ARION 5 (1966) Duplicate

SENECAN TRAGEDY

C. J. Herington

1581 AND 1927 SHOULD COUNT AS THE two most important dates in the long and, for the most part, shadowy afterlife of Senecan tragedy among the English-speaking peoples. In the earlier year, still during the first light of English drama, Thomas Newton's collection of translations of the tragedies was issued in London; and almost from that moment, whether by chance or not, "it was dawn, and the sacred day was growing." But it is characteristic of the malevolent fate presiding over the Senecan plays that nearly two and a half centuries were to pass before any great poet of the English language should again feel their impact, or before they should again become a reputable subject of conversation among serious lovers of literature. That second epoch is marked by the reissue, in London and New York, of Newton's translations, introduced this time by one of T. S. Eliot's most masterly essays. And few who are familiar with both Eliot and Seneca will believe that Eliot's response stopped dead at a single critical delineation. In Eliot's art the agonized sense and gorgeous sound of the Latin verses met, and befriended, something like their equal, as once they had with the Elizabethans.

Now, in 1966, appears a reprint of the 1927 edition.[1] To hail this event as the prelude to yet a third poetic renaissance would be unwise, no doubt. Yet I for one welcome the book; and also feel that, after a generation's lapse, it brings with it a suitable occasion to reflect afresh on the old translations, on Eliot's essay and, above all, on the ultimate source of both—the half-forgotten Roman master, Lucius Annaeus Seneca.

Apart from those who will be required to possess the book merely for professional reasons, I see two classes of reader, both in search of a new poetic experience, who may be interested in

translations themselves. There are those who have no Latin, hope for a fresh approach through these versions to the mysterious Seneca himself, the remotest, even though not the most closely guarded, of classical fastnesses. And there are those who be looking at the book primarily as English poetry in its own

The Latin-less can be assured that as a whole, even if we take account the considerable differences in quality between the various hands,[2] Thomas Newton's collection comes nearer than later English translations to capturing those qualities of Senecan poetry which most grip a reader of the Latin original. The essence of the imagery; the intense (though, as we shall see, severely restricted) moral feeling; the unerring choice of the thunderous epithet; the steady rhythmic punch; above all, and probably most neglected of all in modern times, the superb *speakability* of Senecan verse; all these things the Elizabethan translator clearly felt down to his bones, and all these he conscientiously tried to reproduce with the means available to him. On the other hand, later translators, whether scholarly or amateur, probably have not felt in the first place or, if they have, certainly have not tried. Let the reader test this judgment for himself by declaiming the three versions of the opening of Hippolytus' speech in *Phaedra* 671ff—the moment of detonation in that most powerful scene of all ancient drama, the meeting, face to face, of Phaedra and Hippolytus. (He should declaim with shame, disgust and anger, for, in the very word before, Phaedra has finally unveiled her obscene desire.)

. Magne regnator deum,
tam lentus audis scelera? Tam lentus vides?
Et quando saeva fulmen emittes manu,
si nunc serenum est? Omnis impulsus ruat
aether et atris nubibus condat diem,
ac versa retro sidera obliquos agant
retorta cursus; tuque, sidereum caput,
radiate Titan, tu nefas stirpis tuae
speculare?

O soveraygne Sire of Gods, dost thou abide so long to heare
This vile abhomination? So long dost thou forbeare
To see this haynous villany? if now the Skies be cleare,

Wilt thou henceforth at any time with furious raging hand
Dart out thy cracking thunder dint, and dreadfull lightninge brand?
Now battred downe with bouncing bolts the rumbling Skies let fall
That foggy Cloudes with dusky drouping day may cover all,
And force the backward starting starres to slide a slope wythall.
Thou starry crested crowne, and Titan prankt with beamy blase
Come out, with staring bush upon thy kindreds guilt to gaze.

(John Studley, 1581)

O King of gods,
Dost thou so mildly hear, so mildly see
Such baseness? When will fly the thunderbolt
Sent from thy hand, if thou art now unmoved?
Oh! Let the firmament be rent apart,
The daylight be by sable clouds concealed,
The backward driven stars be turned aside
To run inverted courses. Thou bright sun,
Chief of the stars, canst thou behold the crimes
Of this thy offspring?

(E. Isabel Harris, 1904)

Great ruler of the gods, dost thou so calmly hear crimes, so calmly look upon them? And when wilt thou send forth thy thunderbolt with angry hand, if now 'tis cloudless? Let all the sky fall in shattered ruin, and in murky clouds hide the day, let the stars be turned backward and, wrenched aside, go athwart their courses. And thou, star of stars, O radiant Sun, dost thou behold this shame of this race?

