METATRAGEDY

SENECA'S ACTOR-AUDIENCE

When the audience's own theatricalized reality is incorporated into stage reality, the metatragedy of Seneca results: theatricality replaces theatre as characters become their own audience watching or commenting on their own theatricalized stage actions. The audience itself shifts roles from spectator to witness when the theatricalized stage actions of actors compete with their own perception of the world outside of the theatre, making the recognition of dramatic illusion on the stage and the interpretation of dramatic allusion off the stage difficult. Confusion replaces catharsis when the audience cannot distinguish between theatre and reality. Where is the "real" audience? The term "actor-audience" is coined by Boyle to describe how Senecan tragedy draws attention to its own theatricality:

> The recurrent dramatisation of role-playing in which characters become actors before other characters as audience: Phaedra before Theseus (*Phaedra* 864ff.), Medea before Jason (*Medea* 551ff.), Clytemnestra before Aegisthus (*Agamemnon* 239ff.), Atreus before Thyestes (*Thyestes* 491ff.)—underscores Senecan tragedy's own conventions and artifice. So too the related focus on characters as audience, on action as spectacle, on human behaviour as self-dramatisation; or the staging in *Medea* or *Thyestes* of a character's own staging as character, actor and dramaturge of the climactic evil itself.[1]

Seneca's actor-audience arrives onstage via the theatricalization of tragedy and contemporary rhetoric: Senecan tragedy is at once a

product of its age, in which theatricality, on and off the stage, was endemic, and a product of the tragic tradition, from the theatricalization of tragedy under Pacuvius and Accius, and possibly the Augustan tragedians, to the reception of *praetextae,* in which the audience faced the task of interpreting competing realities.[2] Contemporary rhetoric—*declamatio* and *suasoria,* especially as adopted by Ovid—serves as a stylistic bridge between the plays of Accius and the plays of Seneca.[3] Seneca's plays, in turn, seem to have been influenced by the literary style of his nephew Lucan, which is similarly grounded in contemporary rhetoric. (For the dating of Seneca's plays, See Tarrant, 1985, 10.) Many factors went into creating the "rhetoricized mentality" of Seneca's contemporaries.[4]

Ten plays survive under the name of Seneca: *Hercules furens, Troades, Medea, Oedipus, Agamemnon, Thyestes, Hercules oetaeus, Phaedra,*[5] *Phoenissae,* and *Octavia.* It is generally agreed that Seneca wrote all of these plays except the *Hercules oetaeus* and the *Octavia.*[6] Seneca's confidence in his abilities as a tragic dramatist is reflected not only in the large number of plays he undertook, but also in the story that he disagreed with Pomponius Secundus over aspects of tragic diction and that he further enunciated his position in a published preface.[7]

The dating of Seneca's tragedies is unclear, and it is possible that some, if not all, were written before the reign of Nero.[8] As far as we know, the emperors Gaius, Claudius, and Nero did not "use" Seneca's plays for public entertainment and propaganda purposes on important occasions. In the case of Nero, there is no evidence that he even had earlier Latin tragedies restaged on important occasions of state, such as his reception of Tiridates at Pompey's theatre.[9] Yet Roman tragedies must have been staged in this period, in addition to pantomime, considering the tragic roles of Nero and the large number of scenic competitions. This distance between dramatist and ruler may be due to Nero's own literary compositions and performances, and his reluctance to let a literary rival write plays for his stage appearances. When we recall that Seneca coached Nero upon the stage, and Nero forced members of the aristocracy to perform, it becomes evident that the role reversal of emperor and dramatist also reversed the role of actor and audience.

The audience in the auditorium is irrelevant when characters onstage become their own audience. In addition to the examples cited by Boyle above, Medea's speech in which she needs Jason as witness to validate her actions (*Medea* 551ff.), cited at the beginning of chapter 4, shows Medea as dramatist plotting acts to be witnessed by Jason, while the ac-

tual audience watches a play seemingly unfold in a way that is scripted by her. Medea, as dramaturge, seems to allude to Seneca.[10]

Atreus performs the similar roles of audience and dramaturge in the *Thyestes*. As Atreus enters the stage for the first time, he chides himself for not yet having taken revenge on his brother (176–180):

> *ignave, iners, enervis et (quod maximum*
> *probrum tyranno rebus in summis reor)*
> *inulte, post tot scelera, post fratris dolos*
> *fasque omne ruptum questibus vanis agis*
> *iratus Atreus?*
>
> Cowardly, lazy, and impotent, and (what I think
> is the greatest fault to a king in affairs of state)
> unavenged, after so many crimes, after the plots of my brother
> and every violation to everything sacred, do you go on, angry Atreus,
> with useless complaints?

