gwinne's play is based on all relevant ancient sources, both historiographical and dramatic; it covers a much longer period and hence a more varied action than the pseudo-Senecan *Octavia*, and it is couched in a highly rhetorical Latin. The play consists of five very long acts; each of the first four acts dramatizes a conspiracy that leads up to a murder, and the ghost of the victim introduces the following act. *Nero* is the main character, an intriguing villain, who, after becoming emperor, changes from a moderate young man to a murderous and ferocious adult. Hence a scene about principles of *Nero*'s reign in the second act, taking place soon after *Nero*'s accession to the throne, conveys a portrait of Seneca and *Nero* that is reminiscent of their dialogue in the classical *Octavia* (cf. D 15), but also differs in a number of ways, including *Nero*'s attitude, the setting and the number of characters involved.

The Latin text (followed by an English translation) is taken from a reproduction of the copy of the original edition in the Bodleian Library, Oxford (with some conventions of seventeenth-century spelling of Latin texts eliminated): Matthew Gwinne. *Nero* (printed 1603), prepared with an Introduction by Heinz-Dieter Leidig, Hildesheim/New York 1983 (*Renaissance Latin Drama in England* 13). This edition has been used by kind permission of Olms Verlag.

### Act. II, Sc. 3

*Nero e castris in curiam. Senatores. L. Antistius Consul. Burrhus praefectus Praetorianus. Seneca.*

[770] **Nero.** postquam inter homines desiit divus Nero  
morari, avitis Claudiis clarus Nero,  
suis triumphis clarus, illorum inclytus,

Graecae et Latinae scriptor historiae Nero,  
patriae pater, curator annonae Nero,

[775] sub quo regente triste nil, tuta omnia,  
providus (id acta vita sub Caio docet)

sapiens (id ipsum nomen imperii probat)  
Caesar, Tiberius, Drusus, Augustus, Nero;  
pietatis ergo, Claudium in caelos, patres,  
[780] unco trahamus, Divus ubi fungos edat,  
cibos deorum: funus Augustum apparo.  
nunc quia Deorum gratia, voto meo,  
virtute matris, militum assensu omnium,  
filius, et haeres Claudii, imperium gero,  
[785] auctoritatem postulo vestram, Patres,  
summam, auspicatam, liberam, unanimem, gravem.  
unam esse Lunam, luceant stellae licet,  
solum esse Solem, Luna licet orbem impleat,  
unum esse superis, inferis, mediis Iovem,  
[790] unum esse Romae, monstra nisi gignat, caput,  
pax, ordo, lex, vis, usus, utilitas iubent.  
ille unus ecce Iupiter, pastor, pater,  
adsum, iuvando Iupiter, amando pater,  
et alendo pastor adsum, ut Augusti pia  
[795] subinde referam regna, licet impar feram.  
Augustus, ecce denuo Augustus, redit.  
nec mihi iuventus civicis armis furit  
imbuta, nec sunt, quas alam, lites domi.  
nulla odia, nullae iniuriae, nulla ultio.  
[800] vestra odia, vestrae iniuriae, vestra ultio  
mihi vindicanda: mitis in reliquos ero,  
in me severus: esse vos tales volo,  
qualis videbor, nec ero quam videor minor.  
talis ero vobis, mihi Deos quales velim:  
[805] exempla vitae recta quasi leges dabo.  
documenta legum sancta mihi vitam instruent.  
hominem meminero, non Deum, sed nec feram,  
praeesse hominibus, non feris, sed nec Deis.  
non unus omnes arbiter causas agam;  
[810] ne reus et actor, una cum capiat domus,  
paucos potentes, pauperes sese eiulent.  
venale nihil est in domo nostra: nihil,  
nihil impetrandum est ambitu, merito omnia.  
mea domus aliud, aliud est Romae status.  
[815] id cupio, non me, sed mihi timeant mei.  
antiqua teneat munia Senatus volo.  
Italia lectos Consules tota audeat,  
provinciaeque pareant: illi Patres  
vocent: gerenda bella mandantur mihi.

[820] pace moderabor milites, bello instruam.  
sic Caesar astrum, sic fit Augustus Deus.

**L. Antistius.** o nos sub isto principe beatos Patres.  
perpetua Deus haec servet Aeneadis bona.  
vivat Domitius, Claudius, Caesar, Nero,  
[825] Augustus, Imperator, Invictus, Pius,  
Plebis tribunus, Pontifex, Patriae Pater:  
concinite, 'vivat'.

**Omnes.** vivat, o vivat Nero.

*Tubae concinunt.*

**L. Antist.** iurandum in acta Caesaris nostis, Patres.

**Nero.** collega, noli vel Patris Patriae mihi  
[830] induere nomen, quod mihi iuventus neget:  
vel tute in acta nostra iurare: haud decet  
esse beneficiis imparem, officiis parem.  
tu Seneca iuris verba iurandi doce.

