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## Studies in Senecan Drama: Reception, Fatalism, and Meter

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Studies in Senecan Drama: Reception, Fatalism, and Meter

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Languages and Literature  
of Bard College

by  
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## Introduction

In his tragedies, Seneca regularly engages in discourse with the authors of the past and ideas formulated in his own prose works. The myths he chooses for his plays are ancient, but he makes subtle changes to them so that the narrative can remain in line with his philosophical beliefs. Living in a period conventionally defined as the silver age of Latin poetry, he cites and paraphrases passages from Vergil, Horace, and other Roman poets of the golden age. But he does not always agree with them. As Roman comedians did before him, he writes dialogues in iambic trimeter. But his trimeter is different from theirs and more closely resembles the meter of classical Greek tragedy. For these and other reasons, the study of Senecan poetry is, to a significant extent, the study of the reception of classical texts by Seneca. The general aim of this project is to situate Senecan tragedies within the broader context of Greek and Latin drama by showing how Seneca responds to ideas embraced by his predecessors and employs various dramatic techniques to emphasize his position on a given issue.

My approach is for each chapter to look at the Seneca's drama from a different perspective, while at the same time keeping with the general aim just stated. The first three chapters are each devoted to a particular play of Seneca and are arranged in chronological order of the plays' composition.<sup>1</sup> Each chapter shows how Seneca incorporates his philosophical views into his texts, but the three chapters together also demonstrate that these views change over time.

I begin my analysis with *Oedipus*, one of the early plays of Seneca, in which he attempts

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<sup>1</sup> The relative dating of Seneca's tragedies is a difficult problem, but *Oedipus*, *Hercules furens*, and *Thyestes* can be arranged with a very high certainty thanks to the research done by Fitch (1981), which I discuss at greater length in chapter four.

to reinterpret the ancient myth as we know it from Sophocles. Seneca preserves the overall narrative but makes some of its elements more ambiguous so as to reconcile the myth with his philosophical views concerning plagues and earthquakes. *Oedipus* is unique because there is no other play of Seneca, in which natural phenomena take such a preeminent position.

In the second chapter, I turn to *Hercules furens*. Here too, Seneca deviates from the Greek, this time Euripidean, model. More interestingly, he engages in dialogue with Horace over the concept of deification. Seneca was in no way compelled to cite or argue with Horace in his work, and the fact that he does do so make *Hercules furens* an interesting play to analyze. As he does in *Oedipus*, Seneca tries to advocate for his philosophical views, only this time, the discussion shifts from the realm of natural philosophy to that of ethics.

All tragedies of Seneca are based on myths that playwright have exploited before him, and Seneca always borrows something from the famous plays of the past. But for the modern reader, *Thyestes* is unlike any of the Senecan tragedies because no other play written before Seneca on the subject has survived to our times. For this very reason, *Thyestes* is at the center of the third chapter, in which I will consider whether we can still discern the motives that Seneca must have introduced to the play by his own initiative.

In the fourth chapter, I will discuss iambic trimeter, the most common of tragic meters. Seneca's trimeter is much looser than that of Horace or Catullus, but much stricter than the iambic senarius of early Latin comedians.<sup>2</sup> This, and the fact that the Senecan corpus<sup>3</sup> contains the only ten extant Roman tragedies, makes it difficult to find a work to which Seneca's trimeter

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2 Plautus and Terence admit resolutions in any odd-numbered syllable (hence the meter is called senarius rather than trimeter), Catullus allows none. Seneca and Horace lie somewhere in between, with the latter being more conservative. For iambic trimeter in Roman poetry, see Morgan (114-181), who mentions Seneca only passingly.

3 Here and elsewhere, "Senecan corpus" refers to the eight genuine Senecan plays combined with *Octavia* and *Hercules Oetaeus*, which are generally believed to be spurious and written shortly after Senecan death.



could be meaningfully compared. For this reason, and also due to my personal interest in Humanist tragedies, the fourth chapter will compare Senecan trimeter to the meter employed by Italian playwrights of the Renaissance.

The last chapter is the result of more than two years of work and is the draft of the article, which will be co-authored with the members of the Quantitative Criticism Lab and will be submitted for publication in the coming months. The final version of the article will contain sections not written by myself, but the text submitted as part of this project is written exclusively by me. That said, this text would not have been possible were it not for the help and feedback of the Quantitative Criticism Lab members.

A few notes are in order about the editions used in this study and some of the assumptions I make. The Latin text of the tragedies comes from Zwierlein's 1986 critical edition. For all other texts of Seneca, I use the corresponding Loeb editions. All translations in the first three chapters are mine unless specified otherwise. The fourth chapter uses Grund's edition of the Humanist tragedies for both the Latin text and the English translations. I also use Fitch's Loeb translation of Seneca's plays throughout the last chapter, unless specified otherwise.

With one exception, I do not make assumptions about the absolute dating of the tragedies, because there is almost no evidence on which such dating can be performed. Some of my argumentation in second chapter will, however, imply that Seneca wrote *Hercules furens* after returning from exile and becoming Nero's tutor. This assumption is reasonable because most scholars who attempt a dating place *Hercules furens* in that period.<sup>4</sup> This includes Fitch, who in his edition of the play, seems to admit that *Hercules furens* was most likely written shortly

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4 This includes Rose (1980:142) and the prevailing majority of scholars cited by Herzog (1928) in his article on the relative dating of the tragedies: Birt, Münscher, Jonas, and Peiper. Herzog himself places *HF* around the moment of Seneca's return from exile.

before Claudius' death.<sup>5</sup> It should be stressed, however, that some scholars prefer not to date *Hercules furens* or any other of the Senecan tragedies at all,<sup>6</sup> and any dating must be met with a degree of skepticism.

I hope that this project will allow the reader to appreciate the many ways in which Seneca uses drama to engage in conversation with ideas of the past and test dramatic techniques employed by his predecessors.

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5 Fitch (1987) is extremely careful not to state anything explicitly, but he says that much: "The ease with which Seneca adapts phrases from *HF* [in *Apocolocyntosis*] suggests that the tragedy was fresh in his mind and had either been written, or at any rate presented in a *recitatio*, within a year or two of 54. It will be seen that such a date is not inconsistent with Quintilian's evidence for Seneca's activity in tragedy [during this period]."

6 Harsh (1944), in his *Handbook of Classical Drama*, is completely silent on the matter.

## Chapter I

### Sophoclean Myth in Seneca's *Oedipus*

Each of the eight Senecan tragedies is, as has been noted by Tarrant, “imbued with Seneca's particular philosophical outlook.”<sup>1</sup> Each of the plays can be perused in search of expressions and ideas that justify Seneca's beliefs, particularly his moral views. But *Oedipus* is unique in that it gives a glimpse of Seneca's natural philosophy as well with much of the discussion in the play revolving around diseases and physical defects. The story is set in motion by a plague ravaging the city of Thebes; The story continues with the struggles of blind Teiresias to put his divination skills to use; the story ends with Oedipus blinding himself. Seneca's portrayals of the Theban plague and Teiresias' blindness are eclectic, with some details being borrowed from various ancient sources and others apparently being Seneca's own inventions. In the end, his play is quite different from its model, Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*. The goal of this chapter is to show how Seneca's depiction of diseases, particularly of the Theban plague, is different from that of Sophocles.

While the plot of Seneca's *Oedipus* is borrowed from Sophocles, there are several structural differences between the two works, and so I will outline the narrative here highlighting these differences along the way. Both plays open with an exposition in which the plague is described in some detail. Soon afterward, Creon arrives from Delphi with an oracle about the plague. In *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the oracle makes it clear that the plague is the consequence of Laius' murder: only by punishing the criminal can the city redeem itself; the murderer must

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<sup>1</sup> Tarrant 1985:22-3.

either be executed or exiled.<sup>2</sup> In Seneca's *Oedipus*, this causal link between the king's death and the epidemic is absent: the oracle only promises that the plague will leave Thebes together with the murderer of Laius.<sup>3</sup> In Seneca's tragedy, therefore, the question of what the plague's origin is, remains unanswered and up for interpretation.

In Sophocles, the first person to entertain the notion that Oedipus is responsible for the scourge is Teiresias, who calls the king “the damned defiler of the land” (γῆς τῆσδ’ ἀνόσιος μιάστωρ, 353). In Seneca, the idea is introduced by Creon, who claims that he has heard it from the ghost of Laius, whom Teiresias had allegedly summoned from the dead.<sup>4</sup> Creon is not a sage, he is a much less respectable figure than Teiresias is, and he is much more difficult to believe. Seneca's Oedipus eventually concludes that Creon speaks the truth, but there is much less certainty about the plague's origin in the Senecan play. In both the Greek and the Latin versions, Oedipus blinds himself upon learning the truth.<sup>5</sup> The Senecan tragedy concludes with Oedipus leaving the city; in Sophocles' version, Creon forces Oedipus to stay. Both plays end before there is any indication that the plague dies out.

Crucial to the understanding of Seneca's *Oedipus* is the conflict between the author's philosophical views and the legend on which the play is based. According to Sophocles, the plague is of divine origin; it is a punishment for the unavenged murder of Laius. As mentioned above, Seneca avoids drawing this connection between divine anger and the epidemic, and his decision not to do so stems from his philosophical beliefs. In *Questiones Naturales*, he describes

2 “[Phoebus orders us to purify the city] by exiling [the murderer of Laius] or by repaying murder with murder, since it is this blood [of Laius] is raising a storm upon the city” (Ἀνδρηλατοῦντας ἢ φόνω φόνον πάλιν / λύοντας, ὡς τόδ’ αἶμα χεμάζον πόλιν, 100-1). The Greek is from Lloyd Jones' Loeb edition (1994).

3 “The placid stars will return to Cadmean Thebes, if the stranger leaves Ismenian Dirce in exile, [who is] guilty of the king's murder and was known to Phoebus already as an infant” (*Mitia Cadmeis remeabunt sidera Thebis, / si profugus Dirce Ismenida liquerit hospes / regis caede nocens, Phoebus iam notus et infans*, 233-5). The Latin is from Zwielerlein's critical edition (1986).

4 See 530-658.

5 Oedipus' motivation for blinding himself is somewhat different in the two plays (see Boyle's introduction), but this is not pertinent to the current discussion.

the plague as a natural phenomena,<sup>6</sup> and in several of his works he writes that natural phenomena should never be attributed to divine anger. This idea is articulated most clearly in *De Ira*: “[only] madmen and those who do not know the truth consider the fury of the sea, [and] excessive rain to be of their [gods'] doing ... we admire ourselves too much, if we think ourselves worthy of causing such great things” (*dementes ... et ignari ueritatis illis imputant saeuitiam maris, inmodicos imbres ... , nimis nos suspicimus, si digni nobis uidemur propter quos tanta moueantur, De Ira II.27.2*).<sup>7</sup> In *Oedipus*, therefore, Seneca attempts to reconcile his beliefs with the myth as we know it from Sophocles. I think that he succeeds in finding a compromise and in this chapter, I will attempt to reconstruct Seneca's version of the myth. I will ultimately argue that Oedipus is the source of the disease but that the plague has very little to do with Laius' murder. Rather, I will claim that the ἀρχὴ κακῶν for Thebes lay in the rod which Oedipus' parents have driven through his feet and in the infection caused by it.

In other words, my argument will be that Seneca intentionally subverts the traditional myth, that the gods, divine influence, and the supernatural are all but absent from his play. In later chapters, I will compare *Oedipus* to *Hercules Furens* and *Thyestes* and will show that Seneca's approach to the latter two plays is less radical. If Fitch is right, *Oedipus* must be one of the earliest of the Senecan tragedies. Seneca's radical approach to Oedipus can, therefore, be explained by a high degree of self-confidence that Seneca might have developed during his early years, or, perhaps, after returning from exile to the court.

### (i) Where do Plagues come from?

Seneca says a lot about plagues in his prose and it is worth summarizing his views on the

6 For specific passages, see below.

7 The Latin is from Barose's 2014 Loeb edition. Cf. also *QNat.* VI.2.4.

subject before proceeding to the Theban plague itself. In his philosophical works, Seneca uses the term “plague” (*pestilentia*) to describe diseases one contracts by inhaling the polluted air. According to Seneca, such diseases often appear after earthquakes, when the poisonous underground air finds its way to the surface and pollutes the atmosphere.<sup>8</sup> Seneca believes every plague to be contagious because the sick contaminate the air with their breath.<sup>9</sup> This is where plague is similar to anger: like a contagious disease, anger can spread from one person to the next.<sup>10</sup> Seneca also argues that a plague attacks everyone indiscriminately, just like anger does.<sup>11</sup> In several places, he says that it is possible to escape the plague by fleeing to a foreign land.<sup>12</sup>

It is important to understand that a plague is simultaneously a physical, social, and mental disease. It usually affects the body first, but it can infect the mind as well: as I will discuss below, the sick in *Oedipus* are on the verge of insanity. Even those unaffected by the disease proper are driven crazy as they lose their families and friends to the plague: in one of the most metrically decorated passages in the play,<sup>13</sup> Oedipus explicitly calls the mother whose children are dead *amens* (“insane”, 60). Oedipus is the king, the “head” of the state, and throughout the play, he tries to act as a physician and cure the country of the plague. This metaphor of a king acting like a physician is prominent in *De Ira*, and I will have more to say about it in the

8 See *QNat.* VI.27.2: “They say, in fact, that a plague often occurs after strong earthquakes: and this is not surprising. For a lot of deadly things lurk below: the air itself, which grows stiff either because of inactivity, eternal darkness, or some fault of the earth, is heavy for those breathing it.” (*Aiunt enim solere post magnos terrarum motus pestilentiam fieri, nec id mirum est. Multa enim mortifera in alto latent. Aer ipse, qui uel terrarum culpa uel pigritia et aeterna nocte torpescit, grauis haurientibus est*). Cf. also *De Consolatione ad Marciam* XXVI: “[Time] sends the breath of plague from below” (*ex infimo pestilentiae halitus mittet*). Here and thereafter, the Latin text of *QNat.* is from Corcoran's 2014 Loeb edition, of consolations – from Barose's edition.

9 See *De tranq. anim.* VII.4: “As in time of plague we must take care not to sit with people already seized by and flaming with disease, because [by so doing] we draw the dangers near and suffer from [their] breath...” (*Itaque, ut in pestilentia curandum est ne correptis iam corporibus et morbo flagrantibus assideamus, quia pericula trahemus afflatuque ipso laborabimus*). The Latin is from Barose's edition.

10 See *De Ira.* III.2.2.

11 See *De Ira.* III.5.1.

12 See *QNat.* VI.1.6: “In time of plague one can change their place of abode. No disaster is without a way out” (*in pestilentia mutare sedes licet: nullum malum sine effugio est*). Cf. also *De Consolatione ad Helviam* VII.5.

13 See the last chapter for a discussion of this line Seneca's metrical practice in general.

upcoming sections.

Curiously, Seneca never uses the term *pestilentia* in *Oedipus* or any other of his plays. To denote the plague in the tragedy, he instead employs the word *lues*, the word that rarely appears in his prose.<sup>14</sup> It is as if he was talking about two different types of plague that have nothing to do with each other. It is even tempting to believe that Seneca uses two different terms to hide the inconsistencies between his philosophical beliefs and the Oedipus myth. However, the most likely reason behind Seneca's decision to replace *pestilentia* with *lues* is metrical: no word that appears in Seneca's trimeters yields the same metrical pattern as *pestilentia*. I will, therefore, assume that Seneca's decision to supplant *pestilentia* with *lues* was motivated solely by the meter.

In *Oedipus*, the plague, *lues*, is described at some length first by Oedipus himself (37-70) and then by the chorus (110-201). Seneca offers two different perspectives on the matter: that of a king untouched by the disease and that of Theban citizens suffering from the epidemic.<sup>15</sup> In the upcoming two sections, I will scrutinize these two descriptions to collect evidence for my argument about the origins of the Theban plague.

There are several authors who wrote about the plague before Seneca and to whom Seneca can be compared in this respect. Beside Sophocles, the three most important among these are Lucretius, Thucydides, and Homer.<sup>16</sup> These authors were undoubtedly familiar to Seneca and even now their texts constitute a representative sample of how a plague can be depicted in

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<sup>14</sup> *lues* appears in *Ep.* XCV.29, but, as far as I can tell, nowhere else in Seneca's prose.

<sup>15</sup> It is safe to assume that the chorus or at least some part of it is suffering from the plague: its members mention that their *animus* is *aeger* (204) and that because of this they are uncertain whether the man they see approaching is Creon or not.

<sup>16</sup> To these could have been added Vergil and Ovid, but they are arguably less important to the discussion. Homer is crucial, because he is the oldest poet to mention a plague, Thucydides – because he is the first one to describe a plague first hand, Sophocles – because he is the author of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Lucretius – because Seneca repeatedly borrows from him.

literature.<sup>17</sup> I will refer to them throughout this chapter.

## (ii) The Plague and the Chorus

The chorus is mostly concerned with the way the disease propagates. It lists the symptoms that closely resemble those recorded by Thucydides and repeated in Latin verse by Lucretius. These include the heat spreading from the head to the whole body,<sup>18</sup> hiccup giving way to convulsions,<sup>19</sup> and contaminated blood dripping from the nostrils (this last detail is an invention of Lucretius, though it is still roughly based on Thucydides).<sup>20</sup> Another detail shared between the three authors is that the neglected sick plunge into springs to counteract the heat and satisfy their thirst.<sup>21</sup> Such behavior is a sign of utter desperation or even insanity: the torments of the plague drive the suffering mad.

This terrible but realistic catalog of symptoms is preceded by the list of *adynata* coming true: stags do not fear wolves, snakes lose their poison, etc. (149-153) This happens because

17 Rene Girard (1974) opens his analysis of the plague in literature and myth with exactly these four works putting emphasis on the fact that the four texts belong to different genres of literature: philosophy, history, epic, and drama.