(F. J. Miller in his Loeb translation, 1917)

Of these three translators only the Elizabethan Studley (by no means the most gifted of Thomas Newton's contributors) seems to me to have had much understanding of Hippolytus' contorted horror, or to have heard the riot of Latin sound in which that horror is expressed, or—above all—to have *seen* the storm clouds gathering and the stars racing backwards in the boy's mad heaven. Miller's version is merely what it was intended to be, a

ful and workmanlike crib, but (literally) unspeakable. Be- Harris'—which is still made to represent Seneca in such a ely read handbook as P. W. Harsh's *Anthology of Roman* ama—I hear, perhaps uncharitably, little more than the rhyth- tinkling of teacups.

Newton's collection remains, then, the furthest point on the to the real Seneca that the Latin-less reader, as yet, can hope ach. But the truth must now be admitted, both to that reader to that other reader whom I have in mind, the reader who es to this book for love of *English* poetry. Though I said ear- that the Elizabethan of 1581 did his best to express Seneca the means available to him, in 1581 these means were not ressive. (Another twenty years, perhaps—the maturing was so -and who can tell how a translation of Seneca would have supposing it had still been needed?) Eliot, though estab- ng this point with his customary learning and clarity, especi- in the last section of his introduction (xlv ff), still seems to me ewhat overgenerous in his final judgment on their verse (liii–

The reader who wishes to know exactly what he is in for ld reflect on Alexander Nevile's preface to his translation of *Oedipus* (1.191): "In fine, I beseech all together (if so it ght be) to bear with my rudenes, and consider the grosenes of owne Countrey language, which can by no meanes aspire to high lofty Latinists stile." We shall be hearing more of Ne- opinions, all thought-provoking in spite of his tender years was sixteen when his translation was first published—another hose omnicompetent Tudor adolescents); but this one in par- ar seems completely accurate. Our language was indeed still , with a rustic tendency to redundance and verbosity. And tendency, in these translations, is made into an obligatory by the fatal choice, for all the plays except *Octavia*, of four- ers as the standard verse of the dramatic dialogue. Just as our bic pentameter is usually a little too short to carry the full load eaning packed into the Greek and Roman six-foot iambic so the fourteener is a little too long; and padding becomes in- able. Add the restraint of rhyme, as these translators did, and have a medium which, from the start, cuts you off from all e of achieving the concision of a Senecan phrase or the sus- d forward thrust of a Senecan period. It is no wonder that 's two examples of the poetic excellence occasionally to be in the translations are both taken not from the dialogue but

from choruses, which are regularly rendered more freely, and in rhymed quatrains of pentameters. Even so, I doubt whether it would be easy to find many more than those two.

To read through these translations is in fact no great aesthetic experience. Pleasure one feels, but it is akin to the pleasure of ruins—of early Elizabethan ruins, rambling, whimsical, repetitive in their effects, wavering still in provincial uncertainty between Gothic and Renaissance. From this touristic point of view almost any page offers agreeable surprises: the "Great Guns in Carts" brought against the city wall in a chorus of *Thyestes* (1.67), the "prety dapper cutted Beard" on the chin of the youthful Theseus (1.159), and the unmistakably sixteenth-century tackle of the ship Argo (2.69). Above all, the immense wealth of obsolete but expressive adjectives, amply illustrated in the passage from Studley's *Hippolytus*, quoted above; add the dankish dabby face of the South Wind, and the Danube's waumbling streame (2.81). Without doubt Polonius, a generation out of date, slept with these translations under his pillow ("That's good, 'waumbling streame' is good"). For us, however, the luxuriance of such oddities, the lack of proportion or selection at any point, the relentless alliteration,[3] the numbing ding-dong rhythm of the fourteeners, page after page—all these things make it difficult to treat the translations seriously as works of art.

To summarize: these translators, partly through the accident of having lived just when they did and partly through their own natural gifts, possessed a still unrivaled feeling for what Seneca was about. But, again partly through an accident of time, their poetic technique is too unsure to communicate their feeling to a modern reader directly, without great labor on his part. One last example. There is a compact, devilish sentence towards the end of *Thyestes* (1067–68), where the insatiate Atreus is wishing that he could give the banquet all over again, because neither father nor sons had been conscious of the horror at the moment of eating. A modern who seeks to know Seneca will need much patiently acquired understanding of the Elizabethan translators' ways before he can sense that behind such vividly felt yet grotesque verses as:

> He rent his sonnes with wicked gumme, himselfe yet wotting naught,
> Nor they thereof,

lies anything like this:

> Scidit ore natos impio—sed nesciens,
> Sed nescientes!

he vivid feeling is there, as it is in no other versions.