Atreus refers to himself with the Greek word for "king" (*tyranno*, 177) that has connotations of tyrannical behavior.[11] Atreus seems to typecast himself in this dual and conflicted role, as his punishment far exceeds any crime committed by Thyestes. Atreus also takes this duality of identity and roles further by assuming the role of actor and audience as he speaks and listens to himself. He continues to address himself and to debate whether he will take an active or passive role in his response to Thyestes' crimes, in a speech that echoes Atreus' speech in Accius' *Atreus* (192–204):[12]

> *age, anime, fac quod nulla posteritas probet,*
> *sed nulla taceat. aliquod audendum est nefas*
> *atrox, cruentum, tale quod frater meus*
> *suum esse mallet—scelera non ulcisceris,*
> *nisi vincis. et quid esse tam saevum potest*
> *quod superet illum? numquid abiectus iacet?*
> *numquid secundis patitur in rebus modum,*
> *fessis quietem? novi ego ingenium viri*
> *indocile: flecti non potest—frangi potest.*
> *proinde antequam se firmat aut vires parat,*
> *petatur ultro, ne quiescentem petat.*
> *aut perdet aut peribit: in medio est scelus*
> *positum occupanti.*

> Come, my heart, do what no one will later approve,
> nor keep silent about it. Some crime, vicious and cruel,
> must be dared, such that my brother would have wished
> to commit—you cannot avenge a crime
> unless you surpass it. And what is so cruel
> that can overcome him? Is he the sort that would lie resigned?
> Would he exercise restraint in success,
> or resignation in defeat? I know the fierce temper
> of the man: he cannot be swayed—but he can be broken.
> Therefore, before he strengthens himself or prepares his forces,
> I will go for him, instead of him finding me unprepared.
> Let him destroy or be destroyed: the crime is set in the middle
> for the one who claims it first.

Atreus continues to serve as audience to his own drama as he sees Thyestes enter the stage with his sons (491–495):

> *plagis tenetur clausa dispositis fera:*
> *et ipsum et una generis invisi indolem*
> *iunctam parenti cerno. iam tuto in loco*
> *versantur odia. venit in nostras manus*
> *tandem Thyestes, venit, et totus quidem.*
>
> Let the prey be caught in the laid-out nets.
> I see him together with his hateful sons
> at his side. Now hatred can be unleashed
> in a safe place. At last, Thyestes comes into my hands,
> he comes with all besides.

Tarrant points out that Atreus' entrance speech, which begins with this passage, is a combination of the entrance monologue and the eavesdropping aside that gives the impression that Atreus is in total control of his brother's fate, which seems to be sealed as much as from Atreus' plotting as from Thyestes' own inattention.[13] There is a voyeuristic quality to Atreus' perusal of his brother's unkempt features that seems to foreshadow Thyestes' later appearance after feasting on the blood and gore of his sons (505–507):

> *aspice, ut multo gravis*
> *squalore vultus obruat maestos coma,*
> *quam foeda iaceat barba.*

Look, how his dirty hair
hangs over his ruined face,
how his beard lies filthy.

Atreus seems to address himself rather than the audience when he contemplates Thyestes' features. The voyeuristic unfolding of Atreus' plot reaches a climax after Thyestes has eaten his children. Atreus wishes he could drag the gods down from Olympus to witness his deed (894–895). We, as witness/audience, watch Atreus, as witness/audience, as he watches his brother's physical reactions to his cannibalistic meal (908–919):

aperta multa tecta conlucent face.
resupinus ipse purpurae atque auro incubat,
vino gravatum fulciens laeva caput.
eructat. o me caelitum excelssissimum,
regumque regem! vota transcendi mea.
satur est; capaci ducit argento merum—
ne parce potu: restat etiamnunc cruor
tot hostiarum; veteris hunc Bacchi color
abscondet—hoc, hoc mensa cludatur scypho.
mixtum suorum sanguinem genitor bibat:
meum bibisset. ecce, iam cantus ciet
festasque voces, nec satis menti imperat.