18 **Seneca:** *vapor ipsam corporis arcem / flammeneus urit* (“the fiery warmth burns the very top of the body”, 185-6) and then *ignis pascitur artus* (“fire feeds on the limbs”, 187<sup>b</sup>, 188<sup>a</sup>). **Lucretius:** *principio caput incensum fervore gerebant* (“at first, they [the sick] bore [their] head kindled by the heat”, VI.1145) and then *intima pars hominum vero flagrabat ad ossa* (“the inner part of men truly burned down to the [very] bones”, VI.1168).

**Thucydides:** ὑγιεῖς ὄντας πρῶτον μὲν τῆς κεφαλῆς θέρμαι ἰσχυραὶ ... καὶ φλόγῳσις ἐλάμβανε (“first of all, strong heat(s) and burning seized those healthy by the head”, II.49.2) and then τὰ δὲ ἐντὸς οὕτως ἐκάετο... (“but the inward parts [referring here to the body as a whole] burned so much...” II.49.5). Tataryn mentions this similarity between Seneca and Lucretius (and the next one), but he does not elaborate on them. All translations are mine. The Greek of Thucydides is from Smith's 1938 edition, the Latin of Lucretius – from Rouse's 1992 edition.

19 **Seneca:** *intima creber viscera quassat / gemitus stridens* (“many a creaking groan shakes the inner organs”, 191-2). **Lucretius:** *singultusque frequens ... nervos et membra coactans / dissoluebat eos ... fatigans* (“many a constraining and wearing hiccup dissolved them with respect to their sinews and limbs”, VI.1160-2).

**Thucydides:** λυγξ τε τοῖς πλείοσιν ἐνέπιπτε κενή, σπασμὸν ἐνδιδούσα ἰσχυρόν (“a futile hiccup fell upon many more, giving way to strong convulsion[s]”, II.49.4).

20 **Seneca:** *stillatque niger naris aduncae / cruor* (“and black blood of the hooked nostrils oozes out”, 188<sup>b</sup>, 189).

**Lucretius:** *corruptus sanguis expletis naribus ibat* (marred blood went forth from the nostrils, VI.1203). These descriptions are probably based on Thucydides II.49.2: τὰ ἐντὸς, ἢ τε φάρυγξ καὶ ἡ γλῶσσα, εὐθὺς αἱματώδη ἦν (“the inner parts, the throat or the tongue, were immediately bloody”).

21 Seneca 193-6, Lucretius VI.1172-5, Thucydides II.49.5. That the people to plunge themselves into the water are those uncared for is a detail shared only by Seneca and Thucydides.



according to the chorus, the plague first attacked the animals, both domesticated and wild, the forests and the grass (133-159). Such description agrees with the poetic tradition established by Homer in the *Iliad*, where Apollo begins his onslaught with the mules and the dogs and only then attacks the Greeks themselves (I.50). Universal nature of the disaster manifests itself in Sophocles' version of Oedipus story as well (cf. 25-27) and also in Lucretius' treatise, where most birds and wild beasts are said to die of the plague (VI.1219-22).

In following this poetic tradition, Seneca does not violate his philosophical views and it would be wrong to think that the sweeping power of the plague is in any way indicative of its divine origin. As has been already mentioned, Seneca believes most plagues to be caused by poisonous vapors coming from underneath the earth or sometimes by polluted underground waters. From *Questiones Naturales*, one can learn why some animals fall prey to contagious diseases before humans do: the sheep keep their heads close to the ground and because of that inhale polluted air first; the cattle drink a lot of water, *etc.*<sup>22</sup>

Even so, Seneca's description of the plague appears exaggerated, when one compares it to what Thucydides says. The historian mentions that some scavengers and dogs got the disease from humans (II.50), but he does not argue the reverse. Furthermore, in Thucydides' work, wild animals, cattle and plants are left unaccounted for and in mentioning them Seneca relies on poetic tradition more than he does on historical precedent.<sup>23</sup> Even though he borrows from Thucydides' catalogue of symptoms, Seneca largely ignores the historian, when it comes to describing the effects of the plague on wildlife. In this way, by bringing together the most terrifying accounts from history and fiction, Seneca achieves the horrifying effect he must have

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<sup>22</sup> *QNat.* VI.27.4.

<sup>23</sup> Some diseases, notably rabies and some forms of tuberculosis, do spread from cattle to humans, but this does not imply that Seneca knew that this is the case. He does not provide any factual evidence to support his claims about the cattle in *Questiones Naturales*. And while he does mention that six hundred sheep died during an earthquake in Champagne (VI.1.3ff.), his claims that they were affected by a plague are merely a conjecture.

aimed for.<sup>24</sup>

The chorus' description of the misfortune gives one possible hint as to where the plague comes from: the infection is said to be spreading from the head to the whole body. In modern languages, the word “head” is often used to refer to the person in charge.<sup>25</sup> If the same metaphor is possible in Seneca – and I will show that it is in a moment – then the words of the chorus can be construed to mean that infection spreads from the king, the “head”, to the common people, “the body”.

Seneca does not exploit the head-of-state metaphor as much as Lucan does,<sup>26</sup> but he does employ it in *De Clementia* (I.3.5) and there are even passages in *Oedipus* that suggest Seneca's awareness of it. For instance, after Oedipus realizes, who he is, he exclaims: *congerite, cives, saxa in infandum caput* (871). I will stretch the meaning of the phrase by inserting a possessive pronoun here: “citizens, hurl rocks at this abominable head of yours”. Nowhere else in the play are Thebans addressed as “citizens”, as Boyle notes.<sup>27</sup> By using the word Seneca puts the whole phrase in the political context. The citizen body is made up of individuals that share common rights and obligations which are by definition different from those of the monarch. By using the word “citizen”, Seneca alludes to this disparity between the people and their king and this, I believe, allows understanding “king” when “head” is written.

Hence, Seneca was apparently aware of the head of state metaphor. Because of that, the meaning behind the lists of symptoms in the choral ode can be that Oedipus, the “head” of state, is the source of the plague attacking the “body”, the king's subjects.

<sup>24</sup> Tataryn (2018) places *Oedipus* “within the scope of today’s genre of horror”. He says little, however, about how this effect of horror is achieved.

<sup>25</sup> cf. English “head of state”, Russian “глава государства”, or German “Staatsoberhaupt” all meaning the same thing.

<sup>26</sup> For the head of state metaphor in Lucan, see Mebane (2016).

<sup>27</sup> Boyle 2011:310.

### (iii) The Plague and Oedipus

The chorus shows little concern for the social aspect of the epidemic. It is Oedipus who is worried that the plague makes it impossible for traditional relationships between people to persist. It is the king who notices that “the deadly plague joins young with old and fathers with their children”,<sup>28</sup> that people use pyres intended for others to cremate the corpses of their kin (64).<sup>29</sup>

Notably, Oedipus mentions that physicians are incapable of curing the disease (69-70).<sup>30</sup> Homer's Agamemnon or Sophocles' Oedipus would not even think of physicians – to them, it is clear that the plague is sent as punishment by the gods and as such cannot be cured by usual means. Oedipus of Seneca, however, tries to rationalize the plague and to find a natural explanation for it. First, he hypothesizes that the crops are barren and the rivers are dried up because the sun is excessively hot.<sup>31</sup> But this explanation is inadequate, because, according to what Oedipus says elsewhere, the sun is supposed to be covered by the clouds.<sup>32</sup> The king then offers another interpretation: perhaps the ashes of the Sphinx bring revenge upon him (104-8). This last idea is important because it implies that the plague did not emerge immediately after Laius' death, but only after the Sphinx was dealt with.

However, neither of these explanations satisfies Oedipus and he keeps on waiting for the answer from Delphi (108-9). One could say that the king imagines himself a physician who

28 This phrase (*Iūvenēsque sēnībūs iūngīt ēt nātīs pātres / funesta pestis*, 54) presents an interesting example of how Seneca employs meter to emphasize semantic relationships between words. The connection between *iuvenes* and *senibus* is enchanted by the fact that each of the two words is trisyllabic and yields a resolution. Likewise, *natis* and *patres* are both disyllabic. Seneca could have written *senes iuvenibus* or *nates patribus*, but instead, he chose to pair the words in such a way that semantic relationships are echoed in the meter. the introduction for Seneca's use of meter in this line.

29 A detail borrowed from Thucydides II.52.4 and Lucretius VI.1282-6.

30 This detail is again borrowed by Seneca from Thucydides II.47.4 and Lucretius VI.1179-81.

31 “the crop dies barren on the parched stalks” (*arente culmo sterilis emoritur seges*, 51); “the Sun augments the fires ... fluid deserts the rivers and color deserts the grass” (*ignes auget ... Titan ... deseruit amnes umor atque herbas color*, 39-4).

32 “the [sun's] radiance gloomy because of the filthy clouds” (*nube maestus squalida ... iubar*, 2); “sad earth is pale with the day being cloudy” (*tristisque mundus nubilo pallet die*, 45).

needs to cure the state and restore social order. The king himself says that he wants to rule over *regnum salubre*, “a healthy kingdom” (36). Seneca uses this metaphor of a king becoming a physician in his philosophical works (e.g. *De Ira* I.6.2, *De Clementia* I.17). But in these texts to cure does not mean to solve an economic problem, to improve the living conditions of the subjects, or to provide shelter in times of disaster; in these texts, to cure means to install a punishment – as light as the king can allow, of course, – on whoever is guilty. Nonetheless, Seneca's Oedipus cannot punish the sun or the Sphinx, who is already dead, he cannot find a guilty person whom he could convict thereby fulfilling his function as a ruler. Since it is the whole country that is suffering from the plague he cannot think better than to blame himself, the king (77-78). Yet he still waits for the oracle and so self-accusation must seem too far-fetched to him.

In other words, Oedipus is desperately looking for a scapegoat even before the oracle gives him a pretense for doing so. In *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the notion that there is someone guilty of a crime that caused the plague is introduced by the oracle of Delphi.<sup>33</sup> Before Creon returns with the oracle, Oedipus does not know what deed or word would lead his city to salvation.<sup>34</sup> But Oedipus of Seneca does not need an oracle to tell him that he must find a guilty person to punish. The quest for a scapegoat is initiated by the protagonist himself.

Towards the middle of the play, Oedipus states his intention to execute the murderer of Laius. He explicitly asks Creon, after the latter returns from the session of necromancy, “with whose head should [he] appease the gods” (*cuius capite placemus deos* 510). Oedipus' anger and readiness to execute the murderer seems justified and at this point, the audience should ask themselves, why the oracle of Delphi speaks of exile, and not of execution.

33 As noticed by Girard (1974:842), who mentions that what he calls “the quest for a scapegoat” – which he believes is central to the play – is “triggered by the oracle.”

34 Creon is sent to the oracle “so that he might learn by what deed or word would [Oedipus] protect the city” (ὡς πρόθοιθ' ὅ τι / δρωῶν ἢ τί φωνῶν τήνδ' ἐρυσσάμην πόλιν, 71-2).

**(iv) Where does the Theban Plague come from?**

There is a line in the text suggesting that the plague was not the result of Laius' murder after all, that Oedipus cannot be held accountable for it. The line's meaning becomes apparent if one bears in mind the words which Seneca uses to refer to the plague: *pestis* (4, 55, 589, 1060), *lues* (29, 107, 652) *morbis* (70, 587, 1052, 1059), *clades* (57), *strages* (5), *exitium* (52), *letum* (eg. 113), *mors* (e.g. 164), *malum* (e.g. 159) and *vis* (133) among others. Few of these words literally mean “plague”, but the two words that definitely do and are used in this meaning are *lues* and *pestis*. There is a line in the play, however, where one might be tempted to translate *lues* differently. When Phorbas, the Theban shepherd, describes baby Oedipus, he says that the swelling in Oedipus' feet was burning the boy's body *foeda lue* (“with horrible pest”, 859). After hearing these words, Oedipus realizes everything about himself. There is one more question he will ask, but the king already knows the answer to it and so he exclaims: “Why do you search further? Fate is already drawing near. Tell [me], who was that boy?”<sup>35</sup> The climax of the play is marked by the word *lues*, the word that Oedipus earlier uses to denote the plague ravaging Thebes (29). By doing so, Seneca suggests that Oedipus is the “index case”, the one who was infected first and who then brought the plague back to his hometown.<sup>36</sup>

The idea – outlined by Boyle in his edition of the play (305), – that Oedipus' swollen feet had been harboring the plague for many years before it eventually overtook the city becomes more convincing, when it is considered in the context of other Senecan tragedies, especially *Troades*, *Phaedra*, and *Medea*. As it happens, Seneca almost always uses *lues* as a metonymy for whoever is thought to be the cause of the destruction. So the Sphinx is once again called *Thebarum lues* (*Phoen.*, 131), Helen is *pestis exitium lues* (*Tro.*, 892), Creon speaks of Medea as

<sup>35</sup> *Quid quaeris ultra? Fata iam accedunt prope. – / quis fuerit infans edoce.* 860-1.

<sup>36</sup> It is true that *morbis*, for instance, does not match the required meter pattern, but Seneca could arrange the words in a different manner and *morbis* could have been used in a different position within in the line.

*pessima lues* (*Med.*, 183), and Theseus calls his son *generis infandi lues* (*Phaed.* 905).<sup>37</sup> Where the metonymy is absent, the meaning is still the same: Tantalus complains that he is forced to act as *luem / sparsura pestis* (*Thy.*, 88-9) and Sparta is said to bring *lues* onto Troy and the Greeks (*Tro.*, 853-4). Thus, *lues* becomes almost inseparable from the agent that causes it. In this context, it only seems natural to infer that the Theban plague had its origin in Oedipus' feet.

That the use of *lues* in the description of baby Oedipus is not coincidental has already been brought up by Boyle. But I think there is enough evidence to believe that this is not just a witty remark on Seneca's part, that the reader is supposed to take the proposed explanation seriously. Everything points to this conclusion: that the plague came only after Oedipus reached Thebes, that the oracle favors exile over execution, that the disease spreads from the head to the body, that elsewhere Seneca uses *lues* to denote people. One can also note that associating Oedipus' feet with the plague is in line with Laius' suggestion that Oedipus is followed by "Destruction, Plague, Death, Hardship, Decay, and Pain" (*Letum Luesque, Mors Labor Tabes Dolor*, 652).

In his philosophical works, Seneca introduces his belief that "there is nothing that does not betray signs of that from which it was born" (*Nulla res est quae non eius quo nascitur notas reddat*, *QNat.* III.21.2). This idea is repeated in Seneca's other texts as well<sup>38</sup> and he appears to be taking it to extremes in *Oedipus*, where *lues*, the plague, haunts the protagonist from the first days of his life to the moment of his downfall.

The proposed explanation of the plague's origin is an attempt to rationalize the plague, to do what Oedipus fails to achieve at the beginning of the tragedy, and something that perhaps

37 TLL (Maltby, 1906-12) classifies these uses of *lues* under II.A ("invective, about pestilential people or beasts", *maledice de hominibus vel animalibus pestiferis*). The infection in Oedipus' feet TLL takes literally and classifies it under I.A.a.β ("about various diseases", *de variis morbis*).

38 See, for instance, *De Consolatione ad Polybium* IV.3: This (the cry of a newborn baby) we utter in the first moment [of our lives]; with this is in accordance all the chain of the following years (*hoc principio edimur, huic omnis sequentium annorum ordo consentit*). The Latin is from Barose's edition.

cannot be fully achieved at all. But unlike any of the explanations proposed by Oedipus himself, the current one has nothing whatsoever to do with the divine. This new interpretation, if accepted, has overarching implications for the play as a whole: if the plague is not the punishment sent for Laius' murder, then Oedipus self-mutilation is pointless and whatever he might imagine,<sup>39</sup> does not bring Thebes any closer to salvation. And it is not inconsistent with Stoic beliefs that a child's wound would grow to such enormous proportions. Rosenmeyer writes this about Stoic views: "when one constituent of the cosmos is disturbed or off balance, the whole world, because of the total interconnectedness, is affected. As one of the texts puts it: if a person is cut in his finger, the whole body suffers."<sup>40</sup>

#### (v) Teiresias' Blindness

Not all the differences between Seneca's *Oedipus* and its Sophoclean model pertain to the description and interpretation of the plague. Seneca also introduces a new character, Manto, and explores Teiresias' blindness in much greater detail than Sophocles does. In this section, I will show how Seneca restricts his vocabulary in order to describe Tiresias' blindness as a curse of old age and not a recompense for Tiresias soothsaying gifts, like other ancient sources might suggest it was. In *Oedipus*, Seneca employs the same approach, when he talks about blindness, as he does, when he describes the plague: he tries to exclude the divine from the equation.

Perhaps the most surprising detail in Seneca's depiction of Tiresias is that the prophet is never called blind explicitly: *caecus*, the Latin word for "blind", is never used to describe the seer. The sage is anything but *caecus*: he is "widowed of light"<sup>41</sup>, "lacking sight", "weak with his eyes", and even "brave with his defect" (*luce viduatus*, 290; *visu carens*, 295; *lucis inops*, 301;

39 Oedipus thinks that by taking his eyes out he will earn forgiveness for his fatherland. "I payed the penalties owed", he proclaims after blinding himself (*debitas poenas tuli*, 976).

40 Rosenmeyer 1989:112.

41 Boyle's (2011) translation.

*audaxque damno*, 597 resp.). Some of these ways to denote a blind person are rather unconventional, as Boyle (2011) shows with reference to *luce viduatus*. The poet goes at such great lengths to avoid calling Tiresias blind that his reluctance to use *caecus* seems to be intentional.