*Genu flectant Senatores.*

**Seneca.** Tarpeie Stator, rector in coelo soli,  
[835] Romule Quirine, de solo coeli incola,  
Auguste Caesar, hominum amor, superum comes,  
audite falsos, vindices; testes, pios.  
quae Nero iubebit sancta, quae faciet rata,  
facienda quae vult ille, quae non vult nefas,  
[840] nisi reputemus, Iupiter sic nos foras  
proiciat, ut nos iacimus hos lapides foras:  
tantoque iaciat gravius, ut gravius potest.

*Singuli Senatores ovum aut aliquid simile tinctum et aqua rosacea  
repletum proiciant: tubis concinentibus.*

**Burrhus.** quodnam excubantes milites signum ferent?

**Nero.** signum excubantes 'optimae matris' ferant.

[845] **Bur.** nunc huic tabellae Caesar apponas manum,  
qua destinantur in crucem fures duo.

**Nero.** urgere noli Burrhe: nam membrum mihi  
resecare videor, cum reseco civem mihi:

nec ad secandum medicus accedo lubens.

[850] **Sen.** medicum severum intemperans aeger facit.  
quicumque parcit improbis perdit probos.

probi tenentur praemio, poena improbi.

impune facinus provocat crimen recens.

aliena vitia si ferēs, facies tua.

[855] qui parcit omni ac nemini, est aequē ferus.

**Nero.** qui cito libenter qui nimis, inique iubet.

nescire vellem literas.

**Sen.** vocem, Patres,  
audite, dignam tota quam Roma audiat.  
dignam innocente saeculo, dignam Deo.  
habeamus ergo gratias.

[860] **Nero.** illas Patres  
habete cum meruero: nunc actum nihil,  
quin melius actum debeam, et melius velim.

*Procedunt hinc legati Armenii; inde Agrippina cum Pallante.*  
sed ecce gressus inde Legati ferunt  
Armenii; et inde mater Augusta advenit.

[865] **Sen.** quin Imperator, potius Augustae obuius  
procede, ne sit faeminae in solio locus.

**Nero.** Augusta mater, alius Armenios erit  
locus audiendi: petere nunc aedes placet.

**Agrippina.** mihi me relinque Caesar, ubi visum sequar.

*Nero descendit de tribunali. Exeunt Nero, Senatores, Seneca,  
Burrhus, caeteri praeter Agrippinam et Pallantem.*

### Act II, Scene 3

*Nero is on the way from the camp to the Senate. Senators. Lucius Antistius,  
Consul. Burrhus, Prefect of the Praetorian Guards. Seneca.*

[770] **Nero.** After the divine Nero<sup>1</sup> has ceased to be about among humans, Nero, renowned for his Claudian ancestors, renowned for his triumphs, famous because of them, Nero, the writer of history in Greek and Latin, the father of the fatherland, Nero, the guardian of the grain supply, [775] during whose reign nothing was sad and everything safe, circum-spect (his life led under Gaius<sup>2</sup> proved this), wise (the very name of the empire confirmed this), Tiberius Drusus Caesar Augustus Nero; as a result of piety, let us, Senators, draw Claudius up into the heavens [780] on a hook, now that the Divine has eaten mushrooms, food of the gods<sup>3</sup>: I am preparing an Augustan<sup>4</sup> funeral. Now since by favour of the Gods, by my own wishes, by the virtue of my mother and by the approval of all soldiers, I govern the empire as son and heir of Claudius, [785] I demand, Senators, your approving decree, supreme, auspicious, free, unanimous and weighty. That there should be one Moon, even though the stars shine, there should be one Sun, even though the Moon fills the orb of the world, that there should be one Jupiter for those in the heavens, for those in the underworld and for those in the middle, [790] that there should be one head in Rome, if it does not bring forth monsters, is commanded by peace, order, law, force, custom and utility. Look, this one Jupiter is shepherd and father; here I am, a Jupiter by aiding, a father by loving and a shepherd by nourishing, here I am, so that I [795] immediately restore the



pious reign of Augustus, even though I bear it not as his equal. Augustus, look, Augustus returns once more. And neither does my youth, infected, rage in civic arms, nor are there quarrels at home, which I nourish. No hatred, no injury, no vendetta. [800] Your hatred, your injury, your vendetta are to be avenged by me: I will be mild against everyone else, but strict against me: I wish you to be such as I shall be seen, nor will I be less than I appear. I shall be such towards you as I wish the Gods to be towards me: [805] I shall give right examples of life like laws. Hallowed documents of the laws shall form my life. I shall remember that I am a human being, not a God, but not a wild beast either, that I rule over human beings, not wild beasts, but not Gods either. I shall not carry through all cases as sole judge, [810] accused and plaintiff, as one house holds them, shall not lament that a few are powerful and they are poor. Nothing is for sale in our house: nothing, nothing is to be gained by canvassing, everything by merit. My house is one thing, the condition of Rome another. [815] This I desire, that my people should be afraid not of me, but for me. The Senate should retain its ancient duties, I wish. The whole of Italy shall venture to have elected Consuls, and the provinces shall obey them: they shall summon the Senators: wars to wage are entrusted to me. [820] In peace I shall restrain the soldiers, in war I shall draw them up. Thus Caesar becomes a star, thus Augustus becomes a God.