The doors are opened and the room shines with light.
He, himself, reclines on his back upon purple and gold,
propping up, with his left hand, his head weighted with wine.
He burps. O! I am the most blessed of gods,
and king of kings! I have exceeded my prayers.
He is stuffed; he is drinking from a large silver cup—
don't sip it: there is still blood left
from so many victims; the color of the vintage wine
hides it—with another and another let the meal be ended.
Let the father drink the mixed blood of his sons:
he would have drunk mine. Look, now he is singing
with a joyful voice, he is not in control of his mind.

Character as audience is also apparent in other plays. In the *Troades,* Polyxena watches Pyrrhus deliver the sword stroke that kills her (1148–1152):

ut primum ardui
sublime montis tetigit, atque alte edito
iuvenis paterni vertice in busti stetit,
audax virago non tulit retro gradum;
conversa ad ictum stat truci vultu ferox.

As soon as the youth
reached the mountain's peak, and stood on
the raised mound of his fathers tomb,
the brave virgin did not take a step back;
she, bold, stood facing the blow with a wild look.

The passage highlights Polyxena's bravery in facing death as it invites the audience to contemplate her reaction to her own death: we are watching her watching her killer.[14]

In the *Oedipus* we find a bizarre variation of the actor as audience—Oedipus' eyes watch and actually participate in the blinding (962–964):

at contra truces
oculi steterunt et suam intenti manum
ultro insecuntur, vulneri occurrunt suo.

But his wild eyes
stood ready and, eagerly following his own hand,
rushed from their own wound.

After Oedipus' eyes have been ripped out, even his eye sockets seek to see (971–973):

attollit caput
cavisque lustrans orbibus caeli plagas
noctem experitur.

He raised his head
and tested the night, surveying the regions
of the sky with empty sockets.

The grotesque details of Oedipus' self-mutilation highlight the potential for bathos in such a spectacle in that even his mutilated eye sockets seek to see the effect of their own mutilation.

In the *Phaedra,* Phaedra mourns over Hippolytus' body before all the parts have been collected and pieced together. Eyesight has become even

more symbolic in this scene, since Phaedra witnesses the effects of her false denunciation of her stepson (1168–1169):

> *Hippolyte, tales intuor vultus tuos*
> *talesque feci?*
>
> Hippolytus, I look upon your face, such as it is,
> have I made them such?

The face she looks upon is no longer a face with recognizable features, able to see her own. Unlike the scene of Oedipus' blinding, which was reported in a messenger speech, this scene apparently features parts of Hippolytus' dismembered body onstage; thus Phaedra's own eyes look to the unresponsive body parts in search of an audience for her guilt and grief. Bathos mixes with pathos as the audience watches Phaedra's reaction upon viewing Hippolytus' corpse and her search for an interpretation of her actions.

These illustrative passages show the extent to which stage reaction has replaced stage action. Character reactions appear against a backdrop of spectacle, turning spectators into witnesses.[15] Spectacle itself plays a large role in the theatricalized reality of the characters onstage. Boyle refers to the dramatic action of Senecan tragedy as "action as spectacle," but one could also argue that it is as much "spectacle as theatricalized action."[16] Seneca, for example, calls attention to theatricalized actions in the *Agamemnon*. In the pivotal scene in which she murders Agamemnon, Clytemnestra is likened to a gladiator when Cassandra (quoting Clytemnestra?) refers to the murder with "*habet! peractum est!*" recalling the theatricality of Roman spectacle entertainment (900–905):[17]

> *sic huc et illuc impiam librat manum.*
> *habet. peractum est. pendet exigua male*
> *caput amputatum parte et hinc trunco cruor*
> *exundat, illinc ora cum fremitu iacent.*
> *nondum recedunt: ille iam exanimem petit*
> *laceratque corpus, illa fodientem adiuvat.*
>
> Here and there she swings her unholy hand.
> "He has it. The deed is done." His decapitated head barely hangs
> connected to his body from here and blood gushes out
> from his trunk, there, his moaning head lies.