The picture is complicated by the use of the same adjective in *Phoenissae*. In its extant form, the play opens with Oedipus addressing his daughter Antigone as *caeci parentis regimen*, “guide of a blind father”. It is clear from the context that the meaning of *caecus* here is literal:<sup>42</sup> Antigone helps her father navigate Boeotia and the country surrounding Thebes. Seneca probably meant for this line to resemble the opening words of Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, which are likewise spoken by Oedipus to his daughter: “child of a blind father”, τέκνον τυφλοῦ γέροντος.<sup>43</sup> But the use of τυφλός, Greek for “blind”, is by no means restricted to Oedipus in Sophoclean tragedy. In *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Sophocles allows Tiresias to be called τυφλός as well and plays on the different meanings that the word can have: the sage is accused of being “blind in [his] ears, [his] mind, and in [his] heart” (τυφλὸς τὰ τ' ὄτα τὸν τε νοῦν τὰ τ' ὄμματ'..., 371). In this case, Seneca decides not to follow his predecessor and even though he later translates τυφλός as *caecus* in *Phoenissae*<sup>44</sup>, he never calls Tiresias *caecus* in *Oedipus*.

The playwright's reluctance to employ an adjective when it seems to be an obvious word to choose can be explained only by looking at how he uses the word elsewhere. *Caecus* is a relatively frequent term in Senecan plays. It appears at least twice in each of his tragedies and takes on a range of metaphorical meanings varying from “indifferent” to “dark” and “obscure”.

42 And so the use is classified as such in TLL (Burger, 1906-12).

43 It is not entirely clear whether the scenes from *Phoenissae* that are extant were originally preceded by a now lost prologue, although it is very likely that they were not. As Frank (1990:83) argues, the similarity between Seneca's and Sophocles' opening lines is one argument against such a prologue, not least because for Oedipus to introduce himself as “blind father” is an effective way to make it clear for the audience whom they see on stage.

44 While the relative dating of Senecan plays is a difficult task in general, *Phoenissae* can be safely placed at the end of his career and after *Oedipus*, as agreed, most importantly, by both Herzog (1928) and Fitch (1981).



Yet this adjective rarely defines people. Rather, Seneca uses it to describe things which are inherently *caeca*, such as rage, love, night, chaos, chance or prison.<sup>45</sup> So it is not Hercules himself, but his *furor* that is *caecus* (*Herc. f.* 991). When blindness is not intrinsic, it is intentional: Sphinx's mode of speaking, for instance, is obscure by design (*caecis modis, Phoen.* 132, *Oed.* 92). Given how he employs the word elsewhere, it is no longer possible for Seneca to use the adjective without implying that it reflects an inherent or intentional characteristic. The playwright employs the word in many of its metaphorical senses with the case of Oedipus being called blind in *Phoenissae* being the only exception.

If Tiresias' blindness is neither innate nor self-induced, then it must have been forced on him at some point in his life. One can get a sense of what this would mean from Statius, who followed Seneca in his reluctance to call Tiresias “blind”. In the *Thebaid*, *caecus* is used some 25 times, but it never denotes Tiresias, even though it is used to describe Oedipus, who is addressed by Creon as “the blind king” (*regem caecum*, XI.668). Like Seneca, Statius invents various paraphrases to mention Tiresias' lack of sight. In one passage, the poet describes how “fiery vapor fills the hollow sockets [of Tiresias' eyes]” (*impletque cavos vapor igneus orbis*, IV.471).<sup>46</sup> This line makes it clear that Tiresias is not just blind, but blinded: had he naturally lost his sight, his eye sockets would not have been empty. Statius' description of Tiresias, therefore, is in line with the many accounts of how the sage became blind recorded by Pseudo Apollodorus in

45 *Caecus* has an active (“blind”, “indifferent” = I) and passive (“obscured”, “unknown” = II) meanings. Below is a list of all usages of *caecus* in Senecan tragedy. I also give the number under which the particular usage is classified in TLL by Burger (A=literal, B=metaphorical), or classify the usage myself, if it is not already in there. **I.A:** *caeci parentis* (*Phoen.* 1, I.A). **I.B:** *fors caeca* (*Phoen.* 632), *nullus caecus [erat] cupido auri* (*Phaedr.* 528), *amore caeco* (*Ag.* 118), *caeca quae ...* (of Clytemnestra consciously following whatever way she might be moved, *Ag.* 145), *caecus furor* (*Thy.* 27, *Oed.* 590, *Herc. f.* 991), *caecum pedem* (*Phoen.* 11, not in TLL), *fortuna caeca* (*Phaedr.* 980, not in TLL). **II.A:** *carceris caeci* (*Tro.* 585), *caecum iter* (*Tro.* 724), *chaos caecum* (*Med.* 741), *caecam domum* (of the Labyrinth, *Phaedr.* 649), *caeco mari* (*Ag.* 542), *caeco carcere* (*Ag.* 988), *caecumque chaos* (*Oed.* 572), *caecam noctem* (*Oed.* 1049), *caeca via* (*Herc. f.* 668), *caecos aditus* (of the entrance to Hades, *Herc. f.* 834), *caecus ignis stimulatus ira* (*Med.* 591). **II.B:** *caeco mugitu* (*Tro.* 171), *nostra caeca monstra* (*Phaedr.* 122), *caecos sinus* (*Ag.* 895), *caecis modis* (of Sphinx's speech, *Oed.* 92, *Phoen.* 132).

46 The Latin is from Mozley's 1928 edition.

*Bibliotheca*, all of which suggest that the gift of soothsaying is a recompense for the loss of sight or vice versa (III.69-72).

There is nothing in the Senecan play that could suggest that Tiresias is intentionally or inherently blind, and this is why unlike Oedipus, who chooses to blind himself with his own hands, the prophet cannot be called *caecus*.<sup>47</sup> Yet unlike the *Thebaid*, Seneca's *Oedipus* bears no traces of the stories later to be recorded in *Bibliotheca* and Seneca's explanation for Tiresias' lack of sight seems to be different. It is crucial that in Seneca, references to Tiresias' blindness tend to go together with allusions to his old age: three of the four times his blindness is mentioned, the sage himself is referenced as Manto's father (288-290, 301-2, 594-6). It is no wonder that he is "widowed of light", for widowhood and old age go together. It appears, therefore, that Seneca considers the prophet's blindness merely a sign of his declining years. Once again, just as it is the case with the plague of Thebes, the playwright suggests an explanation that has little to do with the divine and that can be applied to anyone, whether they be an ancient seer or a Roman statesman.

Seneca's decision to distinguish between forced and self-induced blindness demonstrates his desire for clarity and willingness to restrict the meaning of a word in order to articulate a conceptual distinction. This lends weight to my earlier argument about the plague of Thebes and the use of *lues*. Clearly, Seneca's choice to describe the infection afflicting Oedipus' feet as *lues* cannot be accidental, if in the same play he takes such meticulous efforts not to call Teiresias *caecus*.

Seneca's depiction of the Theban plague and his description of Teiresias' blindness represent only a few ways in which the Roman philosopher deviates from his Sophoclean model.

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<sup>47</sup> This argument is not valid in general. Other authors did call Tiresias "blind". TLL, for instance, has an entry from Minucius Felix, who calls Tiresius *caecus* in his writing (26, 5).

Similar comparisons between other Senecan tragedies and the Greek plays on which they are based would reveal many more analogous differences: the next chapter, for instance, will open with a comparison of Euripidean and Senecan descriptions of Hercules' madness. However, comparisons of this kind will always lead to similar results, and there is no reason to catalogue all the differences between pairs of plays on the same subject. Most of the next chapter will, instead, focus on ways in which Seneca responds to the more recent works of Roman poets and, in particular, on Seneca's disagreement with Horace over the issue of deification.

## Chapter II

### Horatian Religious Views in Seneca's *Hercules furens*

*Hercules furens* is another one of the Senecan tragedies for which the Greek model is extant. The play is based on Euripides' *Heracles*<sup>1</sup> and evolves around madness that possesses the hero after his return from the underworld. In this chapter, I deal with two problems concerning Hercules' madness. Firstly, I show that the comparison between the Senecan and the Euripidean tragedies reinforces the point made in the previous chapter: the gods do not have as much influence on the affairs of men in Senecan plays as they do in classical Greek drama. If in Euripides, the madness is godsent, in Seneca, it is at least partially self-induced.

There is another difference between the two tragedies: the Roman playwright gives the mad Hercules a speech, whereas Euripides keeps the protagonist away from stage until he comes to his senses.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, Seneca's *Hercules furens* gives much more material for one to speculate about what goes inside Hercules' head while he is possessed by frenzy. Among other things, the mad Hercules is preoccupied with the idea that he should become a god because his father promised him so (*astra promittit pater*, 959). Seneca would consider such an idea truly insane indeed, as can be conjectured from the rest of the play, in which he discusses deification in great detail. Seneca even engages in dialogue with Horace on the matter and quotes the

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1 There might have been other now-lost Greek or Roman plays on the subject from which Seneca drew inspiration as Fitch (1987:44-50) shows. Still "the fact that the plot of Seneca's play derives ultimately from Euripides' *Heracles* is too evident to need demonstration" (Fitch, 44).

2 Some of the words Heracles utters in his madness are reported by the Messenger, but crucially, the audience does not hear anything directly from the protagonist while he is mad.

Augustan poet extensively in one of the choral odes. The differences between Seneca's and Horace's views on apotheosis, the issue so pertinent to the Roman imperial regime, will be at the focus of much of this chapter. But first, I will compare the Senecan play to its Euripidean model.

### (i) The Cause Behind the Madness

Seneca and his Greek predecessor differ greatly in how much weight they assign to divine intervention in their respective works. Euripides makes Lyssa (Madness) a character in his play, who is literally ordered by Iris, another deity, to attack Heracles.<sup>3</sup> Immediately after the attack, Heracles goes insane. Even when compared to other works of Euripides, *Heracles* is one of the two tragedies (along with *Orestes*) “located at the opposite poles of the godsent to 'self-caused' continuum,” as Brooke Holmes puts it.<sup>4</sup>

In *Hercules furens*, madness is only loosely connected to the divine. The play does open with a speech of Juno, who conceives a plan to drive Hercules mad, but her monologue is far removed from the actual onset of madness. Juno is commonly compared to the ghost of Tantalus from the prologue of *Thyestes*.<sup>5</sup> Tantalus becomes disease personified, “pestilence about to scatter the plague around” (*luem / sparsura pestis, Thy. 88-9*); he has himself done what Atreus is about to do: he served a human being as a meal. Similarly, Juno has to go insane herself, to

3 I will use the Greek name to refer to Euripides' portrayal of the hero and the Latin name to refer to that of Seneca.

4 Holmes 2010:242.

5 See, for instance, Rosenmeyer (1989: 83-84), Fitch (1987: 28-33), and Tarrant (1985: 85-6). My way of comparing the two demons is closer to Rosenmeyer's, though his focus is somewhat different and the cited lines are my contribution. For Fitch (44-50), Juno's monologue poses a problem of narrative structure: she states that Hercules has already arrived from the underworld, even though he arrives from there again after the second act. Fitch sees this as a possible sign that Seneca drew some of the material from a now-lost play, which would have the events happen in a different order. However, another possibility is that Juno foreshadows the arrival of Hercules in the same way that the Fury accompanying Tantalus proclaims the sun's reluctance to shine (*Thy. 120-1*) before the crime is committed. Tantalus and Juno are both removed from the events of the play and so they might as well be considered to exist in a different timeline.

guarantee that she can drive Hercules mad later (cf. *HF*. 109-11). In Rosenmeyer's words, both demons are "the supposed engines of action," and both "are stripped of their powers".<sup>6</sup> Both Tantalus and Juno set everything in motion and produce the butterfly effect that eventually leads to murder and great crimes. But like butterflies, Juno and Tantalus cannot be held accountable for the storm they provoke. There are also other causes of destruction. In *Thyestes*, as I will show in the next chapter, such a cause is the Fury, who forces Tantalus to do her bidding. The causes behind Hercules' madness might be more difficult to discern, but it is clear that they must operate the very instant Hercules goes insane.

The play foreshadows the onset of madness via a sequence of passages that focus on Hercules' restlessness, anger, and ambition. The ways these characteristics of Hercules portend his madness are discussed at length by Fitch in his edition of the play,<sup>7</sup> and so I will only quickly summarize them here: in *De Ira*, Seneca endorses the opinion that anger is a short madness (I.1.2); restlessness was believed by some to be the cause of epileptic seizures; ambition is what causes Hercules' anger and restlessness in the first place. The transition from sanity to madness itself is depicted in the following excerpt from Hercules' monologue:

si quod etiamnum est scelus  
 latura tellus, properet, et si quod parat  
 monstrum, meum sit. - Sed quid hoc? medium diem  
 cinxere tenebrae. Phoebus obscuro meat  
 sine nube vultu. quis diem retro fugat  
 agitque in ortus? (937-942)

"If the earth is yet to produce some evil, let it make haste, and if it has any monster in store, let it be mine. But what is this? The darkness envelops midday. Phoebus passes with a darkened face without [a single] cloud [being in the sky]. Who chases the day and drives it back to sunrise?"

Hercules turns mad the instant he suddenly exclaims: "but what is this?" (*sed quid hoc?*)

6 Rosenmeyer 1989:84.

7 Fitch 1987:15-44.

939).<sup>8</sup> On the one hand, *hoc* in this phrase can stand for “that, which is happening to me.” If it is the case, then Hercules questions his condition and therefore shows signs of sound mind. On the other hand, *hoc* can also mean “that, which I see.” If so, then Hercules no longer doubts hallucinations he is about to describe, he just cannot yet figure out what they mean. In any case, by interrupting Hercules' line of thought and making him see visions, Seneca identifies the precise moment at which the hero loses his mind.

When a change is sudden, one must look for what has triggered it, for the active cause that directly preceded the event. In Rosenmeyer's words, Seneca “maintains that the active cause has a privileged status, with all the other 'causes' being necessary conditions rather than proper causes.”<sup>9</sup> Juno's wrath, Hercules's anger, and restlessness are all conditions and not active causes.

It seems, therefore, that the clue lies in the last words that Hercules pronounces while still in his right mind: “if the earth has any monster in store, let it be mine” (938-9). Fitch notices the “unconscious irony” in this phrase, pointing out that “the monstrous evil will indeed be his own [Hercules'].”<sup>10</sup> The irony here is, however, more explicit than it might seem at first because later, the chorus will directly refer to the madness as *tantis monstribus* (1063).<sup>11</sup> In a sense, Hercules becomes mad right afterward and because he expresses what can be construed as a desire to be mad. This idea is in line with Seneca's views: in Phaedra, the nurse, who is the voice of reason in the play, argues that a great “part of health [always] was the wish to be healed” (*pars sanitatis uelle sanari fuit*, 249). Desire to be mad, one can infer, is but one step short of insanity.

Just as it is possible to pinpoint the moment Hercules loses his mind, it is possible to say when he gains it back: this happens when he wakes up from his sleep, unaware of the murders he

8 That the phrase is a turning point has been noted by Fitch (1987:364) and by others before him.

9 Rosenmeyer 1989:65. This claim seem to have less bearing on *Thyestes*.

10 Fitch 1987:27.

11 Fitch does not comment on this phrase.

committed (1138ff). Hercules' madness takes the form of an epileptic seizure, appropriately called *Herculeus morbus* in ancient times,<sup>12</sup> in that like a seizure it comes and goes unexpectedly.

### (ii) The Problem of Deification

Even though Juno's appearance is distanced from the onset of Hercules' frenzy and the influence she exerts on the events in the play is questionable, Hercules strives to become a god just like Juno fears he does.<sup>13</sup> The idea of deification, though never realized, is central to the narrative, and by the time the play was written, it must have been highly politicized.

By the middle of the first century BCE, certain mythological figures, such as Hercules, have been long associated with Roman imperial power and the ruling members of the Julian family. Composing *Hercules furens* Seneca was undoubtedly conscious that he would invite a comparison between the protagonist of his play and Nero, who at this time must have already become a princeps.<sup>14</sup> And whatever his intentions in pursuing such a comparison were, Seneca would have to respond to those authors, who have first introduced the idea of a deified princeps into Latin poetry. Among these was Horace, who in *Odes* III.14 all but imagines Hercules and Octavian to be the same person. For the rest of this chapter, my goal will be to compare Seneca's understanding of apotheosis to that of Horace paying special attention to how deification is related to public worship in the works of the two authors. Horace is chosen for this comparison because one of the choral odes in *Hercules furens* is modeled on *Odes* I.1, as I will argue below. I will show that Seneca, unlike Horace, wants his reader to believe that one's actions have a

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<sup>12</sup> Fitch 1987:31.

<sup>13</sup> See below on the relevant passages.

<sup>14</sup> Rose (1980) argues that Hercules must be associated with Nero and the whole work be seen as a lesson to the young emperor. It is, however, unclear, whether Nero had already assumed power by the time the tragedy was published, because *Hercules furens* must predate *Apocolocyntosis*, which, in turn, must have been written shortly after Claudius' death (see, for instance, Nisbet, 2008).



direct influence on one's reputation and that apotheosis is conditioned on both. As I will argue in the end, this reading of the play gives additional reason to understand *Hercules furens* as a didactic work intended to educate young Nero. In particular, the play can be seen as a warning to the princeps not to take his status for granted because his adopted father was a princeps too: when Hercules insists that his father promised him the stars, he is mad (*astra promittit pater*, 959).

### (ii) Horatian Views

For Horace, Augustus' apotheosis is a thing unparalleled: even Julius Caesar was given the title of *Divus Iulius* posthumously and not least because it allowed Octavian to style himself as *Divi Filius*.<sup>15</sup> Seneca, on the other hand, can picture deification of a new princeps just as easily as Juno can imagine Hercules achieving immortality after Dionysos, Castor, and Pollux, and others have done the same.<sup>16</sup> Hence, and because Seneca's tragedy is set in mythological times, one might expect from the very beginning that Horace would have to put more effort in convincing the reader that an apotheosis of a living man is possible: to make Octavian known as a god seems to be one of the key goals that Horace sets before him in the *Odes*.