**L. Antistius.** Oh, we happy Senators under such an emperor. The God shall preserve perpetual good for the descendants of Aeneas. Long live Domitius Nero Claudius Caesar [825] Augustus, Emperor, Invincible, Pious, Tribune of the People, Pontifex, Father of the Fatherland: shout together 'long live'.

**All.** Long live, oh, long live Nero.

*Trumpets sound together.*

**L. Antist.** You know, Senators, that oaths must be sworn to Caesar's acts.

**Nero.** My colleague, neither impose upon me the title 'Father of the Fatherland', [830] which my youth denies me, nor swear to my acts: it is not fitting for me to be not equal in kindnesses and equal in offices. You, Seneca, announce the words for the oath.

*The Senators fall to their knees.*

**Seneca.** Tarpeian Supporter, governor of the sun in heaven, [835] Romulus Quirinus, inhabitant of the heavens, coming from the earth, Augustus Caesar, beloved by humans, companion of gods, listen to false avengers and pious witnesses. If we do not consider as sacred what Nero will order, as ratified what he will do, as ordered what he wishes, as a crime what he does not wish, [840] Jupiter shall thrust us out of doors, just as we throw these stones out of doors: and he shall throw us so much more vehemently, as he can do it more vehemently.

*Individual Senators may throw an egg or something similar bathed in and filled with rose water, as trumpets sound together.*

**Burrhus.** What password will the soldiers on nightwatch use?

**Nero.** The watchmen shall use the password 'the best mother'.

[845] **Bur.** Now, Caesar, please put your hand to this tablet, whereby two thieves are given over to the cross.

**Nero.** Do not press me, Burrhus: for I seem to cut off one of my limbs when I cut off a fellow citizen: and I do not approach the duty of cutting off as a willing surgeon.

[850] **Sen.** Someone immoderately ill makes the doctor severe. Whoever spares the dishonest, destroys the honest. The honest are governed by rewards, the dishonest by punishment. A misdeed unpunished provokes a fresh crime. If you bear vices of others, you will make them your own. [855] Those who spare everybody and nobody are equally fierce.

**Nero.** He who orders such things quickly, gladly and excessively, orders unjustly. I wish that I did not know the alphabet.

**Sen.** Listen to this statement, Senators, worthy for the whole of Rome to hear, worthy of an innocent age, worthy of a God. [860] Hence let us be full of gratitude.

**Nero.** Be full of this gratitude, Senators, when I have deserved it: now nothing has been done but what I ought and wish to have done better.

*Thereupon Armenian ambassadors appear, and then Agrippina with Pallas.*

But, look, the Armenian Ambassadors are making their way over here; and then Augusta, my mother<sup>5</sup>, arrives.

[865] **Sen.** Why don't you rather go forth and meet the Augusta<sup>6</sup>, Emperor, so that there be no room on the throne for a woman.

**Nero.** Augusta, my mother, there will be another occasion for hearing the Armenians: now it pleases me to head for the palace.

**Agrippina.** Leave me to myself, Caesar<sup>7</sup>; I shall follow when I decide to. *Nero descends from the tribunal. Nero, the Senators, Seneca, Burrhus and the others leave except for Agrippina and Pallas.*

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1 i.e. Emperor Claudius, Nero's predecessor. 2 i.e. Caligula. 3 Claudius was allegedly killed by poisoned mushrooms. 4 i.e. splendid and royal. 5 i.e. Agrippina; Augusta used as a title. 6 i.e. Agrippina. 7 i.e. Nero.

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#### **N 4. John Dryden (1690), *Amphitryon; or The Two Sosias* (I 1)**

*Jean Giraudoux called his dramatic treatment of the Amphitruo story Amphitryon 38, indicating that thirty-seven earlier versions already existed (1929). Irrespective of whether this precise number is correct, this choice*

of title shows the popularity of the topic and the awareness of a long tradition on the part of later poets. Although the *Amphitruo* story is already attested in Greek literature, the first extant dramatic version is Plautus' *Amphitruo*; since the Renaissance this has inspired a large number of imitations, adaptations and further developments. Famous versions include Molière's (i.e. Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, 1622-1673) *Amphitryon* (1668), John Dryden's (1631-1700) *Amphitryon*; or *The Two Sosias* (1690), Heinrich von Kleist's (1777-1811) *Amphitryon* (1807) and, of course, Jean Giraudoux's (1882-1944) *Amphitryon* 38 (1929).