> Not yet do they quit: he [Aegisthus] seeks and stabs
> the by-now lifeless corpse, she helps in the stabbing.

The shouting of "*habet. peractum est*" takes the reader/audience out of the play and into the arena. Since the text omits details of the actual murder, the spectator supplies his/her own visualization of the scene. The jarring effect of this interruption on the dramatic action and the breaking of the dramatic illusion would be the same as someone today alluding to a hockey game, in the act of murder, by shouting, "He shoots, he scores!" The inclusion of theatricalized violence and death onstage allows Seneca to control the reaction of the theatre audience in a way not possible in the arena.[18] The act of murder becomes an allusion to the Roman arena, but the image of a victor shouting over the vanquished suggests that Clytemnestra's victory was not fairly won, but rather was gained through treachery. The allusion to spectacle also transforms the theatre audience into an arena audience, from spectator to witness.

The descriptive gore found in Accius' plays finds ultimate expression in Senecan tragedy. Even though Seneca's plays may not (all) date to Nero's reign, the inherent theatrical and grotesque aspects of that emperor's rule found in the art and poetry of the period seem to be reflected in the plays.[19] If such a reflection is even remotely accurate, then offstage reality is just as bizarre and theatrical as anything seen in the theatre, especially if we consider the spectacle punishment of prisoners in the arena, which took on mythological allusions.[20] One could also argue that when it is incorporated onto the stage, allusions to the theatricalized violence of the audience might appear "normal" without even more hyperbolic or rhetorical emphasis added by the dramatist.

The *Phaedra* provides ready examples of Seneca's rhetorical debt to Ovid in using rhetoric to metatheatrical effect and in using "descriptive gore" for spectacle.[21] This play relates just one of the episodes associated with the larger Theseus cycle: Theseus' wife Phaedra, frustrated in her attempts to seduce her stepson Hippolytus, plots to accuse him of rape, which leads to Theseus' use of a curse, granted by Neptune, to kill his son. Seneca's version is modeled on the second *Hippolytus* of Euripides.[22] In Euripides' version, the play opens with a prologue by Aphrodite, who, having been scorned by Hippolytus, seeks his death. In Seneca's play, Hippolytus opens the play unaware of the chain of events to come. This change signals Seneca's focus on human freedom to plot and to commit errors rather than a divine agent exercising her wrath as

the cause of Hippolytus' death.[23] With this freedom, Seneca's characters make optimum use of arguments (*controversia* and *suasoria*) to state and resolve their moral dilemmas.

Rhetorical figures are immediately apparent in the play. In Act I, Phaedra and her nurse debate the proper course for controlling passion in balanced speeches of similar length. Each character presents her arguments as though in rhetorical debate (*controversia*). Suddenly, the contemporary passion for rhetoric transforms a myth about sexual transgression into a debate on sexual transgression. Phaedra first argues that she has been conquered by passion and considers herself the latest victim of Venus (85–128). The Nurse counters with arguments of propriety and sin (129–176) and warns (140–144):

honesta primum est velle nec labi via,
pudor est secundus nosse peccandi modum.
quo, misera, pergis? quid domum infamem aggravas
superasque matrem? maius est monstro nefas;
nam monstra fato, moribus scelera imputes.

Best to desire respectability and not to veer off its path,
second is shame that recognizes a measure of sinning.
Where do you hasten, wretched woman? Why heap scandal upon your house
and outdo your mother? A sin is worse than an abhorrent passion;
you may ascribe an abhorrent passion to fate, but a sin to character.

Once Phaedra has resolved to die, however, the Nurse becomes the model of expediency and urges the opposite advice to Phaedra, who takes it to advance the plot more than to admit defeat in argumentation (267–270):

solamen annis unicum fessis, era,
si tam protervus incubat menti furor,
contemne famam: fama vix vero favet,
peius merenti melior et peior bono.

The one solace to my tired years, mistress,
if such a shameless passion seduces your senses,
despise your good reputation: reputation rarely favors the truth,
it is better to the worse-deserving and worse to the better-deserving.