Throughout the *Odes*, Horace is pursuing the project of Octavian's deification simultaneously with that of his own self-immortalization. On the one hand, the poet imagines

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15 As noted by White (1988), in the *Odes*, Julius Caesar is mentioned only twice (I.2.44, I.12.46-8) and only together with Augustus. Given that other public figures such as Cato appear as frequently in the text as Julius Caesar does (for Cato: I.12.35, II.1.24, White has a figure with references to recent political figures in Augustan poets), the *Odes* give an overall impression that Augustus is someone much more prominent than his adoptive father, and the role of the latter in establishing the new order seems to be downplayed in Horace's work (White cites Johann Kasper von Orelli to illustrate this idea, even though he does not fully agree with it). White himself understands the cult of Julius Caesar as a rehearsal of Augustus' own apotheosis.

16 Juno lists many of Zeus' children and consorts who attained immortality in the prologue of *Hercules furens* (6-21).

himself “setting Caesar's glory among the stars” (*Caesaris ... decus / stellis inserere, Odes III.25.4-6*).<sup>17</sup> On the other, Horace thinks that he too can reach the sky, if only Maecenas could count him among the great lyric poets of the past (*Quodsi me lyricis vatibus inseres, sublimi feriam sidera vertice, Odes I.1.35-6*). These two passages, that about Horace and that about Octavian, share the verb *inserere*, “to implant,” which in this context describes the process whereby a person makes someone or something immortal. Both Maecenas and Horace are capable of single-handedly setting such a process in motion and hence must share something in common, something that would allow both of them to make immortal whomever they choose to praise. It cannot be the art of poetry that links the two men together, for it is hardly plausible that Maecenas would have composed odes in praise of Horace in the manner in which Horace composed odes in praise of Augustus. What Maecenas and Horace did have in common is that both were influential men and could manipulate public opinion, Horace through his poetry, Maecenas through his wealth and patronage of poets. I believe that it is precisely this ability to shape public opinion that Horace thinks gives him and Maecenas the power to rank someone among the stars. Before proving this idea, however, it is necessary to clarify what exactly does it mean for Horace or Octavian to become immortal.

Crucially, it is not Octavian himself, but his *decus* that Horace speaks of in the aforementioned passage. This is because, by Horace's logic, the princeps has no need for deification. Augustus is already a god, who has descended from heaven, as the poet states rather explicitly in the second ode of the collection: “you, winged son of Maia, with your appearance changed, imitate a young man on earth” (*mutata iuvenem figura ales in terris imitaris .. filius Maiae, Odes I.2, 41-3*). The ode from which this passage is taken serves the purpose of praising

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<sup>17</sup> The Latin of Horace is reproduced from Garrison's 1991 edition.

Augustus, yet rhetorically it refutes the very possibility of an apotheosis because the princeps is said to be a god already. By this logic, the only thing that Horace can offer to Octavian is to commemorate his *decus* and to prolong the memory of his presence on earth.

Horace, therefore, distinguishes between immortality that depends on memory being passed from one generation to the next and deification, which allows the person to dwell in heaven. Horace himself will never stay in heaven for long: he says that he will just “strike the stars with his head” (*feriam sidera vertice*, *Odes* I.1.30). A great part of him will not die (*multaque pars mei vitabit Libitinam*, *Odes* III.30.6-7) and will transform into a swan (*et album mutor in alitem*, *Odes* II.20.10) to exist somewhere between the earth and the stars. But the smaller part, one might infer, will go down to Hades to join Sappho and Alcaeus (cf. *Odes* II.13), the other two great lyric poets.

It follows that Horace imagines his future to be similar to that of Proculus, of whom he says that “persistent fame will carry [him] on [its] wings reluctant to [ever] dissolve” (*illum aget penna metuente solvi / fama superstes*, *Odes* II.2.7-8). *Fama*, the word Horace employs in this passage can stand for “public opinion,”<sup>18</sup> and public opinion is something a great poet, a *vates*, can shape, as the fourth book of the *Odes* demonstrates.

Having stated in the beginning his desire to be counted among *lyric vates*, the great lyric poets, Horace continues to pursue this goal up until the very end of the *Odes*. Throughout the whole collection, he is careful not to call himself *vates* explicitly. When he does employ the word to denote himself, he either speaks in the third person as if implying some generic poet-figure (I.31.2), uses the future tense to stress that he has not become *vates* yet (I.20.3, II.6.24), or does both these things at the same time (III.19.15). There is only one ode in which Horace

18 TLL (Vetter, 1912-26, VI:206-227) lists *opinio vulgi* as one of the possible meanings of the word.

becomes *vates* at the moment of speaking: this happens in *Odes* IV.6, when he teaches the chorus of young girls and boys. Horace claims that sometime in the future, a now-married member of his chorus will recount how she has been “taught in the melodies of Horace the great poet” (*docilis modorum vatis Horati, Odes* IV.6.43-4). For a woman to say in the future that a *vates* once taught her, Horace must already be a *vates* in the present moment, when he is teaching the chorus. Therefore, Horace's desire to become one of the great lyric poets is fulfilled when he becomes a *chorodidaskalos*. This shows how important it is for him not merely to be appreciated by the few, but also to shape the opinion of the many and to be thereby preserved in the public memory.

It is quite possible that Maecenas was directly or indirectly responsible for Horace's appointment as the writer of *Carmen Saeculare*. Hence, Maecenas' ability to influence such important public decisions probably did help Horace become a *vates* as Horace thought it could in *Odes* I.1. Having attained such a high status, Horace was able to shape public opinion through his poetic authority and to commemorate princeps' *decus* in his texts. In this context, Octavian's virtues and achievements are only partially responsible for his reputation; the princeps is also indebted to Horace for praising him in the *Odes*. To put it differently, in Horace's world, one's reputation does not necessarily correlate with one's actions. Elsewhere, Horace even admits that the public can be in opposition to a man, who is just and who will because of his just actions become a god.<sup>19</sup>

#### (iv) Seneca's Response to Horace

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<sup>19</sup> In *Odes* III.3, Horace says that “fervor of the demanding citizens has no effect on a just man” (*iustum ... virum non civium ardor ... iuventium ... quatit*). Horace then proceeds to say that by being just and steadfast, Pollux and Hercules reached heaven.

In Seneca's *Hercules furens*, the play in which the possibility of the hero's ascension to heaven is restated again and again (e.g. 37-40, 64-68, 959, etc.), there is no apparent distinction between deification proper and immortality achieved by being remembered. Furthermore, the causal link between one's actions and one's reputation is much stronger than it is in Horace's *Odes*, as I will now demonstrate.

In the prologue of *Hercules furens*, Juno says that “all around the world [Hercules] is being called a god” (*toto deus narratur orbe*, HF 39-40). Later, when Hercules realizes that he has murdered his family, he exclaims: “Being known everywhere, I have forfeited a place for exile. The world shrinks from me, the stars turn aside and run their courses askew”<sup>20</sup> (*ubique notus perdidit exilio locum. / me refugit orbis, astra transversos agunt / obliqua cursus*, HF 1331-3). It appears that Hercules' crimes become known to the world immediately after he commits them: just a few acts ago, he was called a god, and now everyone avoids him. If for Horace, reputation is something carefully established with the help of the poets through a long period of time, for Seneca, reputation can change in a split second because of a single (dreadful as it may be) wrong action. Furthermore, Hercules believes that it is his now evil fame that holds off his apotheosis: he literally says that the stars flee from him because he is known everywhere. In associating fame and deification in this way, Hercules is not alone. The chorus, when discussing various people's life goals, sings of him, whom “renown [carries through] many lands and whom fame [lifts] as equal to the heaven and the stars” (*alium multis gloria tradat / et ... fama ... parem tollat et astris*, HF 192-5). This passage from the first choral ode of *Hercules furens* should be understood as a direct response to the ending of *Odes* I.1. The relevance of the poem to this choral ode has been argued before; my contribution will lie in comparing this

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<sup>20</sup> Fitch's (2018) translation.

particular passage about fame and stars to the last lines of the Horatian ode.

Both Allendorf<sup>21</sup> and Spika<sup>22</sup> agree that this choral song as a whole exhibits Horatian influence to a degree greater than any other choral ode in Senecan tragedies does. Throughout the ode, Seneca uses expressions and phrases that echo those of Horace. Seneca's "illum ... **mobile vulgus ... tollit**" (*HF* 169-71), for instance, is reminiscent of Horace's "**mobiliū turba** Quiritum / certat ... **tollere**" (*Odes* I.1.7-8) as Spika notices. More importantly, the second part of the Senecan ode follows priamel pattern, and the "types" of people which Seneca goes over, the lover of money and the lover of public honors, are both mentioned in *Odes* I.1. Furthermore, Seneca and Horace use similar language to describe these types, as the aforementioned example also demonstrates. This structural affinity is mentioned by Fitch, who is nevertheless hesitant to acknowledge it as evidence of Horatian influence. From Fitch's point of view,<sup>23</sup> the end of the priamel contradicts Horatian golden mean by advising the life of "utmost simplicity."<sup>24</sup>

Fitch is persuasive in arguing that the life the chorus strives for is not consistent with Horace's views. However, unlike Fitch, I do not think that this inconsistency undermines any claims of Horatian influence on Seneca. For it cannot be a coincidence that one of the last "types" Seneca includes in his priamel is the person raised to the stars, the person whom Horace imagines himself to be in the very end of *Odes* I.1, the poem whose language Seneca so closely follows. The final lines of the Senecan ode might not be Horatian in themselves, but they form a direct response to Horace.

There is a difference in how immortality is imagined in the two texts in question. In the

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21 2017: 155-6.

22 1890: 1-2.

23 Fitch 1987:180.

24 The precise words the chorus uses are: "Wild-haired old age comes to the idlers, and the paltry fortunes of a small house stand on lowly but solid ground" (*venit ad pigros cana senectus / humilique loco sed certa sedet / sordida parvae fortuna domus*, *HF*, 198-200). The translation is Fitch's (2018).

*Odes*, it is Maecenas, who has the power to rank Horace among the lyric poets, thereby lifting him to the stars. In Seneca, it is *fama* that is responsible for the elevation. Seneca's desire to argue against Horace here can be explained by Seneca's disapproval of Maecenas' character. The playwright criticized Maecenas' writings and claimed that they prove their author's "habits to be not less unusual, perverse, and unparalleled [then the writings themselves are]" (*mores ... non minus novos et pravos et singulares fuisse, Letters CXIV.7*).<sup>25</sup> Being of such a low opinion of Maecenas' writings and habits, Seneca would have found Horace's claim at the end of *Odes* I.1 bizarre, if not ridiculous. He, therefore, responds to Horace by arguing that a person can attain everlasting fame and immortality only through his own deeds and writings and not through their patron's influence. Seneca then proceeds to say that he (or the chorus) does not want such fame or immortality, but prefers a humble life.

The chorus' dismissal of the path that Horace sets before himself in *Odes* I.1 must at least partially stem from the conviction that immortality, equated in Seneca with divine status, has its own limits and must be maintained and fought for. This idea is illustrated by Juno, who, in the prologue, calls herself a widow (*vidua*, 3) and declares that she has left the heavens. She imagines the possibility of Alcmene taking her place altogether.<sup>26</sup> At the end of her speech, she orders the Furies to attack her and drive her mad (110-1). She, therefore, loses the status of an Olympian goddess, if not that of a divinity, and is transformed into some senseless demon. Later, in his madness, Hercules thinks of overthrowing his father by allying with Saturn (965). In other words, neither Juno nor Jupiter can be confident that their status as mother and father of the gods is eternal. To a certain degree, the situation in *Hercules furens* mirrors that of the Roman

25 The Latin is from edition of Gummere (1925).

26 Fitch (1987:129) remarks that Alcmene's possible deification is an invention of Seneca. The passage in question is: "let it be allowed that Alcmene my victress ascends [into heaven] and holds my place" (*escendat licet / meumque victrix teneat Alcmene locum*, 21-2).

imperial court: Messalina, Nero's adopted stepmother, was executed by Claudius, who then married Agrippina. If Nero is to be identified with Hercules, as Rose<sup>27</sup> argues, then Juno should be associated with Messalina. Coming back to the question of the scope of Juno's divine influence, one would imagine this influence to be practically nonexistent, given that Messalina ended up being killed by the praetorian guard.

Building off this apparent similarity between the realm of gods and the Roman principate, one could even claim that *Hercules furens* contains a warning to young Nero: a wrong action on the part of a powerful man can ruin his standing with the people and his standing with the people is what keeps him in power and makes a future apotheosis possible. Horace would argue that public opinion can be kept in check by the poets, but there is nothing in the play that could suggest that the same argument holds in the world of *Hercules furens*.

In the *Odes*, Augustus is clearly a god, but his divine status might not be known to everyone, which is why Horace feels the need to be heard praising the princeps.<sup>28</sup> In Seneca, Hercules is universally understood to be a god, but fails to comply with his reputation and loses his semi-divine status because of his crimes. Horace strives to immortality himself, while Seneca makes immortal life appear insecure and dangerous. In summary, the two poets seem to have such different conceptions of apotheosis that even the same myth of Hercules' journey to the underworld they understand differently: Horace thinks of it as a fortunate redemption, comparing it to Octavian's return from Spain,<sup>29</sup> while Seneca sees it as a sign of Hercules' prowess and

27 Rose 1980.

28 cf. *Odes* III.25, "In what caves will I be heard planning to set Caesar's glory among the stars?" (*Quibus antris ... Caesaris audiar ... meditans decus stellis inserere...* 3-6).

29 cf. *Odes* III.14, 1-4:

Herculis ritu modo dictus, o plebs,  
morte venalem petiisse laurum  
Caesar Hispana repetit penatis  
victor ab ora



ambition and as a prelude to a series of murders. It is clear that Seneca had Horatian odes in mind when he was writing his play, but *Hercules furens* is just as far removed from Horatian Odes as it is from Euripidean *Heracles*.

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“Said to have sought a laurel bought by death, just like Hercules [once had], Caesar has returned a victor, o people, from the Spanish shore back home.”

## Chapter III

### Senecan Philosophy in Seneca's *Thyestes*

Seneca based all of his tragedies on myths explored by Greek and Roman dramatists before him, and – as I hope I have shown in the last two chapters – one can understand a lot about Seneca's ideas by comparing his plays to those of his predecessors. This chapter on Seneca's *Thyestes* would have opened with such a comparison if only there were a play on the subject that preceded Seneca's work and survived to this day. Unfortunately, among those texts that have been preserved, Seneca's *Thyestes* is the oldest, which makes it especially difficult to discuss what exactly Seneca introduced to the narrative. In this chapter, I try to overcome the challenge by comparing *Thyestes* to other works of Seneca, poetry and prose alike. The results of such a comparison are twofold. On the one hand, *Thyestes* clearly contains many traces of Seneca's philosophical views. On the other hand, it becomes apparent that Seneca's beliefs did not stay constant throughout his life. In particular, the stance toward the divine that Seneca takes in this late work<sup>1</sup> is quite different from what one would expect from the author of *Oedipus* or *Hercules furens*.

#### (i) The Title of the Play

Although no dramatic text on the subject written before Seneca's time has been preserved, some information on the earlier plays can be gathered from fragments and occasional mentions by other ancient authors. In his survey of dramatic versions of the myth before Seneca, Tarrant

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<sup>1</sup> See the introduction and also the fourth chapter for a discussion on dating.

names many plays that have dealt with the strife between Thyestes and his brother.<sup>2</sup> Some of these are known to us as *Atreus*, others as *Thyestes*.<sup>3</sup> The only play whose plot can be reconstructed with some certainty is Accius' *Atreus*, and Tarrant shows that Seneca's *Thyestes* shares with it the sequence of scenes, the characters, and some of the underlying themes. The question that naturally arises is why the titles of the two tragedies are different.

We can only speculate about the reasons why Accius' play is called *Atreus*, and we cannot know for certain whether the title we have for the Senecan tragedy was chosen by the author himself.<sup>4</sup> The title must have little to do with who gets to speak more frequently: Seneca gives roughly the same number of lines to each of the brothers.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, it doesn't seem surprising that the Senecan play is known as *Thyestes*. The difference between the two brothers is that, unlike Thyestes, who is hesitant to accept his brother's invitation and eventually has to face the consequences of his decision, Atreus hardly ever doubts his choices. The only moment of hesitation for him comes when he ponders whether to let his children know about his plans. But even then, his sole concern and motivation is finding the most fitting way to exact his revenge.<sup>6</sup> In the end, Atreus remains the same person he was when he appeared on the stage for the first time, and Fitch justly calls him "single-minded" for being only motivated by his revenge.<sup>7</sup> Thyestes, on the other hand, evolves through the course of the play, and Tarrant rightly

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2 Tarrant 1985:40-43.

3 Tarrant mentions that Atreus was a titular character in plays by Sophocles, Accius, Mamerus, and Pomponius Secundus; Thyestes – in tragedies by Sophocles, Euripides, Ennius, Varius, Gracchus.

4 The manuscripts give different titles for some of the Senecan tragedies (though not for Thyestes). So, for instance, *Phaedra* is sometimes called *Hippolytus* and *Phoenissae* is sometimes known as *Thebais* (see Zwierlein).

5 Atreus speaks for 237 lines (+30 lines of *antilabe*), Thyestes – for 224 (+20 lines of *antilabe*). Note that the number of lines dedicated to a given character does not have to correlate with the title of the play – Agamemnon only has 26 lines in the play that bears his name (and half of that is *antilabe* between him and Cassandra).

6 Atreus first thinks that letting Agamemnon and Menelaus know the plan is risky, because they might betray it to Thyestes. But he eventually decides to test his children: if they don't betray him then they must really be *his* and not Thyestes'.