As John Dryden says in the dedicatory letter for his play, his version of the story takes its starting point from Plautus and Molière, 'the two greatest names of ancient and modern comedy'; this connection is seen as justifying and ennobling his drama. At the same time he claims 'that more than half of it is mine, and that the rest is rather a lame imitation of their excellencies than a just translation'; while adopting a conventional stance of modesty, the poet certainly made deliberate changes to create his own version.

The first scene of the first act (after the prologue) of John Dryden's *Amphitryon* is a good example of the impact of Plautus' *Amphitruo* (cf. D 7) on later generations of poets; it also shows how Dryden has adapted the story to his own time, as he was writing at the beginning of the neo-classical period in English literature and right after the Glorious Revolution.

The edition used is *Four Restoration Marriage Plays* (Thomas Otway, *The Soldiers' Fortune*; Nathaniel Lee, *The Princess of Cleves*; John Dryden, *Amphitryon*; or *The Two Sosias*; Thomas Southerne, *The Wives' Excuse*; or *Cuckolds Make Themselves*), edited by Michael Corder with Ronald Clayton, Oxford/New York 1995 (*The World's Classics*). The extract has been reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press.

#### *Dramatis personae*

Jupiter – Mercury – Phoebus – Amphitryon – Sosia – Gripus – Polydas – Tranio – Alcmena – Phaedra – Bromia – Night – Musicians and Dancers

#### Act I, Scene 1

*Thebes. Mercury and Phoebus descend in several machines.*

**Phoebus.** Know you the reason of this present summons?

'Tis neither council-day, nor is this heaven.

What business has our Jupiter on earth?

Why more at Thebes than any other place?

And why we two of all the herd of gods

Are chosen out to meet him in consult?

They call me god of wisdom;

But Mars and Vulcan, the two fools of heaven,  
Whose wit lies in their anvil and their sword,  
Know full as much as I.

**Mercury.** And Venus may know more than both of us,  
For 'tis some petticoat affair, I guess.

I have discharged my duty, which was to summon you, Phoebus. We shall know more anon, when the Thunderer comes down. 'Tis our part to obey our father; for, to confess the truth, we two are little better than sons of harlots; and if Jupiter had not been pleased to take a little pains with our mothers, instead of being gods, we might have been a couple of link-boys.

**Phoeb.** But know you nothing farther, Hermes? What news in court?

**Merc.** There has been a devilish quarrel, I can tell you, betwixt Jupiter and Juno. She threatened to sue him in the spiritual court for some matrimonial omissions; and he stood upon his prerogative. Then she hit him on the teeth of all his bastards; and your name and mine were used with less reverence than became our godships. They were both in their cups<sup>1</sup>; and at the last the matter grew so high, that they were ready to have thrown stars at one another's heads.

**Phoeb.** 'Twas happy for me that I was at my vocation, driving daylight about the world; but I had rather stand my father's thunderbolts than my stepmother's railing.

**Merc.** When the tongue-battle was over, and the championess had harnessed her peacocks to go for Samos and hear the prayers that were made to her –

**Phoeb.** By the way, her worshippers had a bad time on't. She was in a damnable humour for receiving petitions.

**Merc.** Jupiter immediately beckons me aside, and charges me, that as soon as ever you had set up<sup>2</sup> your horses, you and I should meet him here at Thebes. Now, putting the premises together, as dark as it is, methinks I begin to see daylight.

**Phoeb.** As plain as one of my own beams. She has made him uneasy at home, and he is going to seek his diversion abroad. I see heaven itself is no privileged place for happiness, if a man must carry his wife along with him.

**Merc.** 'Tis neither better nor worse, upon my conscience. He is weary of hunting in the spacious forest of a wife, and is following his game incognito in some little purlieu<sup>3</sup> here at Thebes. That's many an honest man's case on earth too, Jove help 'em – as indeed he does, to make 'em cuckolds.

**Phoeb.** But so, Mercury, then I, who am a poet, must indite his love-letter; and you, who are by trade a porter, must convey it.

**Merc.** No more. He's coming down souse upon us, and hears as far as

he can see too. He's plaguy<sup>4</sup> hot upon the business; I know it by his hard driving.

*Jupiter descends.*

**Jupiter.** What, you are descanting upon my actions?

Much good may do you with your politics.

All subjects will be censuring their kings.

Well, I confess I am in love. What then?

**Phoeb.** Some mortal, we presume, of Cadmus' blood,

Some Theban beauty, some new Semele,

Or some Europa.

