

**Drama in the margins – Academic Text and Political Context in
Matthew Gwinne’s *Nero: Nova Tragædia* (1603) and Ben Jonson’s *Sejanus*
(1603/5)**

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Introduction

In 1603, Matthew Gwinne published his monumental *Nero: Nova Tragædia*, a sprawling chronicle-history of Nero’s rise and fall in more than 5000 lines of Latin verse. Gwinne — a fellow of St John’s College, Oxford, and closely involved in Oxford’s literary scene — originally intended the play for performance as part of the college’s regular programme of entertainment between Christmas and Shrovetide. Its huge cast-list (eighty-four characters) and unwieldy size — the fifth act alone could stand as a complete play — meant that the attempt was never made, as Gwinne somewhat ruefully recalls in his preface to the printed edition.¹ Written off as mere ‘academic exercise’ by its first modern editor, Hans-Dieter Leidig, more generous assessments of *Nero* by J. W. Binns and Dana F. Sutton in particular have stressed the on-trend vibrancy of this revenge-orientated drama, its delight in punning wordplay,

¹ In addition to his duties as a Fellow of St John’s, Gwinne edited (in partnership with Fulke Greville) Sir Philip Sidney’s *New Arcadia* (1590) and provided assistance with John Florio’s (1603) translation of Montaigne. He also served on the committee for Elizabeth I’s visit in 1592 and composed the comedy *Vertumnus, sive Annus Recurrens* for James’s visit in 1607. For a more detailed biography see Dana F. Sutton, *Matthew Gwinne, Nero (1603). A hypertext critical edition* (2012): <<http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/Nero/>> (accessed March 2015), Intro. 12-18; Iain Wright, ‘Gwinne, Matthew (1558–1627)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/11813>> (accessed April 2015). Throughout I use the original text (London, 1603) but also include references to Sutton’s hypertext edition for the convenience of the reader.

its relish in the Senecan paraphernalia of ghosts and Furies, and its saturation with gorily thrilling scenes of torture, murder and suicide.²

Such readings rightly re-balance the attractions of the drama against its apparent major defect: a passive approach to the appropriation of the sources, in which Gwinne simply transforms into verse the available historical material, offering a conglomeration of Tacitus, Suetonius and Dio to effect an ‘archaeological restoration’ of Nero’s rise and fall.³ From this perspective, the system of notation in the margin which *Nero* offers — not just stage directions, but also references to a wide range of ancient authorities for his text, the kind of notes to be found in classical commentaries and school-texts, but not in other academic drama — might be seen as an unnecessary adornment.⁴ Yet I will argue in this chapter, through comparative analysis with Nero’s ‘twin’ in this respect, Ben Jonson’s *Sejanus*, that Nero’s margins invite complicating reflection and contested interpretation of the play-text, going far beyond mere homiletic instruction. While *Sejanus* attracted more attention for its

² Heinz-Dieter Leidig, *Matthew Gwinne Nero (print. 1603); prepared with an introduction* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1983) 9; J. W. Binns, ‘Seneca and neo-Latin tragedy in England’, in C. D. C. Costa (ed.) *Seneca* (London: Routledge, 1974) 215-224; see also Susanna Morton Braund, ‘Haunted by Horror: The Ghost of Seneca in Renaissance Drama’, in Emma Buckley and Martin T. Dinter (eds.) *A Companion to the Neronian Age* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012) 425-43.

³ The title-page of *Nero* asserts that the tragedy has been ‘gathered’ out of these sources: ‘NERO TRAGÆDIA NOVA | MATTHÆO GWINNE Med. Doct. | ... collecta | è Tacito, Suetonio, Dione, Seneca’ and Gwinne’s own preface claims, ‘they say nearly everything. I’ve simply transformed their prose into verse’ (*nam et loquuntur ipsi fere omnia: ego tantummodo modos feci*, ¶2v; Pref. to Act I). On *Nero*’s approach – and its connections with the similar project of Henry Savile’s 1591 *The Ende of Nero* see Sutton, *Nero*, Intro. 3 and below.

⁴ The functions of marginal notes in Renaissance education have been explored in e.g. Antony Grafton and C. Lisa Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), “‘Studied for Action’: How Gabriel Harvey read his Livy, *Past and Present* 129 (1990) 30-78. On neo-Latin commentaries in particular, see Marianne Pade (ed.), *On Renaissance Commentaries. Noctes* (Hildesheim: Olms, 2005); Karl Enenkel and Henk Nellen (eds.), *Neo-Latin Commentaries and the Management of Knowledge in the Late Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period (1400 -1700)*, (Hildesheim: Olms, 2013). William W. E. Slights, *Managing Readers: Printed Marginalia in English Books* (Ann Arbor, 2004) 25-6 offers a useful spectrum of roles for early modern marginalia, including amplification, correction (pre-empting and diverting erroneous interpretation), explication, justification (pre-emptively rebutting detractors), and even parody (where the margin mocks the substance). Helen Smith and Louise Wilson (eds.), *Renaissance Paratexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) offer a diverse range of approaches to early modern paratexts.

provocative subject matter and theatrical failure, Gwinne's *Nero* uses the privileged space of academic drama, its conspicuously self-styling role as advisor to monarchy as well as educator of the young elites about to enter the service of government and crown, to ask similarly challenging questions of its audience about the role of counsellors within a tyrannical system.⁵

Nero and Sejanus: framing history

Nero does not just reflect the fashions of contemporary vernacular revenge tragedy: it is also, together with Jonson's *Sejanus*, written in the wake of the new English 'Tacitism', tackling in drama for the first time Roman imperial history as locus for political analysis and critique.⁶ Both plays centre on a tyrannical imperial Rome, though Nero's by turns calculating and hysterical actor-emperor has little in common with the controlled, Machiavellian Tiberius of Jonson's play. Both plays put a cycle of ambition, corruption and conspiracy at their centre: Gwinne's start-to-finish chronicle of Nero's life features the conspiracies of Agrippina, Piso and finally Vindex, while Jonson offers an extreme decoction of Sejanus' rise and fall over a decade of Tiberian rule. And both plays reflect deeply upon the role of counsellors in close contact with tyranny. *Nero* —typically — crams in as many examples as it can find of collusion and resistance from the historical record, but perhaps the most important figures in the play are Seneca and Burrhus, the guardians to Nero who fall

⁵ On student participation in academic drama and university drama's privileged relationship with government and court, see Jonathan Walker and Paul D. Streufert (eds.), *Early Modern Academic Drama* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008), especially Linda Shenk, 'Gown Before Crown: Scholarly Abjection and Academic Entertainment Under Queen Elizabeth I', 19-34; Emily D. Bryan, 'The Government of Performance: *Ignoramus* and the Micropolitics of Tutor-Student Relations', 87-114.

⁶ Cf. G. K. Hunter, 'A Roman Thought: Renaissance Attitudes to History Exemplified in Shakespeare and Jonson', in Brian S. Lee (ed.), *An English Miscellany Presented to W. S. Mackie*, (Cape Town, 1977), 93-118, who notes (p.102) that *Nero* and *Sejanus* 'seem to have been the first plays in England to treat the matter of imperial history in political terms'; Sutton, *Nero*, Intro. 45. On the popularity of Roman-themed plays – forty-nine extant, a further forty-five known by name in Elizabethan/Jacobean theatre – see Warren Chernaik, *The Myth of Rome in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 5.

victim to their pupil-emperor at the instigation of their malicious replacements, Tigellinus and Poppaea. In *Sejanus*, a tauter plot sees the powerful courtier Sejanus and his satellites matched by the Germanican faction (Arruntius, Lepidus, Silius), whose reactions to tyranny encompass moralizing commentary, virtuous self-exile, and heroic suicide, before Sejanus' fall is engineered by Tiberius himself.