7 Fitch 2018:221.

considers him to be the play's "most complex character".<sup>8</sup>

I should rephrase what was just said in terms more relevant to the present project: Atreus remains infected with anger from the start of the play till its very end; Thyestes appears to be sane in the beginning, gets drunk in the middle, and finally comes back to his senses by the end of the play. Atreus' anger (*ira*) and Thyestes' drunkenness (*ebrietas*) will be at the focus of this chapter, and I will discuss the two phenomena separately in the coming sections bringing up relevant passages from Seneca's other works. At first, however, I will consider the prologue of the play, which is highly relevant to the question of what influence the gods have over the events in the play and, in particular, over Atreus' rage and Thyestes' drunkenness.

### (ii) The Argive Plague

The play opens with a scene in which the Fury forces the shade of Tantalus to enter the palace of Pelops in Argos and to infect it with "hatred, carnage and burials" (52-3). Tantalus is reluctant but eventually concedes and does the Fury's bidding. But should we attribute Atreus' anger and Thyestes' drunkenness to divine influence?

As Tarrant notes,<sup>9</sup> the closest parallel to the prologue of *Thyestes* is the scene from Euripides' *Heracles*, in which Madness is forced by Iris to attack Heracles. Like Tantalus, Madness is reluctant to follow the orders which it is given. In his own *Hercules furens*, Seneca replaces this scene with a prologue in which Juno plans Hercules' downfall. In the previous chapter, I have briefly compared Juno with Tantalus and have argued that both characters cannot be held fully accountable for the events that they supposedly provoke. This is especially true for Juno, whose monologue is separated from the moment Hercules goes mad by two acts. I still

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<sup>8</sup> Tarrant 1985:43.

<sup>9</sup> Tarrant 1985:86.

consider the comparison between Tantalus and Juno to be justified, but it is important to remember that in the prologue of *Thyestes*, Tantalus is not the only character on stage. There is also the Fury, who is in charge of the situation.

Unlike Juno, who has to go mad herself to ensure Hercules' downfall (109-12), the Fury remains in control of her senses and uses Tantalus as her weapon. Unlike Juno, whose sole wish is to drive Hercules insane, the Fury has long-term plans, which include the birth of Aegisthus, the Trojan war and the murder of Agamemnon (39-48). Because the audience knows that all of these plans will come to fruition, the Fury's influence appears unchecked. Juno, on the other hand, leaves the reader to question the scope of her divine powers, when she laments being driven from the sky (1-4). And the audience knows that despite Juno's wish to keep Hercules from heaven, the hero will eventually be deified: the play leaves this possibility open. The prologue of *Thyestes*, therefore, lends much more credibility to the divine influence over human affairs than the prologue of *Hercules furens* allows. Seneca rejects the Euripidean model in the earlier play, but he endorses it fully in *Thyestes*.

A comparison can also be drawn between *Thyestes* and *Oedipus*. I have argued before that Seneca attempts to find a rational explanation for the Theban plague. In the traditional version of the Oedipus myth, the plague (*lues*) is a divine punishment for the murder of Laius, but Seneca offers an alternative interpretation according to which the plague is nothing but the infection that has originally afflicted the feet of baby Oedipus but has grown to enormous proportions since then. This interpretation is not the only one possible, but it does question the idea that the plague is god-sent. By contrast, this idea that plagues have divine origin is endorsed by Tantalus in *Thyestes*, when he refers to himself as “a disease [sent] to scatter a terrible *plague* among the people” (*gravem populis luem / sparsura pestis*, 88-9). Once again, Seneca appears to

have changed his approach to drama by allowing the divine to have a greater impact on the affairs of men.

When Tantalus uses the word “plague” (*lues*), he speaks of anger. That one can be a metaphor for the other is mentioned several times in Seneca's prose works: the two are similar because of their contagious nature.<sup>10</sup> Anger is also what the Fury conceives as being the driving force of all crimes, and she wants there to “be nothing that anger regards as forbidden.”<sup>11</sup> The Fury's wish is quickly fulfilled: as soon as the chorus sings its first ode, Atreus enters stage, and he is already engulfed in anger.

### (iii) The Angered King

When we first meet Atreus, he rebukes himself for being idle (*ignavus*) and inert (*iners*) – these are literally the first two words that he utters (176). He then calls himself *iratus* (“enraged”, 180) and decides that he must act and find a way to bring revenge upon his brother. From this introduction, one can conclude that Atreus has only recently become *iratus*. A moment before, he was apparently idle, but something triggered his anger and made him denounce his previous inactivity. That something clearly was the curse of Tantalus, because anger was exactly what Tantalus was supposed to introduce to the house of Pelops.

Atreus' anger would be considered a disease by Seneca. This is not just because Seneca condemned anger in all of its manifestations and went so far as to write a three-books-long treatise on the issue. Atreus's anger is particularly distinctive for being welcomed by Atreus himself; he wishes to intensify the rage (*furor*, 252-3) burning in his heart. The king is accustomed to rage and anger, and they become the “permanent evils” of his soul. “Permanent

<sup>10</sup> See the chapter about Oedipus for specific examples.

<sup>11</sup> *Thy.* 39: *nihil sit ira quod vetitum putat*, Fitch's translation.

evils” (*perpetua mala*, LXXV.11ff.) is the term Seneca uses in his letters to Lucilius to introduce the distinction between passions (*affectus*) and diseases of the soul (*morbi animi*): the former are short-lived, like a cough (*tussis*); the latter are permanent, like consumption (*phthisis*).<sup>12</sup> In this model, Atreus suffers from *morbus animi* because he is so wicked as to take pride in his anger and to welcome it as an ally in his designs.

This distinction between *morbus animi* and *affectus* is most clearly articulated in the letters, but Seneca draws on a similar idea in *De Ira*. In this earlier work, he makes a distinction between anger and irascibility (*iracundia*, I.4.1) and another one between anger and savagery (*feritas*, II.5.1).<sup>13</sup> Seneca argues that irascibility and savagery are marked by frequent, or even constant, anger. Applied to *Thyestes*, this means that Seneca would not just call Atreus enraged; he would call the king a mentally ill short-tempered savage. This is, in fact, just about how the chorus describes its king: “that savage man, the wild, irrational, truculent Atreus.”<sup>14</sup>

It is no wonder that Atreus is the first example Rosenmeyer gives of a cautionary paradigm in Senecan drama.<sup>15</sup> The king's disposition is directly opposite to that of a true philosopher.

The willingness to entrust oneself to anger and madness is what distinguishes Atreus from the hero of *Hercules furens*. Hercules' restlessness and ambition cause him to lose his mind, but he has no intention to go mad and is horrified after he learns what he has done. Hercules' madness is short-lived and, though it leads to terrible consequences, it is an example of an *affectus*. As such, his frenzy is not as dangerous and not as deeply rooted in the soul as Atreus' anger is.

This brings us to another major difference between *Oedipus*, *Hercules furens*, and

12 The Latin text of the *Epistles* used throughout this project is from Gummere's 1920 Loeb edition.

13 The Latin text of *De Ira* used throughout this project is from Barose's 2014 Loeb edition.

14 *ferus ille et acer / nec potens mentis truculentus Atreus*, 546-7, Fitch's translation.

15 Rosenmeyer 1989:16.

*Thyestes*. If one were to assume that gods are responsible for what happens in all three plays – and the validity of this assumption can be questioned – one would see that in all three cases, divine influence affects different areas of the human mind. The tragedy of Oedipus is the lack of knowledge. His senses are clear, and his moral convictions have the right to exist, which in Seneca's terms means that he is sane. Hercules commits his crimes because Hera makes him see what is not there. He does not suffer from a lack of knowledge, and his moral compass is not completely broken. Atreus, by contrast, understands what he is doing: he knows what has happened to him in the past, and his senses remain sharp. But the gods make him wish to do unspeakable things.

To put it more succinctly, *Oedipus* warns the audience not to trust what they know to have happened, *Hercules furens* warns the reader not to trust what they see happening, and *Thyestes* warns us not to trust what we think we want to happen. This series of admonitions is progressively more fatalistic and seems to reflect Seneca's own gradually increasing pessimism.

At this point, one may recall that Atreus is not the title character of the play in question. If one intends to call *Thyestes* the most fatalistic of Senecan tragedies – and I intend to do so – then one has to examine the protagonist himself first.

#### (iv) The Drunk Father

As evil as Atreus might be, it is Thyestes who performs the most egregious deed and eats the flesh of his children: when the stars desert the sky, they do so being terrified by what Thyestes did.<sup>16</sup> And while Thyestes might appear to be a victim of Atreus' evil schemes, it is Thyestes' choice to accept his brother's invitation that enables Atreus to pursue them. Thyestes

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<sup>16</sup> It is only when Atreus reveals to his brother what he has done with the bodies of the murdered children that Thyestes exclaims “*this* drove the day back to where it rises” (*hoc egit diem / aversum in ortus*, 1035-6).



decides to enter the palace in the middle of the third act, which occupies the central position within the play. The question that must be answered is whether Thyestes makes this decision independently or is compelled to do so by the gods or other divine forces.

On the surface level, Thyestes appears to be persuaded by his children, who are ignorant of the dangers associated with kingship and are eager to accept their uncle's invitation. Thyestes has a lengthy exchange with one of his sons on the matter. As is revealed later by the messenger, Thyestes has three sons in total: Tantalus, who is named after his great-grandfather, Plisthenes, and a younger unnamed child. The manuscript traditions differ in identifying the son with whom Thyestes has an exchange in the third act, but most-recent editions opt for Tantalus.<sup>17</sup> This choice has its implications and suggests that the naming is not accidental.<sup>18</sup> If the son with whom Thyestes speaks is called Tantalus, then one can say that Thyestes is persuaded by Tantalus to enter the palace. Yet Tantalus is also the name of Thyestes' grandfather, whom the Fury uses as its weapon of divine power in the prologue. There is, therefore, a hint that the spirit of his grandfather haunts Thyestes in the shape of his own child.

But even before his children begin persuading him, there is something that drags Thyestes to the palace. When he enters the stage, he says that his steps are reluctant<sup>19</sup> and urges himself to turn back before it is too late,<sup>20</sup> but continues to go on nonetheless as if he was bewitched or controlled by some supernatural force. Thyestes remains in this state up until the very end of the play when, in his drunkenness, he suddenly remembers about his sons and asks for them to be brought in. The speed with which Thyestes becomes sober in the fifth act makes it

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<sup>17</sup> See Zwierlein for different manuscript traditions. Zwierlein, Fitch, and Tarrant all opt for Tantalus. I couldn't find any explicit information on why this choice is made. However, Tarrant mentions that the E-branch of the manuscripts is generally more reliable (37), and it is in the E branch that Thyestes' son is called Tantalus.

<sup>18</sup> I am not, of course, the first person to suggest this. Tarrant (1985:149) remarks that the son is "perhaps significantly named."

<sup>19</sup> *moveo nolentem gradum*, 420.

<sup>20</sup> *refelcte gressum, dum licet*, 428.

seem as if someone has instantaneously lifted the spell and brought Thyestes back to his senses. Because the change from drunkenness to sobriety is so rapid, this episode deserves to be examined more closely.

When Thyestes first appears in the fifth act, his head is “heavy with wine” (*grauatum vino*, 910), he forgets about his children and sings in anapests (920-969). The choice of meter highlights Thyestes' present drunkenness and inadequacy: generally, only the chorus or characters acting as chorus leaders would resort to anapests in Senecan tragedy.<sup>21</sup> Atreus, however, wants his brother to be sober the moment he reveals to him that his children are dead (*sobrio tanta ad mala / opus est Thyeste*, 901), and so he waits until Thyestes himself expresses the desire to see them. When Thyestes does so (973-5), he switches back to iambic trimeter and also states that he had enough wine; in other words, he sobers up. Therefore, the change from drunkenness to sobriety is instantaneous and is signaled by the change in meter.

In his prose works, Seneca associates drunkenness (*ebrietas*) with madness (*dementia* or *insania*).<sup>22</sup> This view presents Seneca with difficulties because short madness (*brevis insania*) is the first definition of anger that he cites in *De Ira* (I.I.2). Given his unequivocal denouncement of anger, one would expect Seneca to disapprove of anything that, like anger, can be called madness. But in *De Tranquillitate Animi*, Seneca defends the view that drunkenness can sometimes be pleasant and beneficial. He even cites a certain Greek poet to support this idea:

21 In *Troades*, Hecuba takes on a role of the chorus leader and commands the chorus what it should and should not do (83-98, 117-131, 142-155). Similarly, Hippolytus acts as the leader of the hunters in *Phaedra* (1-84), with that only difference that the hunters don't constitute the chorus in this play. Part of Medea's incantation (787-842) is written in anapests as well: here she directs various deities to help her in her vengeance. A somewhat different case is Andromache, who sings in anapests when she begs Ulysses not to kill her son (705-735). But she also orders Astyanax to imitate her lament (*matris fletus imitare tuae*, 717), and by doing so she makes herself leader of a chorus of two. Thyestes' choice to use anapests, is, therefore, inappropriate, for at the moment in question he is drunk and cannot control himself, let alone any other human or god.

22 See *QNat.* III.20.5: “drunkenness, until it passes off, is madness” (*ebrietas, donec exsiccetur, dementia est*). Also see Ep. LXXXIII.18: “[Just] affirm that drunkenness is nothing but voluntary madness” (*Dic ... nihil aliud esse ebrietatem quam voluntariam insaniam*). The Latin text of *QNat.* used throughout this project is from Corcoran's 2014 Loeb edition.

“sometimes it is pleasant to be mad”.<sup>23</sup> And despite all the conceptual difficulties that such association poses, Seneca is willing to associate drunkenness with insanity.

Since drunkenness is madness, the drunk Thyestes must be mad. As mentioned before, Thyestes sobers up and comes to his senses instantaneously. By contrast, he loses his mind only gradually as he walks toward the palace in the third act of the play. By the end of the scene, he is ready to agree with what he denied in the beginning. When Atreus says that the throne has room for two (534), for instance, Thyestes gives no sign of disagreement even though he was arguing the exact opposite just several lines ago (444).<sup>24</sup> It is as if the city of Argos itself was infected: the closer Thyestes gets to it, the weaker his reasoning becomes. Once Atreus commits his crimes, the spell keeping Thyestes mad is lifted, but only for him to understand the terrible truth behind his brother's actions. Thyestes might be less obviously influenced by Tantalus than Atreus, but he is still subject to the curse that affects the house of Pelops.

#### (v) The Timid Stars

There is another important difference between *Oedipus*, *Thyestes*, and *Hercules furens* that has little to do with diseases but supports the idea that later Senecan plays lend more importance to the divine than his earlier works do. This difference lies in the way Seneca talks about stars and celestial bodies.

When Oedipus blinds himself, he “[raises] his head and scanning the sky's expanse with hollow eyes [tests] the darkness.”<sup>25</sup> He can no longer see the sun, the moon, and the stars, but he knows that they must still be fixed on their course through the sky. In *Oedipus*, the heavenly bodies do not react to what happens on earth: the sun might be hesitant (*dubius*, 1) to shed light

<sup>23</sup> The poet is unidentified, and Seneca's translation into Latin is: *aliquando et insanire iucundum est*, XVII.10.

<sup>24</sup> This inconsistency has been previously noted by Tarrant (1985:166).

<sup>25</sup> Fitch's translation of *attolit caput / cavisque lustrans orbibus caeli plagas / noctem experitur*, 971-3.

on Thebes and its people, but it does rise in its due course nonetheless.

In *Hercules furens*, the situation is different. Instead of the protagonist hiding from the stars, the stars take the initiative and isolate themselves from the protagonist. Hercules says that “the world shrinks from [him], the stars turn aside and run their courses askew.”<sup>26</sup> These words need not be taken literally: Hercules does not necessarily mean that the sky is devoid of stars. His concern is that the stars will no longer accept him as their member.<sup>27</sup> And even though in *Hercules furens*, heavenly bodies are endowed with willpower, there are grounds to doubt that what Hercules describes really occurs and is not a metaphor or a product of his imagination.<sup>28</sup>

In *Thyestes*, Seneca takes this willpower to the extreme. The stars not only turn their back on Thyestes (he was never supposed to be deified in any case); they disappear from the sky altogether along with the sun and the moon. The motive is central to the play with an entire choral ode (789-884) devoted to this extraordinary event anticipated by the Fury (120-1) and mentioned by the messenger (776-8), Atreus (892), and Thyestes (990-5, 1035-6).

In *Thyestes*, therefore, the divine and the human worlds are interwoven. The play is in startling contrast with *Hercules furens*, and, especially, with *Oedipus*, where a boundary between the two worlds clearly exists. One can only conclude that Seneca's views must have evolved over time.

In the next chapter I will argue that along with Seneca's views changed the dramatic techniques he employed. In fact, the relative dating of the tragedies used in the last three chapters would not have been established with any certainty were it not for Fitch's<sup>29</sup> careful analysis of certain characteristics of Seneca's trimeter. In the next chapter, I develop on Fitch's findings and

26 *ubique notus perdidit exilio locum. / me refugit orbis, astra transversos agunt / obliqua cursus*, 1331-3, Fitch's translation.

27 Like elsewhere in Latin poetry, stars are presumed to be divine. For the divine status of the stars, see Juno's speech (*HF*, 6-18), the seventh book of *Questiones Naturales*, *Ep.* XLVIII.11, LXXIII.15, *etc.*

28 Fitch (1987:459) acknowledges that there is such an ambiguity.

29 Fitch 1981.

study Senecan trimeter in Senecan and some Neo-Latin tragedies in greater detail. I do not limit the discussion to dating, and there will be sections on topics that have not received their due attention in Senecan scholarship, such as the relationship between meter and meaning in his plays. In this respect, the classical Greek tragedies have been studied much more thoroughly,<sup>30</sup> and my analysis, will, I hope, allow the reader to compare some of the techniques used in Greek plays to those employed by Seneca.