When the Nurse confronts Hippolytus with news of Phaedra's passion (435–482), she cleverly conceals her mission and tries to convince

him to abandon his devotion to Diana through pursuasive arguments (*suasoria*); she urges him to enjoy the sexual pleasures of youth, consider the dangers of the world and advancing old age, and his duty to procreate. Hippolytus, however, has no intention of abandoning his carefree existence and remains "unseduced" by her arguments.

The play, moreover, is full of the *sententia,* or paradoxical epigrams, which were popular during the early Empire.[24] For example, the Nurse advises Phaedra, *fortem facit vicina libertas senem* ("Freedom nearby makes the aged brave," 139), and later adds, *quod non potest vult posse qui nimium potest* ("A man who is too powerful wishes for a power he is unable to possess," 215). After falsely accusing Hippolytus of rape, the Nurse advises the fainting Phaedra, *mens inpudicam facere, non casus solet* ("The mind causes impurity, not circumstance," 735).

Seneca's most obvious debt to Ovid is found in the Messenger's description of Hippolytus' death, which mirrors the description of Hippolytus' death in the *Metamorphoses.*[25] The Messenger in the *Phaedra* describes Hippolytus' death by the sea-bull and the mangling of his body in gory detail (1082–1104):

tum vero pavida sonipedes mente exciti
imperia solvunt seque luctantur iugo
eripere rectique in pedes iactant onus.
praeceps in ora fusus implicuit cadens
laqueo tenaci corpus et quanto magis
pugnat, sequaces hoc magis nodos ligat.
sensere pecudes facinus—et curru levi,
dominante nullo, qua timor iussit ruunt.
talis per auras non suum agnoscens onus
Solique falso creditum indignans diem
Phaethonta currus devium excussit polo.
Late cruentat arva et inlisum caput
scopulis resultat; auferunt dumi comas,
et ora durus pulcra populatur lapis
peritque multo vulnere infelix decor.
moribunda celeres membra pervoluunt rotae;
tandemque raptum truncus ambusta sude
medium per inguen stipite ingesto tenet;
[paulumque domino currus affixo stetit]
haesere biiuges vulnere—et pariter moram
dominumque rumpunt. inde semianimem secant

virgulta, acutis asperi vepres rubis
omnisque ruscus corporis partem tulit.

Then, truth be told, the horses aroused by fear
escaped from control and struggled to snatch themselves from their yokes,
and having risen up, their burdensome yokes lie on the ground.
Falling headlong on his face, he tangled his body
in the entangling reins, and the more he struggled,
the tighter he drew those gripping knots.
The horses saw their crime—and the light chariot,
without a driver, rushed wherever fear gave command,
just as when, not recognizing their usual burden through the winds,
and upset that the day had been entrusted to an imposter sun,
Helios' horses flung transgressing Phaethon far from the sun's path.
Everywhere the fields bear blood and Hippolytus' head dashed against the rocks
knocks around; thornbushes rip out his hair,
and rough rocks mangle his pretty face
and an unlucky appearance destroys with many wounds.
Swift wheels run over his dying limbs;
and at last, a tree trunk, charred to a stake,
with pierced tip, stabs him in the groin;
[the chariot stands for a bit on its pierced master,]
the horses cling to a wound—and equally they break delay
and their master. Then shrubs and wild thornbushes
with razor-sharp thorns tear up his barely breathing body,
and every twig wears a part of his body.

Ovid described Hippolytus' death in similar terms, especially the description of Hippolytus' corpse as a living wound (*Met.* 15.521–529):

nec tamen has vires rabies superasset equorum,
ni rota, perpetuum qua circumvertitur axem,
stipitis occursu fracta ac disiecta fuisset.
excutior curru, lorisque tenentibus artus
viscera viva trahi, nervos in stipe teneri,
membra rapi partim partimque reprensa relinqui,
ossa gravem dare fracta sonum fessamque videres
exhalari animam nullasque in corpore partes,
noscere quas posses: unumque erat omnia vulnus.[26]

Nor would the rabid strength of the horses have surpassed my own,
except a wheel, where it is turned on the ever-turning axle,
had broken and shattered at the joint of the axle.
I was thrown from the chariot, and while the reins held my legs,
you would see a living wound dragged, sinews stuck to a stake,
my limbs partly ripped off and partly left caught,
my shattered bones cracked with a frightening sound,
and my exhausted life breathed in no part of my body,
which you would be able to recognize, all was one wound.