Finally, there is a significant difference in the framing architecture of the two plays. While both model extreme versions of passive virtue and obedience under tyranny, Nero does not just culminate with a complete account of the emperor's gleefully celebrated fall: it also incorporates a supernatural frame in which Nemesis, self-proclaiming 'Hand of Justice' (*Iustitiae manus*, A3v; Prol.5), together with a chorus of Eumenides, watches over the action and concludes with an explicit moralization, setting Nero's tyranny against a Golden Age of Elizabethan rule (T3r; Epil. 5007-11).⁷ *Sejanus*, too, offers an explicit defence of 'absolute obedience', above all in Sabinus' declaration that 'No ill should force the Subject vndertake / Against the Souereigne; more then Hell should make / The Gods do wrong' (H4r; 4.163-5), but Jonson's Germanicans, who lament but do not resist Sejanus' abuse of power, are reduced essentially to a choric role, and in *Sejanus* interventionist divine justice (the kind of justice so often celebrated in harmony with divinely appointed power on earth in Jonsonian masque) is pointedly absent.⁸ While traces of a medieval 'Turn of Fortune' narrative are invoked —Fortune literally turns her face away from

⁷ 'Eliza's reputation, deeds, and destiny are so disparate that nothing can be more different as our English goddess from Nero, these times from those, our goods from his evils. So let us depart. You must set aside wicked Nero, and applaud your own good fortune: *Tam fama, facta, fata, disparia, vt magis / Nihil esse possit, quàm Anglica Neroni Dea, / Temporibus illis ista, bona summè malis. / Nos ergo eamus: Vos vel exutis malo/ Nerone, vestris vel bonis plausum date.* (T3r; Epil.5007-11). Translations are from Sutton, *Nero* (sometimes adapted).

⁸ See especially Stephen Orgel, *The Illusion of Power* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 1975); Blair Worden, 'Ben Jonson among the Historians' in *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England*, Kevin Sharpe and Peter Lake (eds.), (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 67-90: 81.

Sejanus (K4v; 5.184-202) —the malicious counsellor receives his just desserts at the all too human, Machiavellian hands of a Tiberius who himself is subject to no such downfall in the play.⁹ In this Tacitist world in which the Senate is weak, the people are fickle and brutal, and the power of language is dependent upon the status of those who wield power over language, *Sejanus* offers its audience totalizing paradigms of virtue and vice. Yet its pessimistic analysis of the relationship between language and power ensures that the play is constantly on the edge of undermining the totalizing paradigms of virtue and vice it aims to deploy.¹⁰

It may be no coincidence then that when Jonson himself became the victim of the *prava interpretatio* ('faulty interpretation') his play so mercilessly exposes – not just in the disastrous reception afforded *Sejanus*' first public performance at the Globe in 1604, but also in the charges brought against him of 'popery and treason' as a result of the play – he turned to Gwinne's *Nero* as a model of both 'scholarly' status and political security.¹¹ For Jonson's response – in a 1605 quarto edition which excised

⁹ See Philip J. Ayres (ed.), *Sejanus His Fall: Ben Jonson* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991) 13; Gary D. Hamilton, 'Irony and Fortune in *Sejanus*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 11 (1971), 265-81. In the chapter that follows I use the quarto text but include references to Ayres' edition for the convenience of the reader.

¹⁰ Cf. James Loxley, *The Complete Critical Guide to Ben Jonson* (London: Routledge, 2002), 60; Sean McEvoy, *Ben Jonson, Renaissance Dramatist* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 47-9. On the dangers of application more generally see David Womersley, 'Sir Henry Savile's Translation of Tacitus and the Political Interpretation of Elizabethan Texts', *The Review of English Studies*, 42 (1991), 313-342; for 'Tacitism' and contemporary drama see e.g. Patrick Cheney, *Marlowe's republican authorship: Lucan, liberty, and the sublime* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) 149-54; Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare and republicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); P. Kewes, "'A Fit Memorial for the Times to Come...': Admonition and Topical Application in Mary Sidney's *Antonius* and Samuel Daniel's *Cleopatra*', *The Review of English Studies*, 63 (2012), 243-264. More generally, see esp. David Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric, and Politics, 1627-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Peter Burke, 'Tacitism, Scepticism and Reason of State', in J. H. Burns (ed.) *The Cambridge history of political thought, 1450-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 479-498.

¹¹ After *Sejanus*' first performance in 1603 (probably at court), Jonson was summoned to the Privy Council on charges brought by the Earl of Northampton: see Ayres, *Sejanus* 16-22 for its possible topical application to the Raleigh trial of 1605 or the 1603 Essex rebellion; Worden 'Jonson among the Historians', esp. 77-8. Much of the 1605 quarto's prefatory material, including the dedicatory poems of his friends, dwells on the public reaction of this performance: see e.g. the dedicatory poem of 'Ev. B.' which puts the proletariat firmly back in their place with its final assertion: 'this Publication setteth thee free: / They, for their Ignorance, still damned bee.' (A3v; Ayres, *Sejanus*, 6, vv.13-4); on similar themes in the first dedicatory poem by George Chapman, see Brock Macleod, *Polybian text:*

the material of a ‘second pen’ that had helped write the 1603 play-text – was to create a protective carapace for the play in the form of a ‘buttressing’ array of Latin notes, complemented by an ‘Address to the Reader’ to steer interpretation pre-emptively.¹² Claiming here that he has used the Latin notes only to show ‘my integrity in the Story’ (¶2v; 50, v.25), Jonson relies on academic context for his own political safety, de-authorizing his own play and deflecting dangerous application by shifting accountability to the classical sources. And in his careful and ‘scholarly’ elaboration of the material for his drama in the margins, Jonson’s appeal to ‘integrity’ —in a typical Latinate pun, defensive in its appeal to innocence via its ‘completeness’ or ‘wholeness’ (*integritas*) —it certainly seems that Gwinne’s monumental *Nero* has played an inspirational part.¹³

***Sejanus* in the margins**

I start, then, with a select but representative look at the marginating practice of *Sejanus*, which has already received far more critical attention than *Nero*.¹⁴ In Act III

historiography in the margins of Ben Jonson’s Quarto Sejanus (Diss. University of Victoria, 2010) 104-5.

¹² Ayres, *Sejanus*, 71 speculates that the note Jonson appends after the dedicatory poems – ‘This do we aduance as a mark of Terror to all *Traytors*, & *Treasons*; to shewe how iust the *Heauens* are in powring and thundring downe a weighty vengeance on their vnnatural intents, euen to the worst *Princes*: Much more to those, for guard of whose Piety and Vertue the *Angels* are in continuall watch, and *God* himselfe miraculously working’ (A4v) – is ‘a prudent (and perhaps a compulsory) addition’.

¹³ Cf. Felix Emmanuel Schelling, *Elizabethan Drama, 1558-1642: A History of the Drama in England from the Accession of Queen Elizabeth to the Closing of the Theaters, to which is Prefixed a Résumé of the Earlier Drama from Its Beginnings*, (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1908) had speculated (I. 28), ‘The relation of Gwinne’s *Nero* ... to Jonson’s *Sejanus* might be worth an investigation. *Nero* certainly preceded *Sejanus*, and its student’s use of material, its conscious scholarship and painstaking elaboration are all of them qualities of Jonson’s tragedy.’ Macleod, *Polybian Text*, is the only in-depth comparison of which I am aware.

¹⁴ See especially Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England*, (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1984) 51; Evelyn B. Tribble, *Margins and Marginality: The Printed Page in Early Modern England*, (Richmond, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1993), 146-55; Worden, ‘Jonson among the Historians’, 79-80; Janet Clare, ‘*Art Made Tongue-Tied by Authority*’: *Elizabethan and Jacobean Dramatic Censorship*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990) 134-55; Ayres, *Sejanus*, 16-23.

of *Sejanus*, Jonson puts a central preoccupation of the play (the abuse of language in connection with the (mis)application of interpretation) centre-stage in the figure of Cremutius Cordus, the historian of the Republic who has praised the regicides Brutus and Cassius in his *Annals*. Jonson's play-text makes it clear that this history is merely the pretext for Cordus' treason-charge: his real crime has been to displease Sejanus. Nevertheless, Cordus is charged with sedition on the basis of his writings (F4v; *Sej*.III.379-88). Cordus, whose defence rests on a tradition of imperial toleration of dissent (G1r-G1v; III.411-441) and stresses the distinction between recording the sedition of the past in history and actively inciting it (G1v; III.445-460), clearly functions not just as 'figure for the poet' but also as a potentially dangerous, destabilizing figure for reflection on repression, censorship and application.¹⁵