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<sup>30</sup> See, for instance, Roisman's *Meter and Meaning* (2000) and Olcott's *Metrical variations in the iambic trimeter as a function of dramatic technique in Sophocles' Philoctetes and Ajax* (1974).

## Chapter IV

### Senecan Trimeter in Humanist Tragedies

Not so long ago, Gary Grund has translated and published several prominent Renaissance tragedies, thereby sparking the interest of scholars in Neo-Latin drama. In his Tatti volume,<sup>1</sup> Grund included Mussato's *Ecerinis*, Loschi's *Achilles*, Correr's *Procne*, Dati's *Hiempsal*, and Verardi's *Ferdinand Preserved*. In their reviews of Grund's *Humanist Tragedies*, both Stefano Gulizia<sup>2</sup> and Anne Mahoney<sup>3</sup> comment on the peculiarities of metrical practices of the Renaissance and, in particular, on Dati's trimeter. Mahoney suggests that a discussion of Renaissance versification would have been in place in Grund's volume. But to my knowledge, no text discussing the meter in the five plays mentioned above has been published.

In the present chapter, I hope to fill this gap and give a broad overview of the iambic trimeter in *Ecerinis*, *Achilles*, *Procne*, and *Hiempsal*. The analysis will be based on the data<sup>4</sup> gathered by me with the help of a semi-automatic scansion program I have written. I will focus exclusively on trimeter because trimeter is the most commonly used meter in tragedies, which means that it is possible to draw statistical conclusions about it. One cannot, of course, consider humanist tragedies in isolation from the Senecan model on which they are based, and I will include my observations on Senecan trimeter as well, whenever appropriate. Verardi's *Ferdinand Preserved* will be excluded from the discussion because Verardi chose hexameter

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1 Grund 2011. Note that the texts and translations of the Renaissance tragedies I use in this chapter are from this volume, unless specified otherwise.

2 Gulizia 2011:1200.

3 Mahoney 2011.

4 The data can be downloaded at <https://dargones.github.io/Scansion-project/>

rather than trimeter as the metric unit for his play.

This text is broken down into five sections, each dealing with a particular approach to the study of trimeter. The first section will establish what Senecan trimeter is and what are the qualitative differences between it and the trimeter found in Neo-Latin tragedies. The second section will deal with what one can infer about the Renaissance pronunciation of Latin words from the four plays in question. In the third section, I will consider variations that occur within trimeter and will perform a statistical comparison of the four Renaissance and the ten Roman plays. In the fourth section, I will discuss the relationship between trimeter and meaning and will show how lines and passages important to the narrative stand out from the metrical perspective. The final section will examine whether and how the change from trimeter to another meter reflects the change in the emotional state of the characters.

### (i) The Structure of Iambic Trimeter

Iambic trimeter is called this way because it consists of three iambic *metra*, each of which is, in turn, composed of two iambs. Seneca allows some iambs to be replaced with a spondee, tribrach, dactyl, anapest, or, rarely, with a proceleusmatic. However, the first and the second iamb in a *metron* are not equivalent, which is why Senecan trimeter is known not by the number of iambs in it but rather by the number of *metra* in each line. The following schema best illustrates the repetitive structure of Senecan trimeter:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
u	—	u	—	u	—	u	—	u	—	u	—
—	uu		uu	—	uu		uu	—	uu		u
uu				uu				uu			

Any line of Senecan trimeter would follow this schema. The reverse, however, is not true. This is because, in theory, the schema defines a combinatorial explosion of 1728 different metrical patterns, some of which never actually appear in Seneca's writings. The fifth and sixth syllables, for instance, never resolve in the same line. A resolution in the tenth syllable is so uncommon as to only occur in three of the Senecan plays.<sup>5</sup>

Boyle<sup>6</sup> defines Seneca's trimeter in terms of the six feet of which it is composed. His definition is more specific than the schema above, but suffers from the same problem: it defines a broader set of metrical patterns than Seneca actually uses. So, for instance, it allows five or more resolutions in a line, while Seneca never has more than four. The schema proposed by Fantham admits the maximum of four resolutions per line but excludes certain rare metrical patterns that are actually present in Senecan tragedy.<sup>7</sup> One is bound to admit that the theoretical idea of iambic trimeter differs from its manifestation in Seneca's writing.

This difference has important implications for the present survey of the trimeter in the Renaissance tragedy. All of the four texts in question exhibit metrical patterns unparalleled in the Senecan plays, but two remain within the theoretical bounds of what could have been considered iambic trimeter by the Roman author. Loschi's *Achilles* and Mussato's *Ecerinis* are theoretically not that different from any of the ten plays in the Senecan corpus.<sup>8</sup>

To be precise, there are two lines in *Achilles* and four more lines in *Ecerinis* that do not

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5 This led Tarrant (1985:29), and Coffey and Mayer (1990:41), who edited *Thyestes* and *Phaedra* respectively, to exclude the possibility of resolution occurring in the second syllable of the fifth foot altogether. On the lines ending in proceleusmatic see Fitch's commentary on *Hercules Furens* 408 (1987:230) and Boyle's commentary on *Medea* 266-71 (2014:201).

6 Boyle's most recent edition is that of *Thyestes* (2017:cxxxix).

7 Fantham (1982:104-10) does comment on the existence of such patterns, but excludes them from the schema for the sake of convenience.

8 Speaking of the Senecan corpus, I will refer to the eight Senecan plays as well as to *Octavia* and *Hercules Oetaeus*. Even though *Octavia* is not genuine and the authorship of HO is disputed, the two plays must have been written by Senecan contemporaries and their trimeter is much closer to the Senecan model than are the humanist tragedies.



follow the schema defined above. Nonetheless, Padrin<sup>9</sup> proposes simple emendations for three of these lines from *Ecerinis*, and the other three should probably be emended as well:<sup>10</sup> changing the whole schema for the sake of including one or two aberrant lines seems too radical a move.

What is certain is that there are some lines in the writings of Loschi and Mussato that exhibit metrical patterns unparalleled in Seneca. I give two examples below. Note that these lines technically follow the schema outlined in the beginning:

Āuspiciā Trō|ylūs Hēctōrīs | bēllō gērens (*Achilles*, 20)<sup>11</sup>

Tārvīsīūm | Vīcēntiā Pā|dūā: pārībus (*Ecerinis*, 544)

In contrast to Loschi and Mussato, Correr and Dati, the two younger playwrights, chose not to adhere to the Senecan definition of iambic trimeter. Correr explicitly says in the *argumentum* that he will admit an anapest in any even-numbered foot (7). He mentions that anapests are “rarer” (*rarius*) in tragedies than in comedies. But he does not make an exception for the last foot and allows a line to end with an anapest or a trochee. By so doing, he contradicts not just Seneca’s notion of iambic trimeter but also the much looser structure of iambic senarius, the meter employed by early Latin comedians.<sup>12</sup> Below is a typical example of a line ending in an anapest:

nōn ēst fūrō|rīs cāpērē mēn|sūrām **scēlēri**. (*Procne*, 768)

Finally, there is Dati’s *Hiempsal*, a metrical anomaly in several respects. Unlike Correr, Dati preserves the iamb in the final line. However, he makes the other feet almost identical and replaces all iambs with tribrachs, anapests, and spondees alike. More often than not, Dati follows Senecan trimeter, but he also deviates from it and deviates often enough for his meter to be more

9 Padrin as cited in Grund (2011:295).

10 See Appendix I for the list of metrically problematic lines in *Ecerinis* and *Achilles*.

11 Troylus is always trisyllabic in *Achilles*. Consider, for instance, line 71:

tūsqvē dē|xtrām **Trōylūs** | dūdūm nēgas.

12 For a discussion on iambic senarius, see Halporn, Ostwald, and Rosenmeyer 1963:74ff.

rightly termed iambic senarius. I give two examples of Dati's practice below:

Iūvābīt īn|**tērīm sīmūlās**|s(e) īd ārtībus. (*Hiempsal*, 473)

**Rēgnī lābēs** | ēst prīncīpūm | dīscōrdīa. (*Hiempsal*, 474)<sup>13</sup>

Another peculiarity of *Hiempsal* is the frequency of hiatus. In Senecan trimeter, hiatus is impossible altogether; it is never found in trimeter sections of *Octavia*, *Hercules Oetaeus*, *Achilles*, or *Procne*. Hiatus only occurs once in Mussato's *Ecerinis*. By contrast, there are more than a dozen lines with hiatus in *Hiempsal*. Most of the time, the word that is not elided is an exclamation (*o*, *io*, *he*,<sup>14</sup> *heu*, or *euhoē*). Non-elision of exclamations is possible in classical Latin: Horatian Odes contain what is, arguably, the most famous example of this practice (*Odes* I.1.2). However, because Seneca does not follow this practice in his trimeters, and because *Hiempsal* contains other examples of hiatus as well, Dati's admission of hiatus should be considered a divergence from the Senecan norm. The line below can give a sense of how Dati employs hiatus:

'**Ō**,' īnquīt, 'ōm|n(e), **ō ū**nīcūm | dēcūs mēum, (*Hiempsal*, 634)

There are also several differences in how Seneca and his successors scan individual words. In a few cases, the differences have to do with the treatment of *muta cum liquida*. So, for instance, Correr allows the first 'a' in *lacrima* to be either long or short, depending on the context,<sup>15</sup> while Seneca is consistent in scanning *lacrima* with short 'a.' It would be tedious, however, to enumerate all such ways in which the Renaissance writers deviate from Seneca. In the remaining part of this section, I will instead focus on a single substantial difference between

13 Note that this line is a reworked quotation from Sallust (Grund, 317).

14 Given that "he" only appears when there is a need for a hiatus, it might be the case that "he" is "heu" with elision encoded in the orthography. This would be very strange, however, because "heu" must be monosyllabic. At present, I consider the four lines with "he" as lines with hiatus.

15 Compare, for instance, the following two lines:  
 Quō cēdīs, ānī|mě? Nūm sōrōr | **lācrīmās** pētīt? (483)  
 dēmūm pērēm|ptām: **lācrīmā** | fācīēnt fīdem. (168)

Senecan and Neo-Latin trimeter.

This difference lies in the treatment of initial 's' followed by a consonant, a sequence commonly referred to as *s impure*. As Henry Hoenigswald notes,<sup>16</sup> the scansion of an open syllable before *s impure* was a controversial matter for classical poets, and they tended to avoid the issue. Among 22 open syllables followed by *s impure* in Senecan tragedy, 20 are anapest syllables and yield no clue about their quantities. The two exceptions listed by Hoenigswald are *HF*. 950 and *Phae*. 1026, where lengthening occurs.

By contrast, the four Renaissance authors translated by Grund allow short final syllables to be followed by *s impure*.<sup>17</sup> Their reasons for doing so might be different, but the most probable explanation is that they followed Plautus and other early comic dramatists, who, according to Hoenigswald, commonly scanned an open syllable preceding *s impure* as short.

There is, however, another possible explanation for this phenomenon. Because it has to do with the Renaissance pronunciation of Latin words, I will discuss this explanation in the next section.

### (ii) Italian Pronunciation of Latin Words

In Italian, the letters 'sc' form a digraph (pronounced [ʃ]) if followed by an 'e' or an 'i'. Hence, Mussato, Loschi, and Correr, all Italians, might have pronounced Latin 'sc' as a single sound as well. The incidents of *s impure* in their works corroborate this hypothesis to a certain

<sup>16</sup> Hoenigswald (1949).

<sup>17</sup> The full list of *s impure* preceded by a short syllable goes as follows: *Ecerinis* 45, 65, 304, 319, 387, 485, 495, 586, 598, 607; *Achilles* 346, 603, 635; *Procne* 7, 46, 180, 259 (this line can alternatively have an anapest in the fourth foot), 297, 387, 456, 614, 663, 710, 715, 743, 869, 873, 915, 922, 994. Note also that the rules of *s impure* apply to cases when s is followed by *muta cum liquida* as in *Ecerinis* 387, and *Procne* 46, 614, 663, 715. Finally, *s impure* can evidently manifest itself within words like it does between the prefix and the root of *rescio* in *Procne* 387 and 440. Because Dati allows any syllable except for the one before the last to be long, it is impossible to say with certainty how he would scan the syllables before *s impure*. The lines in question are *Hiempsal* 9 (*praefatio*), 312, 585, 616, 715.

degree.

Loschi only allows a short final syllable to be followed by a word starting with *s impure* when that word begins with 'sci' or 'sce' (*Scirtis, scelus, sceptrum*). In the majority of cases, the same is true for Correr's play, even though he also applies the rule to some words that start with 'st,' 'str,' or 'spl.' It might be the case that their native language has something to do with the approach these two authors take in treating *s impure*.

This conjecture about the influence of Italian pronunciation of the Renaissance Latin is, however, heavily questioned by Mussato's *Ecerinis*, in which a short syllable only precedes *s impure*, when 's' is followed by 'p,' 't,' or 'tr.' Thus, the only thing that can be stated with certainty is that neither of the three authors followed Seneca's practice of avoiding *s impure* after open syllables.

When it comes to pronunciation of Latin words, Mussato's *Ecerinis* presents the most interesting case. This is because the play is set in the thirteenth century, and some of the names and places mentioned in the text would have been unknown to *Seneca* and his contemporaries. Other proper names might have existed in Roman times but would have come to denote different places or communities.

In the names of people and places contemporary to Mussato's time, the Latin and Italian accentuation coincide (e.g., *Ecerīnis*\Ezzeli'no, *Padŭa*\Pa'dova).<sup>18</sup> What is particularly interesting is that Mussato scans *Lombardīa* (Italian *Lombardi'a*), even though, in classical Latin, the 'i' before another vowel would have been shortened.<sup>19</sup>

It is quite likely that the Italian accentuation in *Lombardia* was influenced by the accentuation the word came to have in late Latin and not the other way around. And clearly,

<sup>18</sup> Note that Padua is scanned in the exact same way in Catullus XCV.7.

<sup>19</sup> There are some exceptions, e.g. certain words of Greek origin, like *Thalia* (example taken from Allen and Greenough 1903:401), but the rule holds true in the prevailing majority of cases.

Mussato was not the first and not the last Renaissance author to Latinize contemporary proper names. One would, therefore, expect Mussato's scansion of *Lombardia* to be an example of a general trend in Neo-Latin literature.

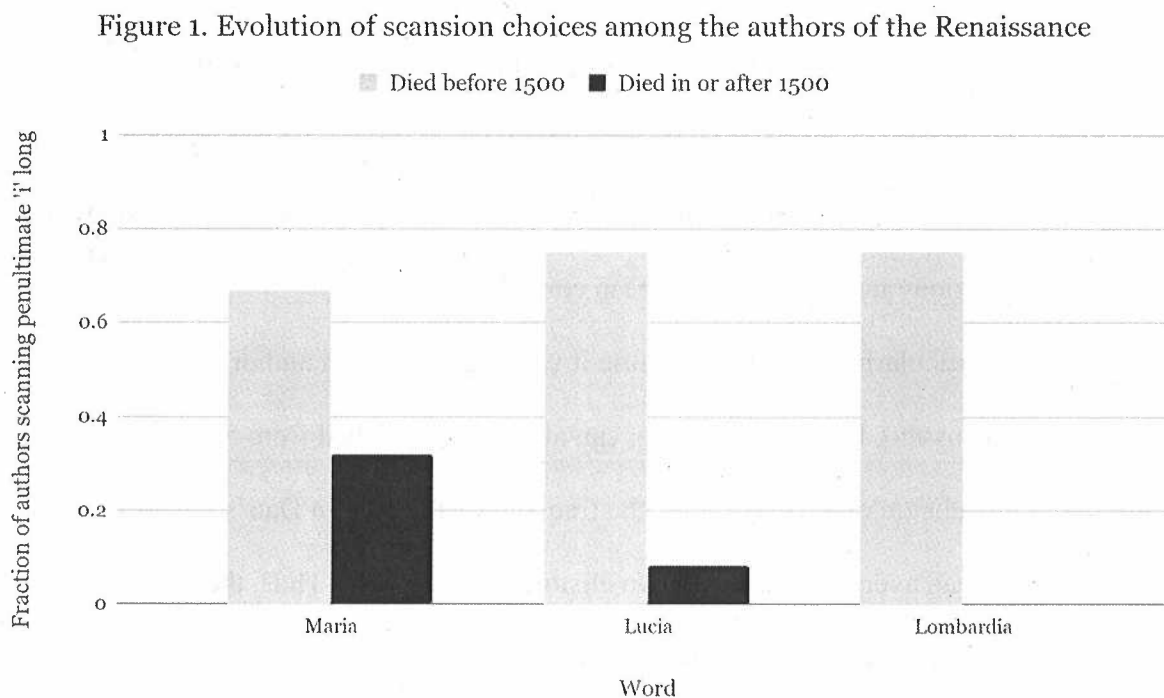
With many Neo-Latin texts now available in digitized form, it is possible to compare Mussato's scansion of *Lombardia* to how other authors of the Renaissance scanned the word. In *Poeti d'Italia*,<sup>20</sup> the largest online database of Italian Neo-Latin poetry, the word appears six times. I list all of these six instances below in chronological order, with entries being color-coded according to the way the word is scanned.