**Merc.** I'll say that for my father – he's constant to an handsome family. He knows when they have a good smack with 'em, and snuffs up incense so savourily, when 'tis offered him by a fair hand.

**Jup.** Well, my familiar sons, this saucy carriage

I have deserved; for he who trusts a secret

Makes his own man his master.

I read your thoughts;

Therefore you may as safely speak as think.

**Merc.** Mine was a very homely thought. I was considering into what form your almightyship would be pleased to transform yourself tonight. Whether you would fornicate in the shape of a bull, or a ram, or an eagle, or a swan. What bird or beast you would please to honour, by transgressing your own laws in his likeness. Or, in short, whether you would recreate yourself in feathers or in leather?

**Phoeb.** Any disguise to hide the king of gods.

**Jup.** I know your malice, Phoebus. You would say

That when a monarch sins it should be secret,

To keep exterior show of sanctity,

Maintain respect, and cover bad example;

For kings and priests are in a manner bound,

For reverence sake, to be close hypocrites.

**Phoeb.** But what necessitates you to this love,

Which you confess a crime, and yet commit?

For to be secret makes not sin the less.

'Tis only hidden from the vulgar view –

Maintains, indeed, the reverence due to princes,

But not absolves the conscience from the crime.

**Jup.** I love, because 'twas in the fates I should.

**Phoeb.** With reverence be it spoke, a bad excuse.

Thus every wicked act in heaven or earth

May make the same defence. But what is fate?

Is it a blind contingence of events?

Or sure necessity of causes linked

That must produce effects? Or is't a power  
That orders all things by superior will,  
Foresees his work, and works in that foresight?

**Jup.** Fate is, what I

By virtue of omnipotence have made it;  
And power omnipotent can do no wrong –  
Not to myself, because I willed it so;  
Nor yet to men, for what they are is mine.  
This night I will enjoy Amphitryon's wife;  
For, when I made her, I decreed her such  
As I should please to love. I wrong not him  
Whose wife she is; for I reserved my right  
To have her while she pleased me. That once past,  
She shall be his again.

**Merc.** Here's omnipotence with a vengeance – to make a man a cuckold, and yet not to do him wrong. Then I find, father Jupiter, that when you made fate, you had the wit to contrive a holiday for yourself now and then. For you kings never enact a law, but you have a kind of an eye to your own prerogative.

**Phoeb.** If there be no such thing as right and wrong,  
Of an eternal being, I have done;  
But if there be –

**Jup.** Peace, thou disputing fool.  
Learn this. If thou couldst comprehend my ways,  
Then thou wert Jove, not I. Yet, thus far know,  
That, for the good of humankind, this night  
I shall beget a future Hercules,  
Who shall redress the wrongs of injured mortals,  
Shall conquer monsters, and reform the world.

**Merc.** Ay, brother Phoebus; and our father made all those monsters for Hercules to conquer, and contrived all those vices on purpose for him to reform too. There's the jest on't.

**Phoeb.** Since arbitrary power will hear no reason, 'tis wisdom to be silent.

**Merc.** Why, that's the point. This same arbitrary power is a knock-down argument. 'Tis but a word and a blow. Now methinks our father speaks out like an honest barefaced god, as he is. He lays the stress in the right place – upon absolute dominion. I confess, if he had been a man, he might have been a tyrant, if his subjects durst have called him to account. But you, brother Phoebus, are but a mere country gentleman, that never comes to court, that are abroad all day on horseback, making visits about the world, are drinking all night and in your cups are still railing at the government. O these patriots, these bumpkin patriots, are a very silly sort of animal.

**Jup.** My present purpose and design you heard –  
T'enjoy Amphitryon's wife, the fair Alcmena.

You two must be subservient to my love.

**Merc.** (to *Phoebus*) No more of your grumbletonian<sup>5</sup> morals, brother.  
There's preferment coming. Be advised and pimp dutifully.

**Jup.** Amphitryon, the brave Theban general,  
Has overcome his country's foes in fight,  
And in a single duel slain their king.

His conquering troops are eager on their march,  
Returning home; while their young general,  
More eager to review his beauteous wife,  
Posts on before, winged with impetuous love,  
And, by tomorrow's dawn, will reach this town.

**Merc.** That's but short warning, father Jupiter. Having made no former  
advances of courtship to her, you have need of your omnipotence, and all  
your godship, if you mean to be beforehand with him.

**Phoeb.** Then how are we to be employed this evening?  
Time's precious, and these summer nights are short.  
I must be early up to light the world.

**Jup.** You shall not rise; there shall be no tomorrow.

**Merc.** Then the world's to be at an end, I find.

**Phoeb.** Or else a gap in nature, of a day.

**Jup.** A day will well be lost to busy man:  
Night shall continue sleep, and care shall cease.

So, many men shall live, and live in peace,  
Whom sunshine had betrayed to envious<sup>6</sup> sight,  
And sight to sudden rage, and rage to death.