Cordus, then, is a lightning-rod for the play's pessimistic depiction of a world whose language and values are systemically broken. Yet if we confine ourselves to a close look at Jonson's margination practice here, we see that he has done all he can to contain the dangerous material. It has long been recognised that, ironically enough, Cordus' defence of 'free' speech is already wholesale translation of Tacitus. But the Latin notes Jonson provides offer crucial assistance in making the text yet more 'safe'. At Cordus' entrance (F4v; III.370) we are commanded to consult *Annals* 4.34-35 and Dio 57.24: passages which prepare the audience for Cordus' defence of free speech before it comes. At the close of Cordus' speech, a new note does not just return us to *Annals* 4.34-5 again: it literally closes down further reflection on Cordus, with a direct quote from Tacitus which removes Cordus from the picture permanently:

¹⁵ Cf. Jonas A. Barish (ed.), *Sejanus: by Ben Jonson* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1965) 17-8: '[Jonson] is making history do just what his historian, Cordus, claims it does not do – reflect on the present times. [...] We have, then, the odd spectacle of a manifesto of the disinterestedness of historical writing in a piece of historical writing that is itself anything but disinterested.' More generally on language, ethics and politics: see Robert C. Evans, 'Sejanus: Ethics and Politics in the reign of James', in Julie Sanders, Kate Chedgzoy and Susan Wiseman (eds.) *Refashioning Ben Jonson: Gender, Politics and the Jonsonian*, (London: Palgrave, 1998) 71-92.

Egressus dein Senatu, vitam abstinentiâ finivit. Tac. ibid. Generosam eius mortē vid. Apud Sen. Cons. Ad Mar. cap. 22 ('Then having left the Senate, he ended his life by starvation. Tac. *ibid.* On his excellent life see Seneca, *Consolatio ad Marciam*, ch.22').¹⁶ These notes 'flesh out' the portion of the story enacted on stage, making good on the claims to the 'integrity' of the story, and offering a harmonious combination of text and supplement, text and contextualization. But the margins also act in a pincer movement to contain this provocative subject matter, authorizing only a strictly delimited horizon of interpretation for his audience.

Margination in concert with translation provides a 'safe space' to reflect on the dangers of application with Cordus, then. But for Jonson margination also supplements in order to direct interpretation much more actively. In the first meeting between Sejanus and his master, the courtier attempts to persuade Tiberius to take pre-emptive action against the politically dangerous family of Agrippina (whose husband Germanicus is already dead). Intertextually this scene is framed as Senecan revenge-tragedy, with Sejanus inverting the satelles-Atreus conversation of Seneca's *Thyestes* to urge his emperor on in evil, while he resists with protestations that pre-emptive violence is unlawful (II.170), provokes long-lasting hatred (II.174), and violates the values of faith, love and piety (II.175-7) (D3v). The margins do not acknowledge Seneca's influence. Rather —in ostentatiously pedantic fashion — a series of notes is deployed, which extends all the way down the page and under the play-text, apparently merely to provide adequate citation for the 'prideful' nature of Agrippina and the Germanican family:

¹⁶ Jonson, *Sejanus*, G2r. Seneca (*Consolatio Ad Marciam* 22) offers a fuller version of Cordus' self-starvation, concluding that in his death Cordus gained freedom. Gwinne may have been using the 1594 Heidelberg edition (*L. Annæus Seneca ... a M. A. Mureto correctus et notis illustr. Accedunt seorsim Animadversiones I. Gruteri opera*): Lipsius' monumental *L. Annaei Senecae Philosophi Opera Quae Exstant Omnia* (Antwerp) would not be published until 1605.

Sei. Or else my thought, my sense, or both do erre:

‘Tis^a *Agrippina*? Tib. She; and her proud race.

Sei. Proud?^b dangerous, *Cæsar*. For in them apace

The fathers spirit shoots vp. *Germanicus*

Lives in their lookes, their gate, their forme,^c t’ vpbraid vs

With his close death, if not reuenge the same.

...

Sei. You knowe sir. “Thunder speaks not till it hit.

“Be not secure: None swiftlier are opprest,

“Then they, whome confidence betraies to rest.

“Let not your daring make your danger such,

“All power’s to be fear’d, where ‘tis to much.

The Youth’s are (of themselves) hot, violent,

Ful of great thought; and that ^d*male-spirited* Dame,

Their Mother, slacks no meanes to put them on...

(D3v; III.189-94, 205-212)

^a *De Agrip.*
vid. Dio
Hist. Rom.
lib. 57. pag.
694.

^b *De Seiani*
consil. in
Agrip.
leg. Tacit.
Ann.lib.1
pag. 23 &
lib. 4 pag.
77. 79.

de Tib. susp.
lib. 3. pa. 52.

^c *Gnaris*
omnibus lae-
tam Tibe-
rio Germa-
nici mortē
malē diffi-
mulavit.
Tac. lib.3.
ibid. Huc
confer Ta-
citi narrat.
de morte
Pisonis
pag. 55 &
lib. 4. pag.
74. *Germa-*
nici mortē
inter pro-
spera duce-
bat.

^d *De ani.*
uirili A-
grip. consul.
Tac. Ann.
lib. 1. pag.
12 & 22.
lib. 2. pa. 47.

Yet this cluster of notes does far more than merely confirm the proud character of the family of Germanicus. The first two notes (instructions to read Dio (57.4) and citation of relevant sections of Tacitus *Annals*, Books 1, 3 and 4) again anticipate the eventual outcome, Agrippina’s demise, and provide more information on the conspiracy of Sejanus against Agrippina.¹⁷ The third steers interpretative

¹⁷ Dio 57.4: ‘Among the large number of people who thus lost their lives was Agrippina, together with her sons, except the youngest. For Sejanus had incensed Tiberius greatly against her...’ (Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, Tr. Ernest Cary, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927, p.166-7).

anticipation much more strongly. In the play-text itself we are not sure at this point whether Tiberius is being led astray by the poison dripped in his ear by Sejanus; his protestations suggest a genuine struggle with conscience. But if we have read the margins, Tiberius' 'true' nature has already been revealed, for here Jonson quotes *Annals* 3.2 ('Everybody knew that Tiberius was covering up his happiness badly at the death of Germanicus'); draws our attention to Piso's death in the *Annals* (over which Tiberius also shed crocodile tears); and rams the point home with further quotation, from *Annals* 4.1: *Germanici mortē inter prospera ducebat*; 'He considered the death of Germanicus a happy outcome.' The marginal notes, in other words, force us to anticipate Tiberius' fundamentally duplicitous nature even before he reveals he has been dissimulating to Sejanus at II.278.¹⁸

In fact, such pre-emptive anticipation, achieved by this careful mosaic of quotation and citation, merely supports the point already made in Tiberius' first address to Sejanus:

Tib. Is yet Seianus come? Sei. H' is here, dreâd

Cæsar.

Tib. Let all depart that chamber, and the next:

^b *De hac
consultati-
one. vid.
Suet. Tib.
cap. 55*

¹⁸ Note (d) – 'On the manly spirit of Agrippina consult ad. *Ann.* 1.33, 1.69; *Ann.* 2.72' (D3v) – also performs a further supplementary function. Here Tacitus does mention Agrippina's 'imperial disposition' (*indomitum animum*), but only after mentioning that Germanicus 'was troubled by the secret hatred of his uncle and grandmother, the motives for which were the more venomous because unjust'; *Annals* 1.69 recalls Agrippina's 'heroic spirit' (*femina ingens animi*), but goes on to say that this provoked the jealousy of Tiberius, a jealousy 'inflamed and aggravated by Sejanus, who, with his thorough comprehension of the character of Tiberius, sowed for a distant future hatreds which the emperor might treasure up and might exhibit when fully matured'. Jonson's final citation – *Annals* 2.72 – once again completes the back-story immanent in, but never fully articulated by, the play-text's mention of Germanicus, for it directs the reader to his death-bed advice to his wife Agrippina to lay aside her 'high spirit' (*ferocia*) and submit to fortune – 'and not, when she returned to Rome, to enrage by political rivalry those who were stronger than herself. This was said openly; other words were whispered, *pointing, it was supposed, to his fears from Tiberius* (my emphasis)'. All translations of Tacitus (occasionally adapted) come from A.J. Church and W.J. Brodribb, *Annals of Tacitus* (London: Macmillan, 1877, pp. 16, 34-5, 72): Jonson uses Lipsius, C. *Cornelii Taciti Opera Quæ Exstant*, (Antwerp, 1600).