o not mean to discuss Eliot's "Introduction" at any length, se it is certainly familiar to most readers (a reprint of it, of e, is available also in his *Selected Essays*), and because, n the areas which he chose to cover, there can be little serisagreement with him even at this date. I draw attention to one factual error, which may prove to be more important t first sight it seems, if we seek a just understanding of Senerama: "The most unpleasantly sanguinary [of Senecan tragei is the *Thyestes*, a subject which, so far as we know, was not pted by a Greek dramatist" (xxiii–iv). That is simply un- Eight Greek dramatists, including Sophocles, Euripides and hon, wrote tragedies entitled *Thyestes*; although all are now nd the fragments of them, as so often, are scanty, at least the ocklean *Second Thyestes* (and possibly, also, his *Atreus*) al- certainly dealt with the cannibalistic dinner. (And incidenas if for good measure of horrors, Sophocles seems to have d Thyestes' subsequent outrage, the rape of his own daughPelopia, in the *Thyestes in Sicyon*.)[4] This mistake of Eliot's in fact, be classified as a Freudian slip: even in a passage he is, quite rightly, protesting against the widespread beat Senecan drama is simply crammed with horrors, he still ut shake off the even more widely spread ancestral opinion t any rate it ought to be gorier than *Greek* drama. Even the t Euripidean versions of the deaths of the Princess and Kreon e *Medea*, and of Hippolytus, and of Pentheus, or Sophocles' n of the agonies of Lichas and Herakles, or Aeschylus' exly precise account of the Thyestean banquet itself (*Agamnon*, 1587–1602) should long ago have put an end to such ca—if only people had been content to read the poems for elves, and with the help of all five senses. Seneca is indeed dic, but not, as I hope to show later in this essay, in the same

sensuous, physical way as the Greek dramatists can be when they choose.

Otherwise, I still see little that I should wish to change in Eliot's essay, and only find myself admiring once again his mastery of, and immediate transcendence of, what scholars call (often with quite straight faces) the "Literature"; his perfectly tuned ear for the original dramas both in Latin and English; and the felicity and precision with which he expressed his findings. Little that I should wish to change; but very much that I wish to add. The essay, it will be remembered, falls into three sections: the first treating the character, virtues and vices of the Latin tragedies themselves; the second, their influence on Elizabethan drama; the last, the Elizabethan translations as such. The first of these sections, which primarily interests me here, remains to this day the most intelligent sketch of Senecan tragedy available in English, outranging by far the current academic handbooks.[5] Yet I will confess that even it seems to me a collection of piecemeal observations—nearly always just, and often excellent—on the superficies of Seneca, on his style, his characterization, his Stoic slant, his metric. What I miss is any final synthesis, any sustained attempt to reach the heart of these tragedies, to appraise their status as works of art in themselves. One still comes away with the feeling that had they not, by the accident of their preservation, exercised a vast influence on Renaissance drama, they would be remarkable only for a few casual felicities. In that sense Eliot's approach to Seneca, for all his superior intelligence, remains squarely in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Anglo-Saxon tradition. Senecan drama as a *whole* we refuse to take seriously; even the most benevolently disposed, after admiring a phrase here, a scene there, will go on to speak of matters that are strictly irrelevant, of Greek derivations or European influences, or Silver Latin rhetoric, or, in extreme cases, the fact that Seneca prophesied the discovery of the American continent.[6] In the following part of this article, turning away from such things, I shall first concentrate on the man himself. For I believe that there and there only we shall find our clues to the criticism of these tragedies—in that terrible moral sensitivity which imperiously compelled their creation, and in that concrete, pictorial imagination which brought them into shape. Whether the examination will show that they are great works of art I do not know. But it may suggest, at least, that neither their contents nor their technique are anything like so remote from modern experience

(or indeed from the human experience of all ages) as is usually supposed; that they are perfectly serious, honest works of art not frivolous exercises in gruesome wit; finally, that they represent an art form almost without parallel in antique literature, truly religious drama.