Now, I will have a night for love and me,

A long luxurious night, fit for a god

To quench and empty his immortal heat.

**Merc.** I'll lay on<sup>7</sup> the woman's side for all that, that she shall love  
longest tonight, in spite of your omnipotence.

**Phoeb.** I shall be cursed by all the labouring trades  
That early rise; but you must be obeyed.

**Jup.** No matter for the cheating part of man;  
They have a day's sin less to answer for.

**Phoeb.** When would you have me wake?

**Jup.** Why, when Jove goes to sleep. When I have finished,  
Your brother Mercury shall bring you word.

*Exit Phoebus on his chariot.*

**Jup.** (to *Mercury*) Now, Hermes, I must take Amphitryon's form,  
T'enjoy his wife.

Thou must be Sosia, this Ampitryon's slave,

Who, all this night, is travelling to Thebes  
To tell Alcmena of her lord's approach  
And bring her joyful news of victory.

**Merc.** But why must I be Sosia?

**Jup.** Dull god of wit, thou statue of thyself!  
Thou must be Sosia, to keep out Sosia,  
Who, by his entrance, might discover<sup>s</sup> Jove,  
Disturb my pleasures, raise unruly noise,  
And so distract Alcmena's tender soul,  
She would not meet my warmth, when I dissolve  
Into her lap, nor give down half her love.

**Merc.** Let me alone; I'll cudgel him away.  
But I abhor so villainous a shape.

**Jup.** Take it; I charge thee on thy duty, take it.  
Nor dare to lay it down, till I command.

I cannot bear a moment's loss of joy.

*Night appears above in her chariot.*

Look up. The night is in her silent chariot,  
And rolling just o'er Thebes. Bid her drive slowly,  
Or make a double turn about the world,  
While I drop Jove and take Amphitryon's dress,  
To be the greater, while I seem less.

*Exit Jupiter.*

**Merc.** (*to Night*) Madam Night, a good even to you. Fair and softly, I beseech you, madam. I have a word or two to you, from no less a god than Jupiter.

**Night.** O my nimble-fingered god of theft, what make you here on earth at this unseasonable hour? What banker's shop is to be broken open tonight? Or what clippers, and coiners, and conspirators have been invoking your deity for their assistance?

**Merc.** Faith, none of those enormities; and yet I am still in my vocation, for you know I am a kind of jack-of-all-trades. At a word, Jupiter is indulging his genius tonight with a certain noble sort of recreation called wenching. The truth on't is, adultery is its proper name.

**Night.** Jupiter would do well to stick to his wife Juno.

**Merc.** He has been married to her above these hundred years; and that's long enough in conscience to stick to one woman.

**Night.** She's his sister too, as well as his wife – that's a double tie of affection to her.

**Merc.** Nay, if he made bold with his own flesh and blood, 'tis likely he will not spare his neighbours'.

**Night.** If I were his wife, I would raise a rebellion against him for the violation of my bed.



**Merc.** Thou art mistaken, old Night; his wife could raise no faction. All the deities in heaven would take the part of the cuckold-making god, for they are all given to the flesh most damnably. Nay, the very goddesses would stickle in the cause of love; 'tis the way to be popular – to whore and love. For what dost thou think old Saturn was deposed, but that he was cold and impotent, and made no court to the fair ladies. Pallas and Juno themselves, as chaste as they are, cried shame on him. I say unto thee, old Night, woe be to the monarch that has not the women on his side.

**Night.** Then by your rule, Mercury, a king who would live happily must debauch his whole nation of women.

**Merc.** As fas as his ready money will go, I mean; for Jupiter himself can't please all of 'em. But this is beside my present commission. He has sent me to will and require you to make a swingeing long night for him, for he hates to be stinted in his pleasures.

**Night.** Tell him plainly, I'll rather lay down my commission. What, would he make a bawd of me?

**Merc.** Poor ignorant! Why, he meant thee for a bawd when he first made thee. What art thou good for, but to be a bawd? Is not daylight better for mankind, I mean as to any other use, but only for love and fornication? Thou hast been a bawd too, a reverend, primitive, original bawd, from the first hour of thy creation! And all the laudable actions of love have been committed under thy mantle. Prithee for what dost thou think that thou art worshipped?

**Night.** Why, for my stars and moonshine.

**Merc.** That is, for holding a candle to<sup>9</sup> iniquity. But if they were put out, thou wouldst be double worshipped by the willing, bashful virgins.

**Night.** Then for my quiet, and the sweetness of my sleep.

**Merc.** No, for they sweet waking all the night, for sleep comes not upon lovers till thou art vanished.

**Night.** But it will be against nature, to make a long winter's night at midsummer.

**Merc.** Trouble not yourself for that. Phoebus is ordered to make a short summer's day tomorrow; so in four-and-twenty hours all will be at rights again.