Sit downe my Comfort.^b

(D3r; II.163-5)

Jonson's simple note ('On this interview, see Suetonius' Tiberius, ch.55.') pre-empts the course, not just of the conversation but indeed the whole narrative to come:

'In addition to his old friends and intimates, he had asked for twenty of the leading men of the State as advisers on public affairs. Of all these he spared hardly two or three; the others he destroyed on one pretext or another, including Aelius Sejanus, whose downfall involved the death of many others.'¹⁹

In this introductory note then, Jonson gives the reader a microcosm of the play as it will unfold, complete not just with Sejanus' eventual fall, but also incorporating Tiberius' own manipulative nature long before we see it on stage.

Precision in annotation, combined with the judicious interaction of quotation and citation, guarantees that Jonson does not simply 'complete' the story in the margins: he also contains and directs interpretation through supplementary margination, crafting a particular emphasis which stresses Tiberius' jealousy of rivals and fundamentally dissimulating nature at the cost of other more nuanced historiographical depictions of the emperor: including the one of Tacitus *himself*, who offers in the *Annals* more broadly a much more ambivalent portrait of the emperor.²⁰ In fact, Jonson is prepared to use his margins —supposedly a token of his 'integrity' in the story — to quite drastically reconfigure the historical record. A final example,

¹⁹ All translations of Suetonius come from J. C. Rolfe (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914) 371-2.

²⁰ Cf. Jonas Grethlein, *Experience and Teleology in Ancient Historiography: 'Futures Past' from Herodotus to Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) 154-5 offers summary and bibliography of Tacitus' complex (and even Tacitus-like) Tiberius.

which deals with Silius' response to the accusations of the corrupt consul Afer, will show how creatively Jonson manipulates history from within the margins:

Afer. But now, if after all their Loues, and Graces,
 (Thy actions, and their courses being discover'd)
 It shall appear to *Cæsar* and this *Senate*,
 Thou hast defil'd those Glories, with thy crimes---

Sil. Crimes! *Af.* Patience, *Silius.* *Sil.* Tell thy Moile of patience,
 I am a *Romane*. What are my crimes? Proclaime them.
 Am I too rich? Too honest for the Times?
 Haue I or *Treasure*, *Iewels*, *Land*, or *Howses*
 That some Informer gapes for? Is my strength
 Too much to be admitted? Or my knowledge? ^b*Vid.* Suet.
 These^b now are crimes. Tiber.Tac.
 Dio.Senec.

(F2r; III.163-173)

The first note here (b), an instruction to 'See Suetonius' Tiberius; Tacitus; Dio; Seneca', is uncharacteristically vague. Much more typical is the elaboration of the charge-sheet which follows from Silius' actual accuser, Varro, which elicits a pithy two-word response from Silius:

<p><i>Var.</i> 'Tis I accuse thee, <i>Silius</i>.</p> <p>Against the Maiestie of <i>Rome</i>, and <i>Cæsar</i>,</p> <p>I do pronounce thee here a guilty cause,</p> <p>First,^c of beginning, and occasioning,</p>	<p>^cTac <i>lib.</i> 4 <i>pag.</i> 79. <i>Conscientiâ</i> <i>belli</i>, <i>Sacro-</i> <i>uir diu.</i> <i>dissimulatus</i>, <i>uictoria per</i> <i>auaritiam</i> <i>foedata</i>, & <i>uxor Sosia</i> <i>argueban-</i> <i>tur</i>, ^d<i>Bellum</i> <i>Sacrouiri-</i> <i>anum in</i> <i>Gall. erat.</i> <i>Triumph.</i> <i>in Germ.</i> <i>vid.</i> Tac. <i>Ann. lib.</i>3. <i>pag.</i>630</p>
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Next, drawing out the warre in ^d*Gallia*,
For which thou late triumph'st; dissembling long
That *Sacrovir* to be an enemy,
Onely to make thy Entertainment more,
Whilst thou, and thy wife *Sosia*, poll'd the *Province*:
Wherein, with sordide-base desire of gaine,
Thou hast discredited thy *Actions* worth,
And bene a Traitor to the state. *Sil.* Thou liest. (F2r; 3.179-190)

The notes accompanying this passage are much more targeted. The first (c) directs us to *Annals* 4.19 and quotes the historian verbatim: 'A long concealed complicity in Sacrovir's rebellion, a rapacity which sullied his victory, and his wife Sosia's conduct, were alleged against him.' The next note (d) directs us to *Annals* 3.45-6 and openly contradicts the charge made by Afer that Silius drew the war out, for in these two short chapters Silius advances swiftly to Augustodonum (Tacitus makes the point that there were no usual stops for rest or night-time halts), makes a short speech of encouragement to his troops, and effects the defeat of Sacrovir, who commits suicide shortly afterwards.²¹ But what is most striking here however is the singular lack of a note to match the other charge Varro has made: that with his wife Silius committed the crime of extortion. Indeed, while Jonson has quoted the charge against Silius from

²¹ Bodribb and Church, *Annals*, 122. There is, too, a similarly detailed cluster of notes to accompany Silius' protesting response to these charges, on the grounds that it is improper for Varro, the consul, both to accuse Silius and act as judge (cf. F2v; *Sej.* III.197ff.).

Tacitus, he has omitted the remark Tacitus makes immediately following the allegation:

‘A long concealed complicity in Sacrovir’s rebellion, a rapacity which sullied his victory, and his wife Sosia’s conduct, were alleged against him. *Unquestionably, they could not extricate themselves from the charge of extortion.* (my emphasis) The whole affair however was conducted as a trial for treason, and Silius forestalled impending doom by a self-inflicted death.’

What looks like uncharacteristic sloppiness at the outset (‘see Suetonius, Tacitus, Dio, Seneca’) now looks less like laziness and more like deliberate unhelpfulness. Here Jonson is obviously re-shaping Roman history as he edits his reader’s access to the *Annals*: just as Tiberius has become an unmitigated evil, Jonson’s Silius, both in the play-text and also in the ‘supplementary’ reading he offers us in Tacitus, has been recast as a completely innocent man.

This close study of Jonson’s marginal practice thus reveals a much more subtle use of the historical record than the one intimated in his opening appeal to his ‘integrity in the Story’. While the larger questions about the application of *Sejanus* must still stand, we can see that in the 1605 *Sejanus*’ mutually reinforcing interplay of text and marginal context, Jonson does not simply rely on the historical record to ‘neutralize’ the provocative subject of Tiberian Rome. Rather, in a marginal practice that fragments, re-orders and even re-directs its reader from the account as given in the classical sources, Jonson creates a highly personal interpretation of Tiberian Rome and a readership firmly under the control of his authorizing direction.

Nero in the Margins

Sejanus' watchwords, in terms of marginal practice, are containment, direction, manipulation. Matthew Gwinne's *Nero*, which wears its comprehensive approach to the sources on its sleeve, does not just provide a very different model of engagement with the classical sources, but might also incur the charge that margination is entirely redundant, when everything is already in the play-text: *Sed nec in scena silet /Xiphilinus istâ, nec tacet Tacitus; nec est /Tranquillus hic Tranquillus: historicos putes /Fieri poetas...* (But Xiphilinus [Dio] is not silent on this stage, nor does Tacitus remain tacit, or Tranquillus [Suetonius] tranquil: you would think that historians are become poets...', *Nemesis*, A4r; Pref. 54-7). And Gwinne's margination practice is also strikingly different. Where Jonson hectors with imperatives (*vid.*, *leg.*, *consul.*, *confer*), Gwinne's own commands are limited to stage directions, which account for many of the marginal notes in his text and constantly stress the 'performability' of the piece.²² If Gwinne is citing a relevant literary source, he rarely provides specific referencing (most notes simply say 'Dio'; 'Tacit.14' vel sim.) and he never directs the reader to 'compare', 'consider', 'read' as Jonson does. Nor is there a sense in Gwinne's text that the marginal notes serve as a politically defensive measure. In what was clearly a revival of the 'Momus' controversy (the dispute between champions of (university) theatre and Puritan opponents, which had broken out after the Oxford scholar John Rainolds took offence at the provocative 'Momus', a figure added to the epilogue of the Senecan *Hippolytus* staged in 1592 by William Gager),