It has always been known that there are two distinct lives of Seneca: the life—very largely an *inner* life[7]—which can be reconstructed from his own writings, and the primarily political biography which has to be pieced together from allusions in other ancient authors. The inner life, as perhaps with most of us after reaching maturity, is an almost timeless thing, showing little essential change as the years pass. Against it, in vivid contrast, stand the mountainous fluctuations of Seneca's secular, political life, with its abrupt tragicomic peripeties and its ultimate catastrophe. His outward life is, I believe, of little moment to the critic of Seneca's extant writings, with two important qualifications, which will appear shortly; so I will spend only a few sentences in recalling its main features.[8] He was born in Spain, within a year or two of the birth of Christ;[9] early brought to Rome; in adolescence, obsessed with philosophy, especially in its more ascetic manifestations, from which he was rescued by the common sense of his father, M. Annaeus Seneca (*Ep.*108.17–22). During the same period, and indeed throughout his life, he suffered from ill health. There was a significant moment, late in the reign of Tiberius, when this actually impelled him towards suicide (*Ep.*78.1–2); but he was diverted from it, partly (like his own Hercules in the *Hercules Furens*, 1302–1317!) by his aged father, and partly by the consolation of philosophy. Meanwhile, however, so far as the world at large could see, he was succeeding in life during his thirties and early forties: quaestor, perhaps shortly after 32 A.D., and thereafter an advocate so famous in the courts as to arouse the theatrical hatred of Caligula. Here is our first evidence of his contact with princes, of his presence at the edge of that tiny group of men on which there bore down, night and day, the concentric pressure of a monstrous weight, the post-Augustan Empire. That pressure is almost unimaginable to the ordinary citizen of the present day, perhaps even to the statesman. We can only stare, helpless, at its psychological effects on the individuals. Some of

them found release in madness or cruelty; some (among whom I see Petronius) cushioned themselves in detached pleasure; others (Seneca and Marcus Aurelius are obvious examples) armed themselves in the ponderous carapace of Stoicism and lumbered forwards as best they could. But all these reactions have one point in common: they are extravagant; not only vice (as in the mirrored room of Hostius Quadra),[10] but virtue itself is magnified into monstrous images.

And nothing, no one, is secure. . . . After a narrow escape from the murderous Caligula, Seneca survived into the reign of Claudius only to be exiled before its first year was out (41 A.D.) to Corsica, where he lingered hopelessly for eight years. In 49, however, his fortune again reversed itself, totally and with staggering abruptness: he was recalled by Agrippina, now Claudius' wife in succession to Messalina, and made tutor to Nero. From then on he stood in the center of the world, at Nero's side through his accession in 54, the murder of Britannicus, the murder of Agrippina, and the death of Burrus in 62. At this last point his luck (if it was luck) broke again; his final three years, from 62 to 65, were lived in semi-retirement, under the constant threat of trial and death, until his suicide in the aftermath of the Pisonian conspiracy.

So much for the turbulent outward career, our main concern with which is its relationship to the more static inner life and convictions revealed in the writings. I do not intend here to spend time on the eternally discussed question of Seneca's hypocrisy or otherwise during his years as adviser to Nero. This, surely, can be judged by such scholars or philosophers, if there are any, as have found themselves in anything like Seneca's situation; at any rate it is not relevant to the present inquiry. What does seem relevant is the clear fact that Seneca himself lived through and witnessed, in his own person or in the persons of those near him, almost every evil and horror that is the theme of his writings, prose or verse. Exile, murder, incest, the threat of poverty and a hideous death, and all the savagery of fortune were of the very texture of his career. Such themes, at least where Seneca is concerned, are traditionally dismissed as rhetorical commonplaces, an emotive phrase which really contributes nothing to our understanding of the problem. Rhetorical commonplaces, like early epic formulae (which in fact they closely resemble), can be adopted by a writer with or without feeling, disposed with or without art. Everything in Seneca's career, as well as a dispassionate study of his writings,

would suggest that these themes, for him, were or became urgent realities.

The second point about the outward life which seems worth stressing here is that, at any rate in the last three years of semi-retirement from the court, it merged in an almost perfect harmony with the inner life. "Was man in der Jugend wünscht, hat man im Alter die Fülle." Where we can still trace Seneca in action, he is at his best. And the *Naturales Quaestiones* and *Letters to Lucilius*, known to have been composed in those same years, have the ring of almost religious fervor; there are places, indeed, where neither the contents nor the very sound of the language seem to belong any more to the pagan classical world, but to late antiquity or the so-called Dark Ages. "Intellego, mi Lucili, non emendari tantum sed transfigurari"[11]. . . . "Cresco et exulto et discussa pectute recalesco. . . ."[12] Finally, there is an extraordinary passage where he in effect defends the integrity of his inner life, however men's opinions of his words or actions may be.[13] It is written in old age, evidently in ill health, and evidently in daily expectation of death from these (or other?) causes:

> So I have no fear as I ready myself for that day on which, without any of the turns or colors of rhetoric, I am to pass judgment on myself: is my courage in my words, or in my true feelings? Were they pretense, were they a masquerade, all those proud words which I uttered in the face of Fortune? Away with the opinion of mankind, always uncertain, always a split vote; and away with the studies that I have pursued all my life: Death (I tell myself) is about to cast his verdict on you. . . . I accept the terms, I do not shrink from the judgment. *Non reformido iudicium!*

Neither here nor elsewhere in this essay do I propose to discuss the validity or practicability of the eclectic Roman version of Stoicism which finds startling expression in such passages as these. My purpose will be served if I have indicated how it molded and animated Seneca's inner life from the time of his earliest extant writings (about 40 A.D.) until his suicide; how his whole career down to that date was such as inevitably to reinforce its vitality and meaning for him; how during his last years, if not earlier, it certainly invaded his external actions in return. It is a datum which we must imaginatively accept for the moment, as Seneca him-

self accepted it, if we are fairly to judge either his prose or his verse.