Seneca, of course, adds more detail, such as the impaling of Hippolytus' groin to stress his asexuality.

Another passage in Ovid that provides the same excessive gore and hyperbolic grotesqueness as the description of Hippolytus' death in the *Phaedra* is the narrative of the Lapiths' fight with the Centaurs. Theseus, for example, hurls an urn at the Centaur Eurytus' face (12.238–240):

sanguinis ille globos pariter cerebrumque merumque
vulnere et ore vomens madida resupinus harena
calcitrat.

[Eurytus] spewing chunks of brain and wine equally
from his headwound and mouth, falling back, stepped
on the drenched floor.

The Lapith Celadon's head is smashed past recognition (12.252–253):

exsilvere oculi, disiectisque ossibus oris
acta retro naris medioque est fixa palato.

His eyes leaped out of their sockets, and with the bones of his face shattered,
his nose was pushed back and stuck to the middle of his throat.

Gryneus' eyes are pierced by antlers (12.268–270):

figitur hinc duplici Gryneus in lumina ramo
erviturque oculos, quorum pars cornibus haeret,
pars fluit in barbam concretaque sanquine pendet.

Grynaeus pierced his eyes against the two-branched horn
and gouged his eyes out, part of which dangled from the horns,
part seeped onto his beard and hung with chunkened blood.

Such gory detail is furthermore evident in the *Phaedra,* when Theseus tries to reassemble the bits of Hippolytus' body (1265–1268):

> *hoc quid est forma carens*
> *et turpe, multo vulnere abruptum undique?*
> *quae pars tui sit dubito; sed pars est tui.*
> *hic, hic repone, non suo, at vacuo loco.*
>
> What is this that lacks shape
> and is grotesque, and everywhere gaping with many wounds?
> What piece of you this is, I do not know; but it is a piece of you.
> Here, place it here, not the right spot, but an empty place.

Even though Seneca preserves the gory tone of such passages, one must keep in mind that he rejected passages of Ovid's more hyperbolic rhetoric as "childish," such as his description of the flood in the *Metamorphoses.*[27] Nevertheless, the self-conscious metatheatre of Ovid's narrative defines Seneca's tragedies.

Seneca's concentration on episodes, rather than on the dramatic action as a whole, may be due not only to the influence of epic, but also to the success of the episodic mime productions of Publius Syrus and to the influence of pantomime. Did rhetoric make tragedy less suited for stage production, while other performance genres, such as the pantomime and farce, flourished?[28] Pantomimic productions featured a sole mythological character in a specific scene or an episode of a myth, such as Thyestes or Kronos devouring his children, rather than a sequence of events that made up an entire drama. Music and gesticulation replaced dialogue as the hero/heroine communicated the myth and emotion involved. In the *Phaedra,* a certain unnaturalness in dialogue betrays composition for virtuoso performance roles—Phaedra and the Nurse are present onstage together in the same scene, but each character is given two long speeches before they speak to each other in a "natural" way, although dramatic reality should not be taken for granted.

The *Phoenissae,* a concise play of 664 lines, also presents a particular challenge since, even by the standards of Senecan tragedy, it is unique.[29] The play is divided into two halves: the blind Oedipus wandering with Antigone, and Jocasta's intercession with her sons Polynices and Eteocles. There is an abrupt transition after line 362 between the speeches of Oedipus and Jocasta (Oedipus then leaves the stage, but Antigone remains), but the two halves are well crafted with balanced scenes that contrast the exiles of Oedipus and Polynices, the *pietas* of Antigone

and the power thirst of Eteocles. Jocasta is the figurative bridge between the two halves of the play and also between her two warring sons.

The most peculiar feature of the play is the absence of a chorus, and the name of the play need not imply that a chorus with speaking parts has dropped out of the manuscript tradition, or that it would have been included in a final draft, since that would imply an even more ornamental role for the traditional chorus on the Roman stage. The play does not end, therefore, with the customary closure by the chorus, but it could be argued that Seneca ends his plays most often with a single line of dialogue. The manuscript tradition preserves two alternate endings: a dialogue between Eteocles and Jocasta, and a dialogue between Polynices and Eteocles.[30] Other notable features of the *Phoenissae* include narration of events by the characters themselves, and extremely short messenger speeches that do more to advance the plot than to describe events that have taken place offstage.