²² Macleod, *Polybian text*, 278, 323. Again this contrasts with Jonson's drama, which is perversely unwilling to deny dramatic visual spectacle in the play's final act: cf. John Henderson, 'Jonson's Too Roman Plays: From *Julius Caesar* to *Sejanus* and *Catiline*', in Sarah Annes Brown and Catherine Silverstone (eds.), *Tragedy in Transition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007) 103-22.

the preface is preoccupied with the probity of writing and staging tragedy, and offers arguments in favour of the educative role of academic drama.²³

Yet, as Brock Macleod has already recognized, Gwinne's side-notes are much more than window-dressing. He argues that Gwinne's combination of play-text and notes does not simply circumvent the perils of 'application': it also invites complicating nuance, associating the drama with a 'Polybian' sense of historical method.²⁴ In this section I will argue that elsewhere too in *Nero*, and above all in Act IV, Gwinne is consistently aiming to do more than offer a pluralist perspective on the historical period he dramatizes. Instead, I will suggest that we can see via a close study of Gwinne's margins the Oxford scholar undertaking a far more ambitious interrogation of his sources, fundamentally different from the strategy adopted in Jonson's *Sejanus*. For while Jonson relies upon the authenticity of Tacitus to bolster the integrity of his own play, Gwinne takes the opportunity afforded in Nero's divorce of Octavia not only to substantially re-write a history (-play) —the *Octavia*, attributed to Seneca —but also to open up alternative and even competing interpretations of the behaviour of the chief courtier of this section of the play, Seneca himself. Nero thus becomes a play that is not simply protreptic for the monarch, a 'Mirror for the Prince' but also a 'Mirror for Counsellors', a challenge to actors and audience to consider for themselves the complex balancing act of court life and behaviour.

²³ On Gwinne's attack against 'absent Momuses' and the Gager-Rainolds controversy see Sutton, *Nero*, 46-55. Howard B. Norland, *Neoclassical Tragedy in Elizabethan England*, (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2009) 19-45 provides summary of 'responses to the 'anti-theatrical' attitude.

²⁴ Macleod, *Polybian Text* is the only sustained examination I have found of the notes of *Nero* (also in a context which relates them to Jonson's *Sejanus*). While I disagree with his overarching thesis (that *Sejanus*' notes are 'Polybian' in ambition, while *Nero*'s notes are for the most part redundant 'scholarly pretense'), Macleod offers the first attempt at taking *Nero*'s margins seriously and in a study of the notes at 286-91 offers an excellent close reading of a moment of contestation between play-text (in which the character of the emperor Claudius is ridiculed) and margin (which complicates and contests this interpretation with side-notes which high-light Claudius' good sense and intelligence).

Octavia, attributed to Seneca but in fact clearly written some time after the philosopher's demise, was a historical play (*fabula praetexta*) covering Nero's divorce of his virtuous wife in order to marry his mistress Poppaea; and like Gwinne, *Octavia*'s author fuses the historical record with Seneca's own tragic corpus to write Nero as tyrannical monster.²⁵ This play proved highly influential for early modern tragedy, both academic and vernacular, putting a battle in words between Seneca and Nero at its heart, and results (after Seneca's failed attempts to persuade Nero to rule virtuously by evoking the virtuous sentiments of *De Clementia*) in Seneca's withdrawal into retirement; *Octavia* was seminal in cementing Seneca's Renaissance fame as Stoic hero.²⁶ But the play had also attracted the criticism of Seneca's great humanist champion, Justus Lipsius (a fact seized upon by Sir John Sandesbury in a prefatory poem to Gwinne's *Nero*) and it is obvious from the very beginning of Act IV that Gwinne's own 'take' on the fate of *Octavia* is not simple versification but rather emulous competition.²⁷

The central confrontation between Seneca and Nero in *Octavia* (440-592) highlights Gwinne's strategy, which is, not surprisingly, to 'historically source' the encounter more fully. First, Gwinne replaces the intense conversation between Seneca and Nero on the topic of divorce with conversation involving Burrhus, Seneca, Tigellinus and Faenius Rufus drawn closely, as Gwinne points out in his notes, from

²⁵ The date of composition is unknown (immediately after Nero's death anywhere up to the late Flavian period are possible options): see A. J. Boyle, ed., *Octavia: Attributed to Seneca* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) xiii-xxiv. On *Octavia*'s use of historical sources see Rolando Ferri (ed.) *Octavia: A Play Attributed to Seneca* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 9-16.

²⁶ See Gesine Manuwald, 'Der "fürstenspiegel" in Senecas *De Clementia* Und in *Der Octavia*', *Museum Helveticum* 59 (2002) 117-26; Boyle, *Octavia*, 182-3. For Seneca as exemplum in the Renaissance, see James Ker, *The Deaths of Seneca* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Matthias Laarmann, 'Seneca the Philosopher', in Andreas Heil and Gregor Darmschen (eds.), *Brill's Companion to Seneca* (Leiden: Brill, 2014) 53-72.

²⁷ 'Lipsius, have this *Nero* now, worthy or your prayers and eyes: put this *Nero* in place of that *Octavia*, Lipsius, which you think childish, but the unlettered world judges to be by Seneca' (A1r). For more on *Nero*'s transformation of *Octavia* see Buckley, 'Shades of Seneca: the afterlife of the tragedies in Matthew Gwinne's *Nero* (1603)' in Stavros Frangoulidis (ed.), *Roman Drama and its Contexts* (Berlin: De Gruyter, forthcoming 2015).

Dio, Tacitus *Annals* 14, and Suetonius *Nero* 6 (cf. IV. 2778, 2811, 2830, 2839 and IV. 2789: K3v-K4v.). When Gwinne does pit Seneca against Nero, he does not acknowledge the influence of Octavia but instead provides his own ‘independent’ citations of *De Clementia* (notes at IV.2794, 2807: L3v-L4r) in the argument that unfolds. And while the author of *Octavia* invents an ‘Atrean’ Nero, who argues with his tutor through the amoral *sententiae* of Senecan tragedy, Gwinne’s more historically accurate version here concludes with strikingly close attention to Tacitus: Seneca’s final speech in which he pleads to be allowed to retire (IV.2839-66; L4r-L4v), only to be matched by a flattering but dissimulative speech of thanks from Nero (IV.2867-91; L4v-Mr) is a close reworking of *Annals* 14.53-5. Indeed, Nero’s final remark (after his tutor has left) — ‘Thus I hide my hatred behind pleasantries, thus I am born and bred’ (*Sic odia blandis tego, /Sic natus, assuefactus*, Mr; IV.2891-2) — outright ventriloquizes Tacitus’ own comment on Nero’s dissimulating response to Seneca: ‘he was formed by nature and trained by habit to veil his hatred under delusive flattery’ (*factus natura et consuetudine exercitus velare odium fallacibus blanditiis*, *Annals* 14.55).

Here, then, Gwinne’s notes provide an alternative, more scholarly ‘supplement’ to the story of Seneca’s retirement than the *Octavia* provided: an approach to historicizing the encounter not so very far distant from Jonson’s own supplementary method within the text itself in *Sejanus*. But Gwinne’s ‘global’ approach to the story quickly throws up its own interpretative challenges. In the lead-up to the final confrontation between Nero and Seneca, Tigellinus, Nero’s new Praetorian Prefect after Burrhus’ demise, maliciously counsels Nero to get rid of Seneca not because of his virtuous nature, but instead because he is getting in the way of their joint interests (*At Seneca nostris obviam studijs venit*, K4v; IV.2564). He

warns Nero that Seneca is deliberately stockpiling wealth and courting popularity (charges which have been recorded in Tacitus as rumour) and adds the further slur that Seneca's avarice has sparked the rebellion of Boudicca in Britain.²⁸ But when Gwinne's notes direct us not just to Tacitus *Annals* 14 here, but also to Dio (IV.2565; K4v), we find in the ancient text a much more hostile assessment of Seneca which actively blames him for this rebellion (Dio 62.2, p.85):

Another reason for the uprising was that Seneca, in the hope of receiving a good rate of interest, had lent to the islanders 40,000,000 sesterces that they did not want, and had afterwards called in this loan all at once and had resorted to severe measures in exacting it.