In seeking the springs of Senecan tragedy we must begin with his prose, for here both the convictions of the man, and his preoccupations, and—I would dare to add—his unique artistic talents, are most easily seen. This is not to suggest for one moment that any of the Senecan prose treatises, *as wholes*, can be considered works of art. Indeed, it is hard to classify them in any artistic, literary or philosophic category; which is, I believe, one powerful reason why they have fallen into neglect since the early nineteenth century, precisely when books began to become the province of the systematizing professor. Their philosophical approach is too casual for the philosopher, or even the historian of philosophy. Their lack of formal structure frustrates those who look to ancient literature for aesthetic reasons. Historians of Roman Imperial politics, approaching a source which should be so promising, are met by discreet silence or bland generality;[14] and the inquirer after scientific information is understandably maddened by a page or two of the *Naturales Quaestiones*. As for Seneca's three *Consolationes*: Consolation is simply no longer part of our academic curriculum, and the same holds for Benefaction (*de Beneficiis Libri Septem*!), Anger (*Libri Tres*), Leisure, Clemency and The Happy Life. In short, there's only one phrase to describe Seneca's prose works: *frozen conversations*. Almost all of them deliberately adopt the tone of conversation, and bear the traces of having been set down almost at conversational speed (the nearest thing to an exception, in an entire work, is the *Consolatio ad Helviam*). Indeed, I have sometimes suspected that they were in large part actually dictated to a stenographer.[15] Works of art, naturally, do not emerge, nor do systematic bodies of information. In compensation we have something hardly less interesting, the speaking voice of an extraordinary man. The speaker ranges over a vast number of topics, though always referring them in the end to his most urgent preoccupation, Stoic ethics. As a rule, the level of conversation, over any five-minute section, is high, and the verbal and notional wit is sustained with great virtuosity line sentence after sentence. There are certainly dull periods, as in any conversation, and there are a few entirely dull conversations, notably the *de Beneficiis*.[16] But equally there are passages—again, hardly ever lasting for more than five minutes at a time—when the entire eye, soul, imagination of the speaker seem to leap into the

words. Such passages are not few, and, as will be seen, I believe they are of considerable interest to a student of the tragedies.

Bitterly opposed as I am to anthologizing in general—it is not only the history of the declining Roman Empire that teaches us how the epitomizers and anthologists move in not more than a century before the barbarian hordes—I would make an exception for Seneca's prose works, for the reasons stated. Very few can reasonably be expected to find time to listen to the entire extant conversation of any man, however brilliant, that extends over nearly 1000 pages of close print,[17] in a highly idiomatic and sophisticated Latin. Seneca's reputation would certainly gain by a sympathetic anthology of his inspired moments. In a way, the following pages will contain an approach, in miniature, to such an anthology; they will concentrate primarily on Seneca's sensitive reaction to the phenomena of his world, and on the means by which he expressed that reaction.

It was *one* world. An essential preliminary to the understanding of Seneca is the realization that, however eclectic he is, he is still Stoic enough by habit to draw little or no distinction between spiritual, moral and material realities. Though he protests in theory against some excesses of the earlier Stoics in this matter,[18] in practice he treats *all* phenomena as belonging to the same order of being. His discourse slips, without warning or break, from the greatness of the soul to the vastness of the starry sky.[19] The stormy wanderings of Ulysses are equated with the daily experience of the soul.[20]

There is no difference for Seneca—and this is a point which should interest readers of his tragedy *Thyestes*—between physical and moral light or darkness: the soul of the good man, if we could look into it, would prove to be ablaze with soft light, and in fact we can actually *see* some of that fire in his eyes;[21] on the other hand, the external darkness in which the debauchee spends his existence is matched by the darkness in his soul.[22] "You are wrong, Lucretius," Seneca says, "we aren't afraid in the light; we have made everything into darkness for ourselves: *omnia nobis fecimus tenebras*."[23] Again, I will not pause to pass judgment on this view of reality, nor to inquire whether we should describe it as total materialism or total idealism, totally objective or totally subjective. The important word is *total*: in Seneca the passions, the tides and the orbits are phenomena of the same kind, are causally interrelated, and can be discussed in interchangeable terms. Nor shall

I here do more than tentatively suggest that our own world view, in the latter part of the twentieth century, may again be trending in a similar direction. All I ask is that the reader should do his best, for the moment, to see the world through Seneca's eyes.