Date	Line	Author	Work
1314	Prōmīssā <b>Lōm bārdiā</b> mē   dōmīnūm vōcat: (Iambic Trimeter)	Albertino Mussato,	<i>Ecerinis</i> 294
Early XIV c.	<b>Lōmbār diā</b> , fī dēm mērū īt sī   fāmā prī ōrum. (Hexameter)	Ferreto de' Ferreti	<i>de Scaligerorum origine</i> V.254
Early XIV c.	Tūscīā   rēgē cā rēt, nēc hā bēt <b>Lō mbārdiā</b>   rēgem, (Hexameter)	Convene- vole da Prato	<i>regia carmina ad Robertum Andecauensem</i> 43a.17
XIV c.	<b>Lōmbār diā</b> sī mūl, Gvēl fōrūm   pārtīs ē īdem. (Hexameter)	Ranieri Granci	<i>de proliis Tusciae</i> VI.2073
1480- 93	Dīcā tūr pōst hāc Lātī ūm " <b>Lō mbārdiā</b> "   tēllus (Hexameter)	Ugolino Verino	<i>Carlias</i> X.38
Early XVI c.	<b>Lōngōbārdī(a)</b> ādhūc, cēpīt āb Ānglīīs (Lesser Asclepiad)	Andrea Ammonio	<i>Carmina</i> 1.68

20 Mastandrea, Stocchi, Cervani, Cavarzere, Barizza *et al.*, eds. [Online, 2019, September 21]

It appears from the data above that long ‘i’ in *Lombardia* was a preference of old authors of the trecento. Short ‘i’ was favored by later authors of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In terms of the way *Lombardia* is scanned, Granci’s *de proeliis Tusciae*, whose date of composition is not known, is, therefore, more similar to the earlier works of Mussato and Ferreto de’Ferreti.

An objection can be raised that with mere six examples, one has no basis for an argument. But, in fact, *Lombardia* is only one of several words with penultimate ‘i’ whose scansion changed over time. *Maria*, *Lucia*, and *Sophia* all follow a similar trajectory with ‘i’ being predominantly long in early authors and predominantly short in later texts (Figure 1).



### (iii) Statistical Analysis

The peril of statistical analysis of meter is that there are too many things to analyze. One can quantify the position of caesura, the length of words in a line, or, as I have demonstrated in the previous section, the predominance of a particular scansion choice. It follows that anyone

attempting a statistical overview of trimeter is bound to limit themselves to a small set of features. This section will only deal with two statistical characteristics: elision and resolution rates. The choice of features is guided by what has not been said about trimeter before and also by what I think would be of interest to the present survey of the Renaissance texts.

A word has to be added about John Fitch's 1981 article, in which he proposed a statistical method for relative dating of the Senecan plays. Fitch orders the plays by the percentage of inline sense-pauses and also by the percentage of shortened final 'o'. Based on this data, he divides the tragedies into early (*Agamemnon*, *Phaedra*, *Oedipus*), intermediate (*Medea*, *Troades*, *Hercules furens*), and late (*Thyestes*, *Phoenissae*) groups. Fitch relies on G. C. Giardina's edition of the plays to count the sense pauses, but I have checked that his grouping holds for the more recent edition of Otto Zwierlein as well.<sup>21</sup> Throughout this text, I will rely on Fitch's chronological grouping of the tragedies, which has, for the most part, been accepted,<sup>22</sup> when discussing changes in elision and resolution rates within the Senecan corpus.

Elision is particularly interesting because it varies greatly from author to author (Figure 2).<sup>23</sup> The plays of Mussato, Loschi, and Correr can all be distinguished from Seneca's texts by their unusually low elision rate. By contrast, the frequency of elision in Dati's *Hiemsa* is more than twice the Senecan average of roughly two elisions per five lines. Thus, the rate of elision seems to be wholly dependent on the author's style.

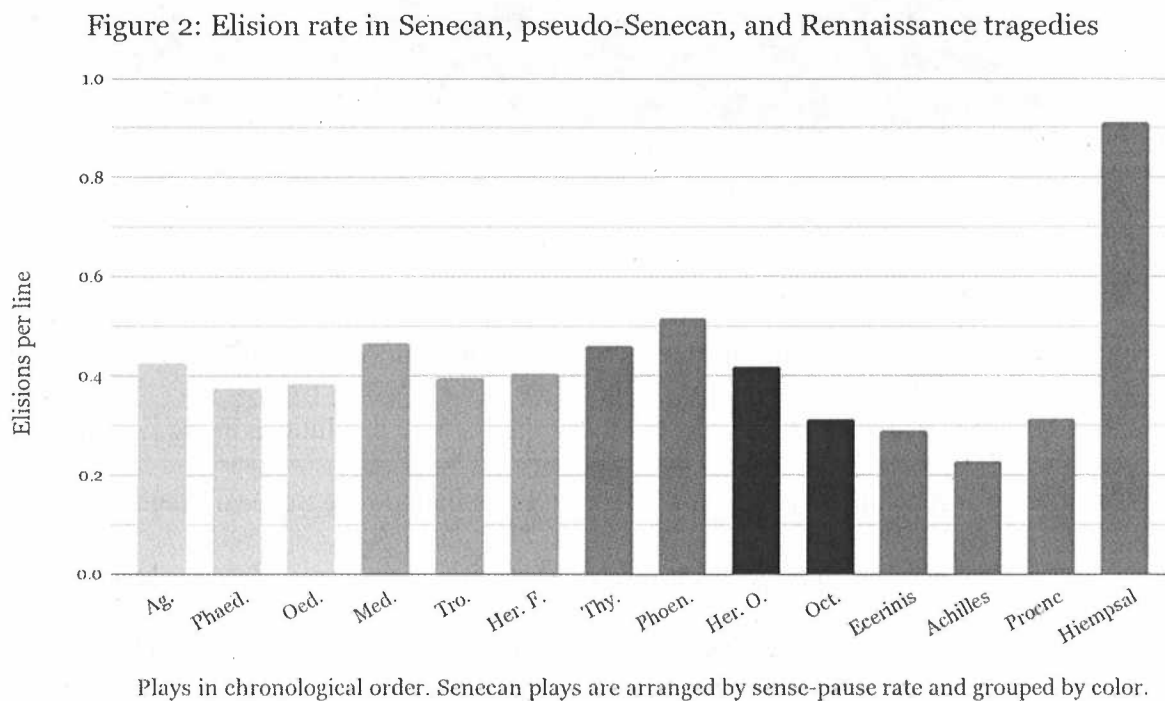
Among the ten plays in the Senecan corpus, *Octavia* stands out. With 187 elisions in

21 The rates for Zwierlein (1986) are higher on average, but the relative differences between the plays hold more or less the same and the groupings remain intact. The percentages go as follows (Giardina, Zwierlein): *Agamemnon* (32.4, 43.4), *Phaedra* (34.4, 45.6), *Oedipus* (36.8, 44.3), *Medea* (47.2, 55.0), *Troades* (47.6, 55.5), *Hercules furens* (49.0, 54.9), *Thyestes* (54.5, 60.8), *Phoenissae* (57.2, 59.2).

22 Fitch's conclusions have been independently validated by Dexter et al. (2016) who have also supplemented Fitch's findings with analysis of numerous other stylometric features proving computational analysis to be an invaluable tool for the study of classical texts. These conclusions are also supported by Ferri (2003:39) and Tarrant (1985:11) among others.

23 This is not only true for trimeter: the *Aeneid*, for instance, has more than twice as many elisions as the *Metamorphoses* even though the latter poem is greater in length (elision counts for the latter two texts are based on *Musisque Deoque*, Accessed: 2019, September 21).

total, the play is 36 elisions short of the elision rate of *Phaedra*, which is the lowest for Seneca. This difference between *Octavia* and the genuine Senecan plays is statistically significant ( $z$  score  $\approx -2.35$ , two-tailed  $p \approx 0.02$ ) and can, therefore, be added to the long list of reasons for which the play should not be considered authentic.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, it should be noted that *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae* have the highest elision rate in the Senecan corpus and that Fitch's grouping holds in the sense that the average elision frequency per group increases with time. If *Octavia* were written by Seneca, it would have been a late play and would have to have the elision rate that is higher than the Senecan average.



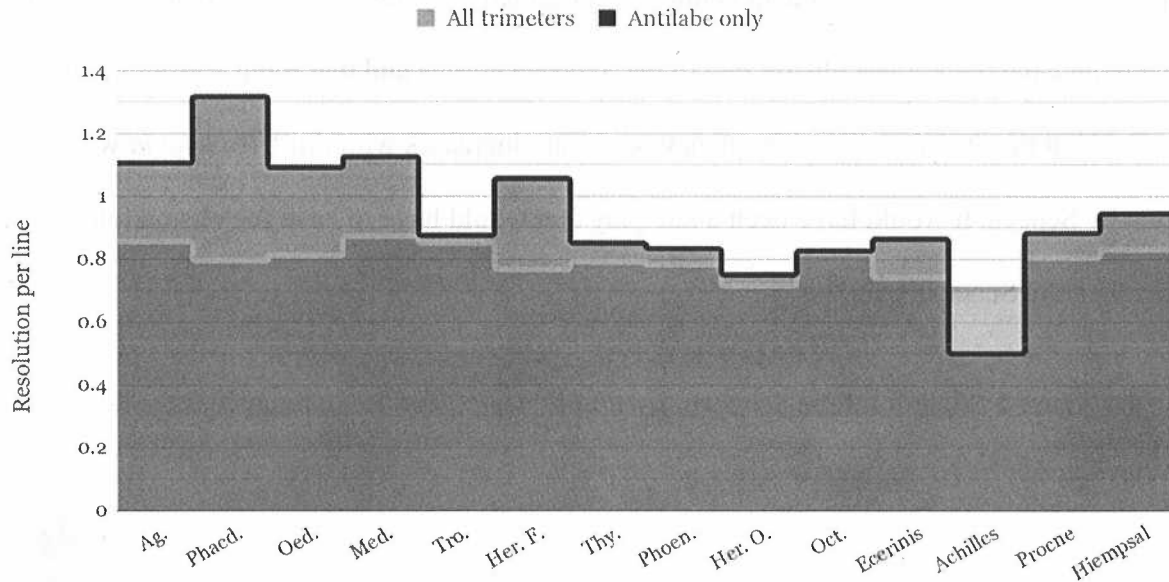
There is much less variation among resolution rates than among elision rates (Figure 3). In theory, this does not prevent one from making statistically-driven arguments about the data. So, for instance, one can claim that the resolution frequency in *Hercules Oetaeus* is significantly smaller than the Senecan average ( $z$  score  $\approx -2.58$ ,  $p \approx 0.01$ ). But one must not overestimate this

<sup>24</sup> The unusually low elision rate is not mentioned by Ferri (2003).



difference. Were *Hercules Oetaeus* to have some 70 resolutions more (and it has more than a thousand already), it would have a resolution frequency of *Hercules furens*.

Figure 3: Resolution in Senecan, pseudo-Senecan, and Renaissance tragedies



Plays in chronological order. Senecan plays are arranged by sense-pause rate.

More significant for attribution appears to be the distribution of resolutions over iambic feet. So, for instance, *Hercules Oetaeus* has proportionally more resolutions in the fifth foot and proportionally fewer resolutions in the first and fourth feet than do the Senecan tragedies or *Octavia*. Each of the Neo-Latin tragedies is also different in its own way: *Ecerinis* has unusually many resolutions in the fourth foot, *Hiempsal* - in the third, etc. It would be too much to go over each foot and each play here, but Appendix II contains the statistics for anyone interested to consult.

The data on resolution rates reveals another interesting, albeit not that surprising, result: *antilabe* seems to be strongly associated with high resolution rates. Virtually in all of the Senecan corpus and also in *Ecerinis*, *Procne*, and *Hiempsal*, the resolution rate is higher in lines that are shared between multiple speakers. Sometimes the difference is slight, but sometimes,

particularly in the early Senecan plays, this difference is very stark.

As can be seen from the figure above, *Achilles* constitutes a notable exception from the tendency of *antilabe* and high resolution rates to coincide. However, one should bear in mind that *antilabe* is fairly uncommon in *Achilles*, in which only ten lines are shared between different speakers.<sup>25</sup> The overall relationship between *antilabe* and increased resolution rate is statistically significant,<sup>26</sup> but the difference for any given play is not necessarily so.

*Antilabe* marks tension between speakers and is sometimes coupled with elliptical syntax, which produces, as Boyle puts it, “the impression of quickfire dialogue.”<sup>27</sup> The fact that *antilabe* corresponds to a high resolution rate, therefore, supports the idea that resolution should be associated with haste and emotional tension as well. This idea is not new, as I will discuss in the next section, but the connection between *antilabe* and resolution will, I hope, yield it more weight.

#### (iv) Trimeter and Meaning

Studies of the relationship between meter and meaning are usually concerned with the associations that different meters evoke.<sup>28</sup> The focus is placed on the differences *between* meters rather than on the variations allowed *within* a particular type of meter. The reason for this preference is apparent: any change between meters must be guided by authorial intent. By contrast, one can never be certain that the increased number of elisions or resolutions in a given passage is deliberate and not accidental.

25 Only *Phoenissae* has less lines of *antilabe* (6).

26 The two-tailed paired t-test yield the p-value of 0.008 for the eight Senecan plays, the p-value of 0.009 for the ten Roman plays, and the p-value of 0.013 for all four plays under examination.

27 Boyle 2017:132 (commentary on *Thyestes* 68-73).

28 This pertains to poetry of any time and genre. See, for instance, Gasparov’s *Meter and Meaning* (2012) for the study of Russian poetry. Roisman’s *Meter and Meaning* (2000) – which might be named after Gasparov’s work – gives an interesting overview of meter in Sophocles’ *Electra* and Euripides’ *Alcestis*. Both these texts consider variations *within* a given meter as well, but at their focus are doubtlessly the differences *between* meters.

Nonetheless, I do think that metrical anomalies within a given meter — which for the purposes of this text is trimeter — can reflect the mood of the scene or the emotional state of the speaker. I hope that the connection drawn in the last section between *antilabe* and resolution justifies this view to a certain degree. The present section will deal more closely with the expressive power of resolutions. This topic has not been given much attention by the scholars of Senecan drama, which is why a significant portion of this section will pertain to the eight Senecan tragedies. As I will show, what can be inferred about Seneca applies to the Renaissance tragedies as well.

In their respective commentaries on *Thyestes*, *Hercules furens* and *Oedipus*, Tarrant, Fitch, and Boyle make brief remarks<sup>29</sup> on the lines with multiple resolutions and recognize that the presence of resolutions in one line can be a sign of emotional agitation. Nevertheless, they do not go into detail, and I hope that my analysis will prove to be more complete. I also hope to show the expressive power of the passages without resolutions, something that, to my knowledge, has never been discussed before in the context of the Senecan drama. One such passage from which resolutions are absent is Medea's prayer to Jupiter:

Nunc summe toto Iuppiter caelo tona,  
 Intende dextram, uindices flammas para  
 Omnemque ruptis nubibus mundum quate.  
 Nec deligenti tela librentur manu  
 Uel me uel istum: quisquis e nobis cadet  
 Nocens peribit, non potest in nos tuum  
 Errare fulmen. (531-7)

“Now, highest Jupiter, thunder across the whole sky! Stretch forth your right hand, make ready your avenging flames, rend the clouds and shake the whole world! And in leveling its weapons your hand need not choose between me and him: whichever of us falls, the guilty will die; against us your thunderbolt can make no mistake.”<sup>30</sup>

From a purely statistical point of view, the absence of resolutions in this monologue is

<sup>29</sup> Later in this section, I discuss what exactly Tarrant, Fitch, and Boyle write. See pages 64-5, notes 34, 36, and 38.

<sup>30</sup> Here, as elsewhere in this chapter, the translation is Fitch's unless specified otherwise.

not particularly striking. Given that *Medea* contains 691 lines of iambic trimeter, 253 of which have no resolutions, one would expect to encounter at least one sequence of six or more consecutive lines with no resolutions with probability close to two thirds.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, the context in which these lines appear makes it seem unlikely that irregularities of the meter are due to chance only.

As noted above, the lines in question comprise an entire speech. The passages that surround it are quite resolution heavy, which makes the speech stand out all the more clearly: the rhythm changes together with the speaker. While being a part of the dialogue between Medea and Jason, the speech is formally a prayer addressed to Jupiter. There is, therefore, a reason for the monologue to have no resolutions – repetition of the metrical pattern makes the lines sound like a solemn chant and highlights the religious significance of the words. Any particular metrical pattern – and trimeter is no exception – prescribes the speaker to restrict the rhythm of their speech. But in this passage, Medea restricts the rhythm even further than Senecan trimeter dictates, thereby creating a sense of poetry within poetry.

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31 The precise probability rounded to the nearest thousandth is 0.657. Additionally, the probability of there being 19 consecutive iambic metra without resolutions is close to 0.715. Both of these quantities can be computed in the following way:

```
def get_p(k, n, s):
    """
    Get probability of there being a sequence of s consecutive lines without
    resolutions in a text of k lines total of which n lines have no resolution
    :param k: Total number of lines
    :param n: Number of lines without resolution
    :param s: Length of the sequence for which to calculate the probability
    :return: Desired probability
    """
    counts = np.zeros(shape=(n + 1, s), dtype=object)
    # counts[i][j] is the number of arrangements of i lines without resolutions
    # among k total lines such that the last j lines in a sequence are without
    # resolutions and no s lines without resolutions occur consequently.
    # Initially, k=1
    counts[1][1] = 1
    counts[0][0] = 1
    for _ in range(k - 1):
        old_counts = counts
        counts = np.zeros(shape=(n + 1, s), dtype=object)
        counts[:, 0] = np.sum(old_counts, axis=1)
        counts[1:n+1, 1:s] = old_counts[0:n, 0:s-1]
    return 1 - np.sum(counts[n, :]) / scipy.special.comb(k, n, exact=True)
```

One might find it too radical to isolate this passage as if it were written in some lyric meter when, after all, it is composed of perfectly normal lines of iambic trimeter. But it is crucial to keep in mind that any line of poetry is also a perfectly normal line of prose. When in *Henry IV Part 1*, Prince Hal says “a purse of gold most resolutely snatched” (I.2.32),<sup>32</sup> we say he speaks in prose, even though the phrase is composed of five iambic feet. It is only at the end of the scene, when the Prince is left alone that he starts speaking in iambic pentameter (“I know you all, and will awhile uphold...”, I.2.183ff), which the audience recognizes by the change of mood and by the repetition of the metrical pattern. It is no different, then, in *Medea*. By the time she finishes her prayer, it is clear that she has switched to a more solemn tone characterized by a highly repetitive metrical pattern.