Perhaps most surprising is the relative absence of "naturalistic dialogue."[31] Characters address each other at the end of speeches, but it is only at the very end of the play that Eteocles and Jocasta or Polynices actually seem to converse for thirteen lines (652–664), in a conversation about power. Except for this final dialogue, the reader/spectator is left with the impression that characters think out loud, but communicate with each other in a seeming vacuum.

The peculiarities of the play are a challenge if we look at it from the perspective of tragic conventions, but the play may actually be a combination of tragedy and pantomime. Pantomime depended on spectacle, rather than dialogue, to communicate mythological subjects to the audience. The absence of the chorus as a collective character in the *Phoenissae* may indicate that the audience was entertained by spectacle onstage. This would account for the possible stage appearance of the Phoenician women, described in the title, in pantomime dance spectacles. Perhaps only the "tragic" speaking parts of the dramatic text for the other characters were actually written, as a series of related monologues with only the barest of dialogue between characters.[32] It is possible that the physical depiction of spectacle replaces the allusion to it that defines the other plays, and this may account for the impression that the play is unfinished or incomplete.[33] Theatricality replaces dramatic realism and the traditional conventions of a staged tragedy. Perhaps the play is the best example of the metatheatricality of Senecan metatragedy.

Visualizing Seneca's tragedies onstage is sometimes difficult, and attempts to place Seneca's plays in a recital hall, in the theatre, or on no

stage at all are based on internal and external evidence that remains inconclusive. Perhaps visualization of dramatic performance is a matter of perspective, Seneca's and the audience's.[34] What is significant is the fact that the audience/reader is still searching for its own role in Senecan drama. In other words, the audience feels left out of the theatre experience, causing some to question the extent to which the plays are actually connected to the theatre.

Commentators have expressed a variety of opinions, and their arguments illustrate the difficulty in assessing the potential for stage production. Recitation of the plays is argued on stylistic grounds and contemporary tastes.[35] Beare argues that in addition to internal evidence that suggests that Seneca did not fully visualize the actions of the characters, there exists the external "evidence" that Seneca would not have written for the stage because he did not need to earn a living from it.[36] Beare contends that the plays were modeled upon originals that had been acted, but that the plays of Seneca were written to be declaimed.[37] Unfortunately, he does not explain how one declaims a play written for several speakers. If Beare means a "rhetorical recitation," then the exact nature of delivery also remains obscure.[38] Herington finds the evidence for the acting of the plays too inconclusive.[39] Yet he argues that at least some of Seneca's plays were probably recited by several speakers rather than mounted for stage production.[40] Elaine Fantham considers the question of dramatic production in terms of the difficulties facing actors who must communicate speakers' roles, which are sometimes uncertain, to the audience. She argues that the plays were written to be read, and that ultimately "only the readers would experience the plays as complete works."[41] Fantham does concede, however, that reading would follow some sort of recitation by Seneca himself or others.

Tarrant approaches the question of production from a figurative standpoint.[42] In relation to Seneca's *Agamemnon,* however, Tarrant argues in favor of recitation.[43] Tarrant's observations of Seneca's stagecraft, such as creaking doors, a character looking around the stage, the withdrawal of a character to plot future action, and the calling for water onstage, point to borrowings from Roman comedy and possibly to a mounted production, but consistency of dramatic illusion remains a problem.[44]

The question of whether the plays ever appeared onstage is related to the dramaturgical question of whether the plays could be performed successfully. Most recently, Boyle argues that even if there is no direct evidence that the plays ever appeared onstage, the plays were and are performable.[45] Sutton, too, argues, based on internal evidence, that the

plays could have been mounted successfully.[46] In addition to convincing arguments drawn from textual evidence, Sutton cites a graffito from Pompeii that suggests that the *Agamemnon* was sufficiently popular that performance of the play should at least be considered, if not produced by Seneca, then soon after his death.[47]