At any level below the fixed stars, it is in great part a world of fear. Beside what we should call the terrors of nature, the earthquake,[24] the thunderbolt,[25] the city-destroying fire,[26] are ranged (as usual with no consciousness that they could be different in kind) the fury of tyrants,[27] envy, pain, poverty, bereavement; and beside them again, the no less solid terrors within the individual soul, the annihilating passions, above all anger, lust, and fear. It is this last group which naturally concerns Seneca most, and bulks largest in his writing. Not only is it the nearest and the ultimate danger, the fifth column within every man's citadel, but its effects are contagious: they extend from the individual across the body politic (nature created Caligula *ut ostenderet quid summa vitia in summa fortuna possent*),[28] and in time can reach out and destroy not only the earth, but the fabric of the universe, stars and all.[29] You want the true image of our human existence (*vitae nostrae vera imago*)? Seneca can tell you: it is the sacking of a city.[30]

All human beings, even if they should miraculously escape the onset of the passions or the tyrant, are in any case headed for nothing but death. In passage after passage, august ancestors of lines in Dante and Eliot ("I had not thought Death had undone so many"), are seen vivid pictures of the crowds hurrying to Hades, and the pompous funerals of the Caesars jostling the quiet, taper-lit obsequies of infants.[31]

With all such terrors Seneca's imagination was obsessed; and I think it is true to say that he spends quite as much time in picturing them as on the more positive function of instructing his hearer in the remedies against them. The receptive artist, in fact (as we shall see in more detail shortly), time and again takes over from the dogmatic moralist. But those remedies are simply described, if one strips away, as Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius did, all the elaborate foundation of dialectic, and most of the foundation of physics, on which the Hellenistic Stoics had based them. A single crucial battle has to be fought within the soul itself, the battle between reason and the passions. A victory by either side is total. If the passions win, the result is at once visible and concrete (such is the instant causal connection between moral and physical realities): the regular lineaments of the human face col-

lapse into the contorted mask of mania, *furor*; and another terror has been added to the world.[32] Reason, on the other hand, annihilates every vice at a blow by its conquest,[33] and the soul is henceforth impenetrably armored for its lifelong duel with externals—in other words, with Fortune. This is still a hard-fought battle, but a glorious one: in the strange second chapter of the *de providentia*, the universe dissolves into a mighty amphitheater, in which an immortal audience, breathless, looks down on the only gladiatorial pair worthy of the sight of God—Fortune and Cato, fighting it out. And this, says Seneca (with one of those mild glimpses from his sense of humor which rather endear him to me) this is definitely a more adult sport than our human practice of boggling at wild-beast fights.

Death itself, to such a man, is of no consequence. Though knowing as well as the rest of us that ". . . every mother's son/Travails with a skeleton,"[34] he accepts this fact as in accordance with nature, and indeed, under certain circumstances, positively welcomes it. The theme of Death the Liberator—liberator not only from the stress of the wise man's battle against Fortune, but from humiliation or dishonor—appears constantly in Seneca's prose and verse;[35] and to this moment one is impressed by its ultimate appearance, not in his prose nor in his verse, but in physical action when one day in 65 A.D. (If that was a "rhetorical commonplace," as the type of Senecan commentator with which I have no patience would call it, we must at least admit that Seneca took his commonplaces very seriously indeed—and, with that admission done, a vital contention of this essay is established.)

I have now surveyed, briefly and impressionistically, the most prominent features of Seneca's world. It is not, of course, a world of his own creation, for it differs in no important respect, so far as we can tell, from that of many earlier Stoics. Yet, I think, enough has already been said to suggest, first, that Seneca had completely assimilated it for his own purposes, and second, that his personal experience at the feverish center of the Julio-Claudian empire enormously intensified his understanding of it. He operates within the framework no less surely than Dante within the framework of the Thomist universe. And, I would now add, with something of the same creative and pictorial imagination: to turn from the fragments of the earlier Stoics, or even from the pages of Marcus Aurelius, to Seneca, is to turn from the philosophical technician to the born artist. Once again, we must bear in mind the patchy, con-

versational character of Seneca's prose works. But they provide abundant evidence, scattered here and there, of a facet of Seneca's genius which I believe has been almost completely neglected: his painter's eyes, his almost Leonardesque visual imagination and fantasy.