Seneca therefore is both the avaricious creature of Dio, and Tacitus' victim of Tigellinus' malice: Gwinne offers no steering interpretation in the margin. But read against the play-text, we might be more mindful of the previous scene in which a tough-talking Burrhus stands up to Nero on his decision to exile Octavia:

Bur. His non probatis pellere insontem placet?

Ne. Placet. *Bur.* Ergo dotem redde in imperio sitā.

Dion.

Ne. Quid ais? *Bur.* Quid aiam, me, Nero, ne bis roges.

Sat est semel dixisse.

(K3v; IV.2505-8)

Bur. Does it please you to drive away Octavia in her innocence, with these things unproved?

²⁸ Cf. especially K4v; IV.2579-81 with *Annals*.14.52).

Ne. It pleases me. *Bur.* Then give her back her dowry, which consists of the empire

Ne. What are you saying? *Bur.* Don't ask me twice what I say, Nero. It suffices to have said it once.

Burrhus' feisty backchat – which effectively seals his death – once again comes from Dio, as the marginal side-note makes clear (Dio 61.13.1-2, p.106):

In Rome Nero first divorced Octavia Augusta, on account of his concubine Sabina, and later he put her to death. He did this in spite of the opposition out of Burrus, who endeavoured to prevent him from divorcing her, and once said to him, “Well, then, give her back her dowry”, by which he meant the sovereignty. Indeed, frankness of speech was characteristic of Burrus and he employed it with such boldness that once, for example, when he was asked by the emperor a second time for his opinion on matters regarding which he had already declared himself, he answered bluntly: “When I have once spoken about anything, don't ask me again”.

It is perhaps hard, after this example of straight-talking, to see as much virtue in Seneca's own response to a similar ethical dilemma not one hundred lines earlier, when he was told by Nero to cover up the death of Agrippina by slandering her: ‘Matricide is easy to commit: it's not so easy to clean up. Nevertheless I obey Nero’ (*Facilè patrari, haud facilè purgari potest, /Materna caedes: pareo Neroni tamen,* K3r; IV.2456-7).

Of course, it could be objected that the confusion we see here is simply the result of an unthinking cut-and-paste approach to history: and it is certainly the case that in the final act of *Nero*, Seneca cuts an impressive figure as he dies in a flurry of intertextual reference to his own consolatory philosophical works. He *dies* well,

then.²⁹ But closer inspection of the role of the margin in pointing up divergent versions of history can only make us more aware of the other additions to the fourth act of Nero that occur nowhere in the ancient historical sources. Thrasea Paetus, another Stoic philosopher who falls foul of Nero and kills himself before Nero's warrant for execution can be carried out —just like Seneca, in fact —actively blames Seneca, not Nero, after the Senate's craven acquiescence in the cover-up of Agrippina's murder. Leaving the Curia after Nero has delivered the speech written by Seneca, Thrasea offers a passionate defence of free speech, which also anticipates Seneca's downfall and blames him for the travesty of justice the senators have all just witnessed:

Thra. Ordo noster seruit, oblitus sui;

Ad seruitutem nata mancipia vt putes.

Si bene: periculum est; si malè, scelestum loqui.

...

Nec ego Neronem culpo, sed Senecam magis;

Confessionem Seneca sic scribit ream?

Immanitate Nero superat omnem fidem,

Questumque. Sed vos agite, sine Thrasea, ut lubet.

Exit Thrasea

Lv-L2r; IV.2643-7; IV.2676-9

²⁹ See Ker, *Deaths of Seneca*. Given that he helped John Florio with his translation of Montaigne, he no doubt remembered Montaigne's own critique of Dio's hostile and inconsistent attitude to Seneca as 'counterfet philosopher' (*The essayes or morall, politike and militarie discourses of Lo: Michaell de Montaigne, Knight of the noble Order of St. Michaell, and one of the gentlemen in ordinary of the French king, Henry the third his chamber. The first booke. First written by him in French. And now done into English by him that hath inviolably vowed his labors to the aeternitie of their honors, whose names he hath severally inscribed on these his consecrated altares. ... John Florio: London, 1603*), II.32.

(Thrasea: Forgetful of itself, our Senate has become servile, so that you would think it a purchased slave born for submission. To say something favourable is dangerous: to say something unfavourable is criminal. (...)

Nor do I blame Nero, but rather Seneca. Did Seneca pen this confession of his own guilt? In his cruelty Nero surpasses all belief, all ability to complain. But you senators act as you wish - absent Thrasea. (*Exit*.)

This goes far beyond the comment of Tacitus' *Annals*, which merely records Thrasea's departure from the Senate:³⁰

Therefore it was not now Nero, whose monstrosity (*immanitas*) exceeded all complaint, who was the subject of adverse rumour, but Seneca: for he had written a confession by such speech-writing' (*sed Seneca adverso rumore erat, quod oratione tali confessionem scripsisset. Ann.14.11.4*).³¹

It would be possible then to suggest, then, that while the play-text itself is 'comprehensive', in the different models of engagement with tyranny Gwinne offers—in particular the straight-talking of Burrhus and Thrasea versus the acquiescence of Seneca—Gwinne's margins invite real engagement in the contradictory approaches the historical record takes to Seneca's role as courtier. Unlike Jonson's much more aggressively controlling approach to marginalization in *Sejanus*, Gwinne's notes demand

³⁰ See Tacitus, *Annals* 14.12.2: *Thrasea Paetus silentio vel brevi adsensu priores adulationes transmittere solitus exiit tum senatu, ac sibi causam periculi fecit, ceteris libertatis initium non praeibuit*. ('Thrasea Paetus, accustomed previously to bypass previous sycophancies in silence or with brief assent, on that day departed from the Senate and put himself in jeopardy: nor did he offer to the other senators the beginnings of liberty').

³¹ See, too, the opening of Act IV in which the ghost of Agrippina warns that she will not allow the death of Octavia to go unpunished: 'But neither she, you, nor Seneca, will accomplish such an evil deed in safety (*Nec illa, nec tu, nec Seneca tantum nefas / Tutò auferetis* Kr, IV.2282-3). No historical source implicates Seneca in the crime of divorcing Octavia. On the Agrippinas of *Octavia* and Gwinne, see Sutton, *Nero*, ad loc., and Buckley, 'Shades of Seneca'.

an audience already competent to adjudicate between the competitive web of reference offered in divergent versions of ancient history and to recognize Gwinne's own original intervention in that record.

This explorative rather than homiletic approach is complemented by a similarly more open approach to the range of sources Gwinne offers in his margins. Take the meeting of Octavia and Seneca, another episode without precedent in the historical record. Seneca approaches with solicitous words which are immediately rebuffed by anachronistically well-informed argument (L2v ; IV.2715-20):

Sen. Augusta, quô te fata lugentem trahunt?

Oct. Nos, Seneca, fugimus; tu philosopharis domi.

Sed num philosophi sic in vxores docent?

Pellere pudicas, capere meretrices domo?

Itane docebas? Itane discebat Nero?

Nequiter vterque; vterque nequitiam luat.

Monstrum est philosophus aulicus: neutrum puto, *Policratic. l.5. c.10.*

Vterque qui vult esse: conueniunt malè.

(*Sen.*: Augusta, where are the Fates dragging you in your grief?)

Oct.: 'I am going into exile, Seneca: you are philosophizing at home. But is this what the philosophers preach regarding wives, to banish the modest, and to keep your whores at home? Is this what you preached? Is this what Nero learned? Both you and Nero are vile, and both should pay the penalty for your vileness. A courtier-philosopher is a monstrous thing. I think the one who wants to be both is neither: the two roles have nothing in common).

Gwinne's Octavia does not absolve Seneca of guilt for the predicament she finds herself in: instead she accuses him of collusion in Nero's tyranny, utilizing the political theory of John of Salisbury's *Policraticus* (1159) to do so. This proto-humanist treatise, dedicated to Thomas Becket and itself written by a philosopher-tutor embroiled in twelfth-century court and church politics, clearly belongs to the 'mirror for princes' genre, with its fusion of Christian thought and classical learning, but also goes beyond simple protreptic to meditate more fundamentally, and with a 'realist', even proto-Machiavellian attitude, on the relationship between ruler and ruled. Indeed, *Policraticus* does not just argue that the ruler's purpose is to advance the prosperity of the commonwealth, subordinating his own will to the public good: it also pays attention to the role of the individuals who serve the Prince, stressing the importance of wise counsel for the monarch (John offers up both the Athens' Gerousia and the Roman Senate as good examples, V.6-9) and the link between virtue and liberty, in which (*Polic.* VII:25):

Liberty means judging everything freely in accordance with one's individual judgment, and does not hesitate to reprove what it sees opposed to good morals. [...] Wherefore, since all agree that virtue is the highest good in life, and that it alone can strike off the heavy and hateful yoke of slavery, it has been the opinion of philosophers that men should die, if need arose, for the sake of virtue, which is the only reason for living.