**Night.** Well, I am edified by your discourse; and my comfort is, that whatever work is made, I see nothing.

**Merc.** About your business then. Put a spoke into your chariot-wheels, and order the seven stars a halt, while I put myself into the habit of a servingman and dress up a false Sosia to wait upon a false Amphitryon. Good-night, Night.

**Night.** My service to Jupiter. Farewell, Mercury.

*Night goes backward. Exit Mercury.*

1 i.e. drunk. 2 i.e. stabled. 3 i.e. outlying area. 4 i.e. excessively. 5 a contemptuous epithet, applied to certain members of the so-called 'Country' opposition to the Court. 6 i.e. malicious. 7 i.e. wager on, lay odds on. 8 i.e. unmask. 9 i.e. assisting.

**N 5. Tony Harrison (1985), *Medea: a sex-war opera*  
(openings of acts 1 and 2)**

*The myth of Medea has been an extremely popular one in both ancient and more recent times. The two surviving classical dramatic versions, Euripides' Medea (431 BCE) and Seneca's Medea (cf. D 14), along with other ancient narratives of Medea have triggered a large number of modern versions. Famous ones include, for instance, Pierre Corneille's (1606-1684) Médée (1635), Franz Grillparzer's (1791-1872) Medea (1820) or Jean Anouilh's (1910-1987) Médée (1946). One of the more recent attempts, which, rather like Jean Giraudoux's Amphitryon 38 (1929; cf. N 4), builds on a long preceding Medea tradition and is composed in full awareness of it, is Tony Harrison's (b. 1937) Medea: a sex-war opera (1985).*

*Tony Harrison is well known for a wide range of plays creatively taking up ancient motifs and referring back to particular ancient dramas. The incorporation of a preceding mythical and literary tradition is obvious in Medea: a sex-war opera not only by attempts to include the whole Medea story, but also by literal quotations from earlier Medea versions by other poets in the original languages, as at the beginning of the play, which appropriately starts with a quotation from Euripides' Medea (and will eventually end with further quotations from Euripides' Medea, followed by quotations of contemporary newspaper headlines about mothers killing children). The second act opens with Medea's reactions to the wedding of Jason and his new bride, a situation that also defines the beginning of Seneca's Medea. This wedding contrasts with Medea's own previous wedding with Jason, and she develops her plans of revenge in a conversation with her Nurse against this background.*

*The edition used is: Tony Harrison, Theatre Works 1973-1985, Harmondsworth 1985 (Penguin). The extract has been reprinted by kind permission of the author.*

**Act One**

*The OVERTURE spills over on to the stage where we see a circle of threatening MEN, chanting their hostility to a murderer of children as yet unidentified. They express their horror and hostility in words culled from the world's drama and opera on the subject of MEDEA, the murderer of her own children.*

CHORUS [M].

παιδολέτορ [Euripides, *Medea* 1393]

παιδοφόνου [Euripides, *Medea* 1407]

nefanda liberorum carnifex [Buchanan 515]

natorum caede cruenta [Buchanan 516]

exécrable tigresse [Corneille V.vi]

furie exécrable [Corneille V.vii]

mrzká, hnusná, zhubitelko dêti!

[*Euripidova Medeia*, tr. Dr Petr Durdik (Prague, 1878)]

tu, tu, malorum machinatrix facinorum [Seneca 226]

O madre iniqua e perfida! [Mayr]

Crudel! Feroce! Barbara! [Cherubini]

Hechizera! [Calderón, *Los Tres Mayores Prodigios*]

This bedlem Wight, and divelysh despret dame

[John Studeley/Seneca, 1566]

O vile malicious mynded wretich [*ibid*]

‘The murd’rous witch ...’ [*Medea; or the Best of Mothers*, 1856]

*As the CHORUS [M] chant their multi-lingual hatred, which becomes more and more intense, a vast female figure rises from the stage and this becomes the focus of male hatred. It is a vast effigy of the murderous MEDEA and as it becomes more gigantic we see that in its hand is a knife and hidden in its skirts frightened children. When the chant of the CHORUS [M] reaches a climax of hatred the knife plunges down, and the hostile circle of chanting men is dispersed and scattered in fear and panic, and the giant effigy collapses like a deflated blimp.*

## Act Two

*The Wedding Hymn is heard loud, clear, joyful, where the Wedding Hymn of the marriage of JASON and MEDEA was quiet, subdued, secretive. Where we heard only the male voices of the ARGONAUTS in the previous Wedding Hymn, we now hear a rich, harmonious complement of male and*