When gifts such as these operate on the physical and moral realities of the Stoic universe—or simply on the Roman world as observed by Seneca—the result is startling. They can bring out, in color and perspective, minute details: the muddy alleys and eroded, cracked, uneven walls of the Roman slums (*de Ira* 3.35.5); the delicate miniature rainbow made by the fuller as he sprays water from his mouth over the stretched cloth (*Q.N.* 1.3.2); the gourmet whetting his appetite by observing a costly fish as it expires in its prison of glass, white stealing under pink (*ibid.* 3.17.2–18.1). In such mastery of visual detail, it is true, Seneca is not quite alone among Neronian writers, for something very like it is found in—of all people—Petronius (perhaps their only point in common). But when he moves out to wider perspectives, Seneca seems to me to leave behind him most of the writers in the Latin language. Here is a landscape from the eighteenth chapter of the *Consolatio ad Marciam* (or from the background of some canvas by Bruegel, "The Fall of Icarus," "The Return of the Cattle"?):

> hinc camporum in infinitum patentium fusa planities, hinc montium magnis et nivalibus surgentium iugis erecti in sublime vertices; deiectus fluminum et ex uno fonte in occidentem orientemque defusi amnes et summis cacuminibus nemora nutantia et tantum silvarum cum suis animalibus aviumque concentu dissono; varii urbium situs et seclusae nationes locorum difficultate, quarum aliae se in erectos subtrahunt montes, aliae ripis lacu vallibus pavidae circumfunduntur; adiuta cultu seges, et arbusta sine cultore feritatis, et rivorum lenis inter prata discursus et amoeni sinus et litora in portum recedentia; sparsae tot per vastum insulae, quae interventu suo maria distinguunt.

On that side, the level spread of plains that stretch off into infinity. On this, great snowy mountain ridges rise into skyward-soaring spires. Tumbling rivers; streams falling off eastward and westward from a single spring; woods waving on hilltops; and all that forest with its animals, with its harmony fused of different birdsongs. Towns variously sited; people cut off by the wildness of the land, some of them withdrawn into soaring hills, others moated by lakes, valleys, marshes.[36] Cornfields thriving through agriculture, wild copses with none to tend them. Streams wander softly through meadows; then there are fair bays, and shores that here and there retreat into harbors; beyond, all those islands scattered through the deep, punctuating beween sea and sea.

The traditional response to such passages is what, by now, amounts to a dirty word: they are ecphrastic, part of the rhetor's stock in trade. But I would ask the reader, before he dismisses them on such a ground, to consider a possible objection to it. Every age has its own forms and conventions, which cannot be judged as good or bad in the abstract, but only by the way in which the individual writer employs them. No one would think any sort of criticism of the third section of Bach's Suite No. 2 for Flute and Strings to remark merely that it is a *sarabande*. Why the rhetorical forms such as *commonplace* and *ecphrasis* should be otherwise treated, as if their use in itself put an end to criticism, is beyond me.

Now there is in fact considerable difference between the *ecphrasis* of a Seneca and that of a Longus, say, or a Philostratus. Not only does a Senecan landscape (or starscape, of the type which we shall shortly mention) seem to arise far more directly from the writer's own inward or outward eye—that is my, admittedly subjective, impression—but it is informed by a deeper meaning and urgency. For example, the passage just quoted from the *Consolatio ad Marciam*, if read in context, will be found to be no casually inserted purple patch. It is part of a vision that is to open before the infant just born into the world. To find its like we must look far afield, perhaps to the late seventeenth-century Christian mystic, Thomas Traherne.[37]

Seneca's vision carried him far beyond a single landscape, however: again and again, in the tragedies as well as in the prose, we meet passages which suggest that he carried in his mind's eye, almost continually, an astronaut's view of the entire Roman world, and of the shadowy regions on its borders. The Scythians tramping across their frozen lakes (*Prov.*1.4.14); the Ethiopian pygmy imposing his will on the elephant (*Ep.*85.41); or the pomp sur-

rounding Parthian kings (*Ep.*17.11)—such pictures flash across his conversation hardly less often than images drawn from the areas where he actually spent most of his mature life, Latium and Campania. Perhaps slightly more often in the tragedies than in the prose, the vision pierces far beyond the Roman boundaries. The pearl from the Indian Ocean is found only in *Phaedra* (391–92); the silk of China, startlingly enough, in *Phaedra* (389) and *Thyestes* (379); and it is to *Hercules Furens* (533–41) that we owe our most imaginative picture of the frozen seas in the far north, with their silent, spiky waves. More than any other extant Latin writer, Seneca is preoccupied with ocean discovery. "Videbis hic navigia quas non novere terras quaerentia."[38] In the *Naturales Quaestiones* (4.2.24) we see a glimpse of the navigation of the African coast; and, in the same work (1.*Praef.*13), occurs the astonishing statement that the voyage from the western shore of Spain to the Indies takes a very few days, given a following wind.[39] For a moment, the vision unites the two far ends of the earth.