There are other passages in Seneca that have no or very little resolutions. None of them stand out as much as Medea's prayer to Jupyter does, but it is still difficult to dismiss them as being there due to chance only. Some of these passages take up entire speeches (e.g., *Oed.* 87-109). Most constitute lists of various kinds: lists of questions (e.g., *Phoen.* 69-76, *Med.* 958-964), lists of places (e.g., *Phoen.* 12-25, *Tro.* 219-231), etc. In other words, semantic repetition is mirrored by the meter.

One of such lists comes from *Troades* and is particularly interesting from the metrical perspective. The old queen of Troy calls to witness gods, her deceased husband, and shades of her children, that everything that has happened, everything that Cassandra has prophesied, she, Hecuba, had divined herself when she was pregnant. This passage (28-37) begins with a sequence of eight lines, of which only the second has resolutions in it. In the ninth line, after anticipation has been built up, the main clause arrives in which Hecuba tells that she knew what would happen. In this key line, there are four resolutions, which is the maximum for Seneca and

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<sup>32</sup> ed. Bevington, D., 1987.

something that only occurs eight times in the whole corpus. It is as if Hecuba stored all the resolutions that were due to come at the beginning of the passage to pour all of them on the penultimate, the most emotional, line: *přior Hēcübă vī|dī grăvīdă nēc | tăcūi mětūs*.<sup>33</sup>

In general, it seems that lines that are heavy with resolutions tend to appear in emotionally charged passages. Tarrant notices that this is the case in *Thyestes*. He writes that lines with three or more resolutions “coincide with moments of high emotion” and provides an example: “note, e.g. [*Thy.*] 33 *rěpětāntqvě prōfūgōs; dūbīă vīōlēntaē dōmūs* in the Fury's vision of ceaseless crime”.<sup>34</sup> It is difficult to define what precisely a moment of high emotion is – which is why it is just as difficult to prove Tarrant's argument as it is to refute it – but I will, nonetheless, attempt to offer some evidence from the rest of the Senecan corpus and the four Renaissance plays to support his idea.

As mentioned above, there are only eight lines with four resolutions in the Senecan corpus. Two of these were already mentioned, so I will now turn to the rest of them to show that they are similarly charged with emotions. A line from *Hercules furens* will provide an exception. As Fitch rightly notices, in *Ārcădīă quătē|rē nēmōră Mă|nălīūm sūem*,<sup>35</sup> “the splendid run of resolutions suggests the trembling of the woods.”<sup>36</sup> This line is an exception in that the meter reflects actions, not emotions; the exception justifies the rule, however, in that it shows that there is a relationship between meter and semantic content.

Another line with four resolutions comes from *Agamemnon*: when the king of Mycenae enters the stage and notices Cassandra lying unconscious, in a moment of high agitation, he orders the servants to restore her to her senses: *rěfōvētē gělī|dō lătīcē. Iām | rēcīpīt dīēm*.<sup>37</sup> The

33 “[these things] I Hecuba saw first while great with child, and I voiced my fears” (36).

34 Tarrant 1985:30-1.

35 “Maenalian boar, that would jolt the Arcadian woods” (229).

36 Fitch 1987:192. Fitch also lists *Tro.* 1178, *Med.* 170, *Oed.* 60, and *Ag.* 78 as lines in which resolutions have expressive effect.

37 “[Servants], revive her with cold water. Now she sees the light again” (788).

next verse full of resolutions is from *Oedipus*. Desperate, the king of Thebes describes the havoc that the plague has wrought upon his city: ...*pōrtāt hūnc ægēr pārēns / sūprēm(um) ād īgnēm, mātēr hūnc āmēns gērīt / prōpērātqv(e) ūt ālūm rēpētāt īn ēūndēm rōgūm*.<sup>38</sup> Here, Seneca uses the same device that he will later bring to a polished state in *Troades*: a sentence that begins with “pure”<sup>39</sup> iambic trimeter ends with a sequence of four resolutions all squeezed into a single line.

In *Phoenissae*, Antigone tries to reason with her father by posing rhetorical questions and then objecting to the implications that these questions carry. Towards the end of her speech, she exclaims “[Do you flee this world so that] you could leave your fatherland? The fatherland, though you are living, is already lost to you.”<sup>40</sup> This exclamation marks another line charged with resolutions, which again appears in a highly emotional moment. Another line that has four resolutions and follows a similar structure of a rhetorical question followed by an objection comes from *Troades* (246).

The last of the eight lines in question comes from *Medea* (170) and presents the most prominent example of *antilabe* and resolution combined:

Nurse:	Mōrīērē.	“You will die.
Medea:	Cūpī ō.	I desire it.
Nurse:	Prōfūgě.	Escape!
Medea:	Pæ nītūt fūgæ.	I regret escaping.”

All of what has been said above applies to the Humanist tragedies as well. There are three lines of iambic trimeter in the Tatti volume with four resolutions in them, and all three are charged with emotion and haste.

One such verse comes from *Ecerinis* (322). Here, the tyrant urges his half brother to tell him the news:

38 “One son is carried to the final fire by an ailing father, another is brought by a crazed mother, who then hurries to fetch yet another son to the same fire” (59-61). Note that Boyle (2011:126) comments on this line, and also says that there are seven lines with four resolutions in total in the eight Senecan plays (there are actually eight).

39 “Pure” in a sense that there are no resolutions. Some iambs are still replaced with spondees.

40 [Ut] pātrīāmqvē fūgī|ās? Pātrīā tībī | vīvō pērīt (210, translation is mine).

Ezzelino:	Zīrāmōns?	“Ziramonte?
Ziramonte:	Dōmīnē.	Master.
Ezzelino:	Dīc āgē, quīd ēst?   Prōpēr(e) īndīcā	Speak up, what is it? Tell me immediately” <sup>41</sup>

With Ezzelino explicitly ordering Ziramonte to speak “quickly” (*propere*), the coalescence of *antilabe* and resolutions in this line seems to be a deliberate imitation of Seneca’s practice. It should be noted, however, that a line of *antilabe* in Seneca never ends with the same speaker with which it began: there must be either one or three breaks in the line, but never two, like in *Ecerinis*.

Two more lines from *Procne* and *Hiempsal* appear to follow Senecan practice as well. In *Procne* (153), Theseus reveals his uneasiness in a line packed with resolutions:

Vērūm mīnīm(e) īn | pātrīām rēdūcīs | ānīmūm gēro:  
“But I do not carry with me at all the emotions of a man returning to his country”

In *Hiempsal* (179), resolutions mark the moment in which the titular hero describes his distress at the injustice done to him by his father. The connection between meter and meaning is somewhat looser in this case than it was in the previous two examples because the line with resolutions does not comprise a sentence in and of itself:

qvāndōquīd(em) īn hōmī|nūm gēnērē tām | mālē lībērōs  
iām tūm pārēn|tēs īmpī(i) ō|dērūnt sūōs.  
“...from that moment, there have been impious parents who so wickedly hated their own sons.”

No line in *Achilles* has four resolutions in it, and enumerating all the lines with three or fewer resolutions would be impractical. However, Loschi’s play is relevant to the discussion of trimeter and meaning for an entirely different reason.

There is a passage in which Paris compares his sister to Iphigenia and describes to Hecuba how the marriage of Polyxena and Achilles can save Troy. The last nine verses of Paris’

<sup>41</sup> Here, as elsewhere, the translation is Grund’s unless specified otherwise.



speech (169-77), in which he describes the potentially peaceful outcome of the marriage, there is not a single resolution.<sup>42</sup> Paris' dreams are not fulfilled, however, and his speech is interrupted by impatient Hecuba, who reminds her son that he and his wife are the reason Troy needs saving in the first place. After Hecuba interjects and finishes off Paris' line, the rate of resolution returns to normal, as if it were somehow indicative of Hecuba's agitation and desire for vengeance.

Whether the reader agrees with this particular argument about *Achilles* or with my arguments about other Neo-Latin and Senecan plays, I believe that this section as a whole demonstrates successfully that the authors of the Renaissance followed Seneca's technique of using resolution to highlight semantically important passages in his plays. As this overview of iambic trimeter in Humanist tragedies comes to an end, a couple of words should be said about other meters.

#### (v) Why (not) Trimeter?

In all Senecan tragedies save for *Hercules furens* and the incomplete<sup>43</sup> *Phoenissae*, there are moments in which characters switch from iambic trimeter to some other meter. Their reasons for doing so are usually quite clear. In *Oedipus*, for instance, Creon reports the oracle from Delphi in a way in which such an oracle would have been reported in real life, i.e. in hexameter (233-238). As discussed in the previous chapter, Thyestes sings in anapests because he is drunk. When Phaedra tells Theseus that she lied to him about Hyppolytus, the king laments his son's death in trochaic septenarii, the change in meter highlighting his intense feelings (1201-12). Such metrical anomalies are rare, but there is usually at least one per play.

The Renaissance tragedians embrace a more systematic approach than Seneca. Among

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<sup>42</sup> By the same method as before, the probability of this sequence of nine lines without resolutions occurring in this play can be estimated to be approximately 0.216.

<sup>43</sup> Or not fully preserved.

them, only Correr makes a character switch to meter other than iambic trimeter: Procne sings in anapests when she meets her wretched sister (560-610). The closest parallel to Procne's song is the prologue of Seneca's *Troades*, where Hecuba sings<sup>44</sup> along with the chorus (83-98, 117-131, 142-155). Both Hecuba and Procne direct the chorus to begin ritual lamentation. They do so in a similar fashion (e.g. both choruses are to loosen their hair: *Tro.* 84, *Pr.* 593). Both queens justify the change in chorus' appearance by saying that it is proper (*placet hic habitus*, *Tro.* 94, *deceat hic habitus*, *Pr.* 594). Correr clearly modeled Procne's song on those several passages from Seneca in which individual characters speak in anapests.

Apart from Procne there are no characters in any of the four Renaissance plays that switch from iambs to some other meter. There is, therefore, not much left to say about iambic trimeter in these four plays. My hope is that this chapter provided a comprehensive overview of trimeter, approaching the subject from different angles and perspectives, and dealing with problems belonging to philology, and also prosody and other branches of linguistics.

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44 There is a dispute over whether these are anapestic dimeters mixed with monometers or anapestic trimeters. This issue is beyond the scope of the present chapter, but Fantham (1982) has a thorough discussion of the problem.

## Conclusion

I have shown how, in his tragedies, Seneca makes references to Greek drama, Roman poetry, and his own philosophical works. The question I have not tackled yet is whether he intended for all these references to be recognized by the audience.

Clearly, Seneca must have assumed the audience's familiarity with Greek drama because it can be easy to misinterpret his plays without comparing them to the Greek models on which they are based first. So, for instance, it might appear to the reader unacquainted with Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* that the plague of Thebes in Seneca's *Oedipus* is the result of Laius' murder. But, as I have argued in the first chapter, the comparison between the two plays reveals that Seneca is much more hesitant to make this connection between the murder and the plague and even hints at a different source for the epidemic.

As for the allusions to specific phrases employed by Euripides, Sophocles, and other Greek tragedians, these might not necessarily have been clear to the Senecan audience. The fact that both *Oedipus at Colonus* and Seneca's *Phoenissae* open with Antigone addressing her father as "blind" is hardly a coincidence, but knowing about this connection does not reveal too much about Senecan tragedy. It would be difficult to argue that Seneca expected his audience to get all such references, not least because he wrote in Latin and Sophocles and Euripides – in Greek.

It is much easier to recognize citations from Latin poetry. In the second chapter, I have repeated several times that in *Hercules furens*, Seneca engages in dialogue with Horace presenting a worldview quite unlike that of the Augustan poet. But perhaps it would have been more accurate to say that Seneca responds to Horatian worldview, not to Horace himself. Seneca

indeed cites Horace, but he never explicitly acknowledges that he does so, and the citations are sparse and incomplete. A knowledgeable audience would get the allusion to Horace, but this would not add too much to their understanding of Seneca's argument in the play, which is clear enough in and of itself.

Seneca could not have been blunter in his portrayal of Atreus in *Thyestes*. As I have demonstrated in the third chapter, anyone familiar with Seneca's prose would immediately recognize in the king all that which Seneca resented so much: anger, savagery, and unwillingness to address one's own flaws. But one does not need to have read Seneca's prose in order to understand his resentment towards Atreus: the play conveys the message well enough on its own. In no way does Seneca assume the audience's prior knowledge of his works.

In other words, when Seneca cites an earlier text in his poetry, he does not do it for the sake of making a reference alone. He recycles his sources and repurposes earlier utterances for his own ends, drawing on the principle that all that was said before is common property.<sup>45</sup> Because of this, it can be more important for the audience to understand how Seneca employs a borrowed phrase than to know from where that phrase came or how it was used originally.

Similarly, the Renaissance playwrights did more than imitate Senecan trimeter and occasionally cite his works.<sup>46</sup> They also adapted the ancient material for their own ends, doing what Seneca did with Greek drama and poetry of the Augustan period. By choosing to write a play with a Christian subtext about the events roughly contemporary to his times, Albertino Mussato deviated from Seneca. But by deviating from Seneca, he also followed Seneca's approach to reusing the texts of the past, an approach which I hope this project has successfully explored.

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45 See QNat XXXIII.2: *Itaque nolo illas [voces] Epicuri existimes esse: publicae sunt et maxime nostrae* ("So do not think that these [utterances] are Epicurus': they are common property, and ours above all", my translation).

46 So, for instance, both *Medea* and *Achilles* open with references to marriage (*Di coniugales... / O coniugales...*).

## Appendix I. Metrical Anomalies in some Neo-Latin Tragedies

Listed below are those lines from *Achilles* and *Ecerinis* that are metrically problematic. For each line I give the corresponding scansion and then discuss why this scansion breaks the rules of iambic trimeter and, if possible, how the line could be emended to fix the problem.

1. **Sī tāntūs dō**|lōr pēctūs īn|flāmāt, pārēns, (*Achilles*, 206)

The second foot is a dactyl, which is impossible in trimeter. Emending the word order fixes the problem:

Sī tāntūs īn|flāmāt dōlōr | pēctūs, pārēns

2. **Ōccūrrēr(e) ērūm**|nīs dūlcē, prēs|cīre ēst grāve. (*Achilles*, 518)

The line, if scanned in the most intuitive way, appears to have one additional long syllable in the second foot. All the other ways to scan the line I could think of lead to an anapest in the second foot (which is possible in iambic senarius, but not in trimeter) and are further problematic in their own right.

To get an anapest, one has to show that 'e' in *erumnis* must be scanned short. While this is theoretically possible, Loschi has *erumnas* with long 'e' in line 618. Alternatively, one can invoke the rule of iambic shortening,<sup>47</sup> which would allow 'e' to be short, because the preceding syllable is short and because the accent in *erumnis* falls on the syllable immediately following 'e'.

However, this is the only place in Loschi where this rule would have to be invoked, which casts doubts on this explanation.

<sup>47</sup> On the rule of iambic shortening, see Halporn, Ostwald, and Rosenmeyer 1963:125.

3. **Dīs gīgnīmūr.** | Nēc stīrpē tān|tā Rōmūlus (*Ecerinis*, 77)

There would have been no issues with this line, had the second syllable of *diis* not been long by position. The rule of iambic shortening (see above) might solve the problem, but then this would be the only place in *Ecerinis* where this rule needs to be applied.

4. **hōc dīgnī pāt|rē;** tālē nōs | dēcūīt gēnus. (*Ecerinis*, 283)

Padrin proposes emending the word order:

hōc pātrē dīg|nī; tālē nōs | dēcūīt gēnus.

5. sūb lēgē cēr|tā. **Sēd quīs hāc | prāpōtēns mōvet?** (*Ecerinis*, 353)

Padrin proposes emending the word order:

sūb lēgē cēr|t(a). Hāc prāpōtēns | sēd quīs mōvet?

6. Tūnc cōncītā|**tūm cālcārībūs** | ūrgēns ēquūm (*Ecerinis*, 508)

Padrin proposes emending the word order:

cālcārībūs | tūnc cōncītā|t(um) ūrgēns ēquūm

## Appendix II. Distribution of Resolutions in Iambic Trimeter

Listed below are the resolution rates and counts for each of the fourteen tragedies examined. Note that the problematic lines listed in Appendix I are included in this calculation.

Play	Resolutions total	Resolution rate	Resolutions in 1 <sup>st</sup> foot	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	Percentage of resolutions in the 1 <sup>st</sup> foot	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>
Ag.	605	0.86	192	112	94	45	162	0	32	19	16	7	27	0
Phaed.	755	0.8	249	114	146	37	209	0	33	15	19	5	28	0
Oed.	600	0.81	185	115	96	30	174	0	31	19	16	5	29	0
Med.	603	0.87	191	91	136	39	146	0	32	15	23	6	24	0
Tro.	782	0.85	256	142	130	40	214	0	33	18	17	5	27	0
Her. F.	802	0.77	252	128	149	52	221	0	31	16	19	6	28	0
Thy.	605	0.79	189	85	121	43	167	0	31	14	20	7	28	0
Phoen.	518	0.78	165	73	105	47	128	0	32	14	20	9	25	0
Her. O.	1008	0.72	281	187	183	28	329	0	28	19	18	3	33	0
Oct.	489	0.82	164	72	93	22	138	0	34	15	19	4	28	0
Ecerinis	347	0.74	88	66	54	62	77	0	25	19	16	18	22	0
Achilles	441	0.7	158	110	69	19	85	0	36	25	16	4	19	0
Procne	581	0.8	145	123	106	43	119	45	25	21	18	7	20	8
Hiemsal	451	0.83	143	63	131	47	67	0	32	14	29	10	15	0

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