*female voices, hymning the true, potentially peaceful, union between man and woman. As the curtain rises we see the WEDDING PROCESSION grouped as before, with the addition of women, but as near as possible to the concluding spectacles of Act One. Whereas on Macris the procession was conducted in the dark with torches that had to be doused, this procession is in the full light of day. The elements of the ritual are identical and we should feel we are watching a continuation of the same procession we saw at the end of Act One. Once more we see the bridegroom JASON come into view with his bride, only this time the bride is not MEDEA but CREUSA, daughter of CREON, King of Corinth.*

*The WEDDING PROCESSION should begin to establish itself both as 'real' and as in the mind of the raging MEDEA we now see with the NURSE.*

MEDEA. (*With the hymn still audible, to Nurse.*)

I wish now my father had got me back!  
The terrors of torture, the pains of the rack,  
the scars of the whip and the scourge,  
the flesh stripped bare to the bloodied bone,  
the gamut of agonies and cruel hurts  
are nothing to the pains that sear and surge  
through the heart of a woman a man deserts  
for another, leaving her alone  
in a hostile land, with her children, *alone*,  
for the mad mob who hate her to stab and to *stone*.

NURSE.

Call the Virgin! Call the Mother! Call the Crone!

MEDEA.

In Colchis at least I'd have died before I knew  
that a man who loved you could be untrue.  
Though love took me wholly by surprise  
I'm more surprised now that his love dies  
and his faithless heart is a nest of lies.  
It's taken ten years for the truth to *emerge*:  
he doesn't want his children or their *mother*  
he wants to bind himself to another  
and all to possess a paltry *throne*.

NURSE.

Call the Virgin! Call the Mother! Call the Crone!

*The sounds of the Wedding Hymn continue to return.*

MEDEA. (*To Nurse.*)

I should have let him be burnt to death,  
his flesh set aflame by the bull's fierce breath,  
I should have let them trample him dead  
cracking his bones and crushing his head  
I should have let the men hack him piece by piece,  
I should have let him die, but instead,  
deceived by love my magic can't check  
I put a noose round my own neck  
and let him win the Golden Fleece,  
and all for these ten years in his bed,  
wandering with him from place to place  
being abused for my foreign face,  
only to be thrown aside  
once he found himself a 'better' bride!

I'll turn their wedding hymn into a *dirge*.  
I'll *smother* the torches in the smoke of death,  
and change their joy-chants to a dismal *drone*.

NURSE.

Call the *Virgin!* Call the *Mother!* Call the *Crone!*

MEDEA.

I'll turn their wedding hymn into a *dirge*.  
I'll *smother* their torches in the smoke of death,  
and change their joy-chants to a dismal *drone*.

NURSE.

Call the *Virgin!* Call the *Mother!* Call the *Crone!*

*This leads the two women into an invocation of the GODDESS, one of the 'quotations' from a previous opera, the Medea of Cherubini. The Invocation is heard against the sound of the Wedding Hymn as the WEDDING PROCESSION re-enters. The WEDDING PROCESSION should be felt as a continuous presence, a perpetual goad to the rage of MEDEA, and present on stage, either as 'real' or still tormentingly imagined by MEDEA, stung that JASON and CREUSA are marrying to the same ritual by which he married her on Macris 10 years ago, a ritual hurried, hushed and suppressed. Its musical presence should also be continuous, giving us a hymn to the potential union of man and*

woman and something which continually enrages the mind and heart of MEDEA.

The WEDDING PROCESSION in all its glory 'delivers' JASON to MEDEA and possibly continues and then re-emerges to 'pick up' JASON after his confrontation with MEDEA, or stays in a 'freeze' which is re-animated each time JASON rejoins his bride.

M. Your marriage torch will be a funeral brand.

J. You are meddling in things you don't understand.

M. Deceit and fraud I don't understand, no!

J. Don't cause trouble. Creon wants you to go.

M. I don't want to stay here. We'll go away!

J. Creon may allow the children to stay.

M. Our sons will go where their mother goes.

J. They'll stone you, you witch in barbaric clothes.

M. I have my magic! I can get by!

J. Corinth doesn't want you, nor do I!

M. Once you couldn't wait to drag me to bed.

J. That part of me will never be dead.

M. Then why take some little virgin instead?

J. To be able to wear a crown on my head.

King Creon's daughter gives me power in this land.

M. Your marriage torch will be a funeral brand.

As if to prove her wrong JASON raises his wedding torch and rejoins the WEDDING PROCESSION which resumes, the Wedding Hymn loud and dominant.

MEDEA.

I'll turn their wedding hymn into a *dirge*.

I'll smother their torches in the smoke of death  
and change their joy-chants to a dismal *drone*.

NURSE.

Call the *Virgin!* Call the *Mother!* Call the *Crone!*

# ROMAN DRAMA

## *A Reader*

Gesine Manuwald



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