Here Octavia has not reminded Seneca of the link between liberty and virtue: instead she has condemned his failure to live up to the standards of 'wise counsel' demanded in John's vision of the ideal society, and her words, accompanied by an unusually

focussed marginal note in Book V of *Policraticus*, underpin the accusation Seneca is a ‘monstrous’ courtier-philosopher (V: 10):

He who has put on the fripperies of the court, and still promises the duty of the philosopher and good man, is Hermaphroditus: the man who shames womanly charm with a hard and bristly face, and whose womanly ways have polluted and defiled man. A courtier-philosopher is a monstrous thing. While he affects the appearance of both, he is neither (*Res siquidem monstruosa est, Philosophus curialis: et dum utrumque esse affectat, neutrum est*): since there is no place for philosophy at court, and the philosopher has no truck whatsoever with court follies.

In other words, Gwinne has not just gone beyond the historical sources here: in obvious contrast to Jonson’s *Sejanus*, which claims that it is written solely from the historical record, Nero’s margin explicitly opens up the audience’s horizon of interpretation to invite further reflection on Seneca’s behaviour via a text which offers not just both moral edification but also philosophical speculation, in a way which (from Octavia’s point of view, anyway) clearly condemns Seneca’s balancing act at court. It would seem that Octavia’s antagonist Poppaea has succeeded in her project to make Seneca a ‘Sejanus’ for Nero.³²

In fact, Gwinne’s margins often range beyond the historical sources in the final two acts of the play, inviting consideration alongside other texts which positively encourage wider moral and political interpretation. In addition to a further reference

³² ‘As Sejanus was of use to your grandfather, let Seneca be of use to you’ (*Seianus ut avo, sic Seneca prosit tibi... Nero*, K4v; IV. 2594). On *Policraticus* see Cary Nederman, *John of Salisbury* (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005); on the role of the ruler and the place of virtue in *Policraticus*, see Quentin Taylor, ‘John of Salisbury, the *Policraticus*, and Political Thought’, *Humanitas* 19 (2006) 533-571.

to *Policraticus*, made when Nero decides to ‘divide and rule’ by appointing two commanders of the Praetorian guard as the doomed Pisonian conspiracy gets underway (K4r, IV.2538; cf. *Polic.* I.7), Gwinne suggests we consult Macchiavelli’s chapter ‘Of Conspiracies’ from his *Discourses on Livy* (O2r; V.3530, O2v; V.3558; the note reads ‘*Macch. in Liv. 3.6*’). And as Nero moves to get rid of the troublesome philosopher, he recalls the incident recalled in Plutarch’s *Praecepta Gerendae Reipublicae* (‘Precepts of Statesmanship’, 810a).³³ As Seneca in turn reflects on his role as courtier, Gwinne points us to the *Aulicus politicus diversis regulis* (1597) of the German lawyer Durus de Pascolo (Eberhard von Weyhe), another work in the mirror for princes’ tradition which offers an aphoristic collection of examples concerning the right behaviour of the courtier and his relationship with his prince which uses Seneca as a model at *Aul. Pol.* 251 and 349 (cf. Nero L3r, IV.2763).³⁴ And as the reach of Nero extends beyond the extant Tacitus, Gwinne directs his audience to compare his play-text with Sir Henry Savile’s recent translation *The Ende of Nero* to write Nero’s demise (R4v-S2r; V.4593, 4639, 4691, 4996). Savile’s translation clearly dovetails with Gwinne’s own project, offering not just impressive evidence of polymathic learning via its own careful marginalia practice, but also a determinedly political, as opposed to moral, dissection of the failures of Nero’s reign.³⁵

³³ In Philemon Holland’s 1603 translation (*The philosophie, commonlie called, the morals vvritten by the learned philosopher Plutarch of Chaeronea. Translated out of Greeke into English, and conferred with the Latine translations and the French, by Philemon Holland of Coventrie, Doctor in Physicke. VVhereunto are annexed the summaries necessary to be read before every treatise*, (London, 1603), H1v, p362: ‘Thus *Nero*, a cruell tyrant though he was, a little before he put *Thruseas* to death, whom he hated and feared most of all men in the world, notwithstanding one laied to his charge before him that he had given a wrong dome or unjust sentence: I would (quoth he) that I could be assured that *Thruseas* loved me so well as I am sure he a is most upright and just Judge’: cf. Nero: *Quàm iustus,ò tam Cæsarem Thruseas amet* (‘What a just fellow! May Thrusea love Caesar so greatly!’) (R1r; 5.4313).

³⁴ On von Weyhe see Wilhelm Kühlmann et al. (eds.) *Killy Literaturlexikon: Autoren Und Werke Des Deutschsprachigen Kulturraums. Band 12 Vo-Z* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009) 356-7.

³⁵ On the topical and polemical aspects of Savile’s translation see esp. Womersley, ‘Savile’s Translation of Tacitus’; Malcolm Smuts, ‘Court-Centred Politics and the Uses of Roman Historians,

Gwinne's marginalization is not consistent, and not every note bristles with complicating or polemical intent. Nevertheless, it is striking that Gwinne (unlike Jonson) is clearly not concerned about limiting interpretation within strict boundaries in this play. Rather, his marginalization policy encourages the reader to roam beyond the source text, to examine history in the light of ancient and modern philosophy and political theory, actively connecting the historical record of the play to the ethical, political, exemplary and educational texts of the margin. The praise offered to the rebel Vindex in Sir Henry Savile's *Ende of Nero*, together with that author's links to the rebellious Earl of Essex, has been well explored, and was perhaps a provocative choice.³⁶ Perhaps Machiavelli too: Gwinne's own colleague at St John's, John Case, for example, had strongly condemned Machiavelli in his *Sphaera Civitatis* (1588) for amoral pragmatism and atheism, and rejoiced that no translation of material he considered more harmful even than Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* or Albertius' *De Faeminarum Secretis* was available in English.³⁷ John of Salisbury was potentially even more explosive: famously *Policraticus* was the first post-antique political treatise to advocate regicide in certain circumstances: when a ruler is 'absolutely ruinous', John argued, tyrannicide is both justified and just. And of course his exemplum for such disastrous misrule was Nero (VIII.18-20).³⁸

c.1590-1630', in Kevin Sharpe (ed.), *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England* (London: Macmillan, 1994) 21-44; Paulina Kewes, 'Henry Savile's Tacitus and the Politics of Roman History in Late Elizabethan England', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 74 (2011) 515-51.

³⁶ On Savile and Essex see Alexandra Gajda, *The Earl of Essex and Late Elizabethan Political Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 226-236, 242-3.

³⁷ Case, *Sphaera Civitatis* (Oxford, 1588), A2r: See Alessandra Petrina, *Machiavelli in the British Isles: Two Early Modern Translations of The Prince* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 1-46, esp. 21-3.

³⁸ See esp. Cary J. Nederman, 'A Duty to Kill: John of Salisbury's Theory of Tyrannicide', *The Review of Politics* 50 (1988), 365-89; Kate Forhan, 'Salisburian stakes - the uses of tyranny in John-of-Salisbury's *Policraticus*', *History of Political Thought* 11 (1990), 397-407. On Nero's possible engagement with resistance-theory see Buckley 'Matthew Gwinne's Nero (1603): Seneca, Academic Drama, and the Politics of Polity', in Teresa Grant and Katie Fleming (eds.) *Seneca in the English Tradition: Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 40 (2013), 16-33.