What seems clear from the texts themselves is that the theatre audience is irrelevant—Senecan tragedy is theatrical even without the theatre, or even an audience seated in an auditorium. When the audience's own metatheatre is incorporated into stage reality, the metatragedy of Seneca results: theatricality replaces theatre as characters become their own audience watching or commenting on their own rhetoricized stage actions. The audience seated in the theatre has effectively shifted roles from spectator to witness. Since Senecan drama undermined the very dramatic reality essential for theatre, the decline of tragedy after Seneca may be due to the inability of tragedy to compete with offstage theatricality, even if incorporated onstage, and to an audience in the auditorium, that felt alienated from the audience onstage. Perhaps pantomime engaged the audience's interpretative abilities without challenging their very notions of reality, as in opposed to tragedy's growing alienation from the audience in the auditorium in favor of the audience on the stage. The *Phoenissae* may point to the intrusion or fusion of pantomime into tragedy for spectacle, which would make distinctions between various genres of theatre performances irrelevant.

FROM TRAGEDY TO METATRAGEDY

By looking forward from Livius rather than back from Seneca, this study has traced, in general, the development of theatre to theatricality that transformed tragedy to metatragedy. The fragments from the plays of Livius, Naevius, and Ennius illustrate that the stage was not the exclusive domain of actors unconnected with the reality of the audience. Ennius' rhetorical skill contributed to the perception of offstage theatricality in that only once actors say and do things appropriate to the theatre can they be quoted and imitated offstage and recognized as theatrical. The involvement of the audience or the inclusion of the audience's reality on the tragic stage points to the development of metatheatre concurrently with the development of the theatre itself: the recreation of the audience's reality onstage leads to a perception of theatre, whereas the recreation of stage reality or the framing of offstage reality in relation to the theatre leads to a perception of theatricality offstage.

Pacuvius' and Accius' plays point to their own theatricality. The seeming dialectic with rhetoric and Accius' exploitation of spectacle for pathos seems to reflect his audience's experience outside of the theatre, in particular the growing audience awareness and exploitation of a theatricalized reality off the stage. This reciprocal relationship between the theatre and the audience's perception of reality outside of the theatre, whether due to the plays of Accius, Varius' *Thyestes,* or Ovid's *Medea,* may have anticipated and shaped how Neronian Rome interacted with the theatre.

What happens, however, when the audience's reality, in the form of historical drama, enters the stage? The audience's theatricalized reality was reincorporated onto the stage, producing "competing realities." The dramatic recreation of historical events leads to a *contaminatio,* not with another play, but with reality. Since real or historic people assume stage roles in *praetextae,* the dramatizing of events alters both onstage and offstage reality and intentionally breaks down the separation between the stage and the audience. This is especially the case if, say, a celebrated general is depicted onstage by an actor watching "himself" in audience, and vice versa.

The opening program of Pompey's theatre, with visual referents to his own triumph, demonstrated to public figures exploiting the stage, through the restaging of previously produced plays and the inclusion of the audience's reality, that tragedy could be made topically relevant to produce a correspondence between real people and mythological characters, current events and mythological events, and the current stage production (dramatic text) and a previous stage production (dramatic text). Although the audience may have understood allusions to contemporary persons and events in stage productions before this date, Pompey's conscious self-association with a mythological character points to the manipulation of a theatre event to guide the audience's interpretation of that allusion. The attempted restaging of Accius' *Brutus* following the assassination of Julius Caesar and Augustus' choice of Varius Rufus' *Thyestes* point to the extent to which tragedy could allude to the audience's reality without altering the dramatic text of a previously produced play.

The theatricalization of the audience's world in the late Republic and early Empire competed with the dramatic illusion of reality onstage. The incorporation of the audience's theatricalized reality onto the stage led to the creation of Seneca's metatragedy. However, audience identification can also produce audience alienation: the spectators in the audience are irrelevant in a drama where characters have become their own au-

dience. Seneca's "actor-audience" has transformed spectators into witnesses. Tragedy has come full circle as the audience's reality, which informed initial adaptations of Greek tragedy by Livius and Naevius, has usurped the stage in Senecan metatragedy, to produce a theatre undermined by its very theatricality.

ROMAN TRAGEDY

Theatre to Theatricality

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