Gwinne's *Nero* ranges, then, far beyond the narrow horizon of interpretation authorized in the marginal strategies of Jonson's *Sejanus*. Of course, it can afford to, for the structuring principle of divine over-watch for the play ensures that its audience can be repeatedly reminded of the divine justice that will come to Nero. But if we pay attention to the margins, even here we might see a more 'Jonsonian' complexity of motivation being worked out. To return to Nemesis' beginning (A3v; Prol.5-7, 13-26):

<i>Debita sceleribus flagra, Iustitiæ manus,</i>	Arist. de mund.
<i>Distribuo Nemesis; siquis in sequitur scelus,</i>	Nat. Com. myth.
<i>Insector Adrasteia, nec quisquam effugit.</i>	l.9.c.19.l.3.c.10.
...	
<i>Quod si Tragædis materia primùm malis</i>	
<i>Patheticis turbata, lachrymosa, horrida,</i>	
<i>Quærat; vllum terra sustinuit, tulit</i>	
<i>Natura, vidit Phæbus, historia edidit,</i>	
<i>Vel par NERONI, vel parallelum malum?</i>	
<i>Quin si sit illis arbiter rerum Chorus,</i>	
<i>Iudex, vel index, qui malis abstet, bonis</i>	Hor. art poet.
<i>Faueat, vtrisque sua tribuat, oret Deos,</i>	.191.
<i>Fortuna miseris redeat, à tumidis eat ;</i>	
<i>Quin nos facinorum uindices, æquæ arbitrae?</i>	
<i>Agenda quin prædicimus, quoniam Deæ?</i>	Orph.hymn.
<i>Interpretamur acta, Iustitiæ assecleæ?</i>	Eumenid.
<i>Acta, uel agenda, linquimus inultum nihil?</i>	
<i>Nunc, unde ueniant, scelera quæ uenient loquar (...)</i>	

(I, Nemesis, Hand of Justice, mete out well-earned lashings to crimes. If any evil deed impends, as Adrasteia I make my attack, nor does anyone escape. [[..] And if there is to be a Chorus to govern these proceedings as judge or narrator, to shun the evil and support the good, rendering both kinds their due, to pray the gods that Fortune return to the wretched but depart from the arrogant, who should it be but us, avengers of crime, dispensers of justice? Do we not know what is to happen, being goddesses? Do we not interpret what has been done, being ministers of justice? Do we leave anything unavenged, past or future? Now I shall tell you whence come the coming crimes...)

When Nemesis speaks of the Furies here she explicitly twins their role as deliverers of justice with the kind of politically and culturally conservative values entirely appropriate for the homiletic environment, bolstered by the bravura display of ‘amplification’ in the accompanying notes.³⁹ Yet there is one specific direction in these margins which sticks out: the reference to Horace’s *Ars Poetica*. And this reference is obviously incongruous, for here Horace advises playwrights, ‘Don’t let a god intervene in the action, unless there’s a difficulty worthy of an avenger’ (*Nec Deus intersit, nisi dignus vindice nodus / incidit, AP.191*).⁴⁰ Sutton, noting that the meaning behind this note is not ‘self-evident’, suggests either that it might explain why no gods participate in the action of the play itself, or might hint that the audience

³⁹ *De Mundo*, a translation of pseudo-Aristotle’s *Peri Kosmou*, attributed to Apuleius, deals not just with the nature of the universe but also the role of providence and (at 38.2) addresses the role of Adrasteia within the operation of fate; the Orphic Hymn on the *Eumenides* (69), which concentrates on their role as punishers of the unjust, rounds out the philosophical-religious reflection; and philosophy is bolstered by allegorizing commentary in the form of Natale Conte’s *Mythologiae*, which explains that Nemesis is the destroyer of ‘arrogant leaders’ (*superbos duces*; 9.19): cf. Macleod, *Polybian Historiography*, 279-80.

⁴⁰ *Q. Horatii Flacci Venusini, poetae lyrici, poëmata omnia doctissimis scholijs illustrata* (London, 1574) 318.

should understand Nero's downfall as the result of 'behind-the-scenes' work by the Furies.⁴¹ Both interpretations force the reader to confront the more obvious fact, however: that in the action of the play *itself*, the Furies and Nemesis play no role in Nero's downfall after all. There is no *deus ex machina* to bring Nero's evil reign to an end, but there *is* Vindex, a flesh-and-blood human being, as Gwinne surely puns here (*vindice*, Horace *AP*.191).⁴² Right from the beginning, then, Gwinne's complicates the 'morality' tale with a note signalling a 'Tacitist' narrative of complex human cause-and-effect.

Indeed, while the Chorus continue to offer excellent exemplary comment throughout the play, there is no doubt that they become steadily demoralized. The end of Acts I and II promise divine justice and even assert the doctrine of Divine Right explicitly (Fv-F2r; II. 1241-1252).⁴³ But by the end of Act III Megaera offers a much more pessimistic point of view on all mankind: ('Man is not a god, but a wolf to his fellow man. [...] Men are the Furies, we the Kindly Ones', I3r-I3v; III. 2203, 2216-7). And with the conclusion of act IV, it is now far from clear that Nero's descent has anything to do with Nemesis at all in an external sense:

Fate besets tyranny. No tyrannical rule is as savage as that of guilt-stricken mind.
[...]This mind is as like the three Furies, hostile, avenging, malevolent.⁴⁴ Nero's impending doom is now paradoxically not an end engineered by divine agents of justice: rather these agents of justice reflect a psychological state of mind.

⁴¹ Sutton, *Nero* ad loc.; cf. Macleod, *Polybian Text*, 281-2.

⁴² This role has obvious resonance in the vernacular theatre too: on revenge and resistance theory on the commercial stage, see Linda Woodbridge, *English Revenge Drama: Money, Resistance, Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 167-188.

⁴³ Sutton, *Nero* ad loc. notes that these words are closely imitated by William Gager, who transposes the sentiments into his 1608 *Pyramis*, a poem on the Gunpowder Plot written for King James and clearly echoing his position on the question of absolute monarchy.

⁴⁴ *Vrgent fata tyrannidem. /Tam trux nulla tyrannis est, /Quàm mentis malè consciaë [...]* Hæc, ut tres Furiaë, inuidens, /Vlciscens, cupiens malè. (M4r-M4v; IV.3101-3, 3110).

Nemesis and the Furies become themselves perhaps, then, the most ‘marginal’ figures in the text: deployed as a contextualizing framework, they offer a politically unobjectionable but hardly fully interventionist role within the play, like Jonson’s Germanicans, who function as pointedly side-lined observers with no place in this political narrative of rise and fall. Indeed, even when Nemesis returns to celebrate Nero’s downfall, she speaks in the voice of Savile’s translation of Nero’s end to remark the joy of Rome’s nobility at its newly regained liberty *The Ende of Nero* (T3r; V.4996).⁴⁵

Conclusion

Gwinne’s margins do not collaborate with the centre, as Jonson’s *Sejanus* do: they do not attempt to shut down meaning. Instead, from the very beginning *Nero*’s margins open up questions of causality, challenge easy exemplarity, and stress multiple and divergent versions of history. In asking its audience to make sense of the play in terms which place the classic ‘Turn of Fortune’ narrative into counterpoint with the Tacitean narrative, Gwinne does not so much make sense of Nero’s reign from a providential perspective as challenge the audience to construct that perspective for themselves. Unlike *Sejanus*, Gwinne’s *Nero* was never staged: its provocative reach was limited to those prepared to read both text and margin with painstaking care. Still, its popularity can be measured in the fact that when questions of resistance to tyranny ceased to be theoretical and the country descended into civil war, *Nero*, like Savile’s

⁴⁵ Cf. Sutton, *Nero* ad loc: ‘A sidenote cites Sir Henry Savile, *The Ende of Nero and Beginning of Galba. Fower Bookes of the Histories* (1591) sig. ¶ iii^v, *Nero being slaine, the people and gentlemen, but principallie the nobilitie, the principall object of tyrannie, sacrificed to the gods and feasted for ioie: some also ware Bonnets, as beeing newlie enfranchised.*”

Ende of Nero, was sufficiently in demand to require reprints in 1638 and 1639. And if as a play its chaotic sprawl fails to offer the concentrated and transgressive meditation on the corruption of power offered in *Sejanus*, at least in the margins Gwinne's *Nero* deserves to be recognized as a sophisticated negotiation of life under monarchy, one worthy to be considered alongside other early modern explorations of tyranny and kingship via Roman imperial history.