Such Senecan passages, taken together, convey perhaps as vividly as anything in Latin writing the sheer immensity of the Imperial Roman world, as seen through the eyes of a sensitive observer stationed at its administrative and diplomatic center. But even from a more restricted, literary point of view the phenomenon is interesting: Seneca's Stoic habit of mind here combines with his practical experience as a Roman administrator to produce a truly ecumenical poetry, a poetry in which location and race are almost non-significant. Since Aeschylus (who, from very different causes, seems to share something of the same internationalism, the same sense of the coherence of the known and half-known worlds) such a thing is not easy to parallel. But there are more surprises to come: Seneca, unlike Aeschylus, is aware not only of the immensity of the earth in the eyes of man, but of its minuteness in relation to the universe. A characteristic passage in the *Naturales Quaestiones* (1.*Praef.*8–11) is worth quoting; it comes near to a familiar modern simile for our earth, the ants on the billiard ball. The human soul, says Seneca, cannot quite discipline itself to despise material luxury,

> until it has made the circuit of the entire universe; until it has looked down from the heights on to our earth—narrow, largely covered by sea and, even where it emerges from the waters, wild over wide spaces, and either scorched or frozen; until it has told itself, "So that's the dot which so many nations compete to carve up with fire and steel! How absurd are mortal frontiers! (*o quam ridiculi sunt mortalium termini!*)" . . . If human intelligence were granted to ants, wouldn't they, like us, carve up their single threshing floor into many a Province? Once you have lifted yourself into that region which is truly great, you will be content, whenever you see our armies marching with their standards aloft, their cavalry squadrons (as if something important was going on) scouting in advance or clouding the flanks, merely to quote: *it nigrum campis agmen.*[40] All that rushing to and fro is ant labor, labor in a tiny space. . . . The scene of your voyages, your wars, your allocation of empires, is a dot! The mighty spaces are above our heads; and into their freehold the human soul is admitted.

From the period of his exile,[41] through the height of his power,[42] into the years of his retirement,[43] we can follow Seneca's preoccupation with the starry heavens in a series of passages which in splendor and vivid realization are scarcely to be paralleled between Plato and Boethius. For him the stars have a triple fascination: their majesty and the regularity of their movement are wonders—wherever you stand on the earth's surface, whether in Corsica or on the Palatine Hill—of the divine order; the fire of which they consist is identical with the fire of the human soul, for they are *cognatae res*;[44] finally (a grim fascination, this), being unlike us, they may ultimately, for all their remoteness, perish with us and through us. Seneca's universe, I would repeat, is one, and all its parts are interrelated.

Here I reach a side of Seneca's mind and art, his visual fantasy, which is hard to parallel at all in extant ancient writings—the great myth at the end of Plato's *Phaedo* is the nearest thing that comes to me. That he possessed the power of projecting himself imaginatively into regions which he could never see is shown by many casual passages—his description of the measureless caverns in the bowels of the earth, with their sightless fauna,[45] his visions of the deep seas of future time,[46] and of scientific discoveries cleared up by remote posterity.[47] But of all such visions, the greatest and the most terrible are those which concern the destruction of the universe. For neither earth nor stars are immune

to human sin, and the time will come when we shall destroy them all. This idea is never far from Seneca's consciousness again we can trace it throughout his career,[48] but perhaps the most fantastic of all such passages is to be found near the end, in the *Naturales Quaestiones* (3.27–30), where he envisages the destruction of the world by water, the *fatalis dies diluvii:*

> First, there are immense showers of rain. The suns are seen no more, but heaven's face is grim with clouds and uninterrupted mist. There is thick, humid darkness with never a wind to dry it out. Corruption seizes the crops, and the growing cornfields rot, grainless; and when the sown plants have perished, marsh grasses grow up to take their place all over the plain. Soon even the stronger vegetation feels the hurt, as the trees heel over with their roots loosened, and the vines and every other shrub can no longer keep their grip in the earth, which has turned soft and liquid. . . . The houses, soaked through, begin to slip, for their foundations are sinking; the water has filtered deep, the entire soil is a swamp. No use, their efforts to shore up the tottering structures. Every solid building is set in a slippery, muddy earth: nothing is firm. And now the storm clouds gather and gather, and layers of snow, which have taken centuries to accumulate, melt; a torrent rolls down from the utmost mountain heights, catches up the loosely clinging forests, bowls down rocks set free of their twisted settings, scours away farms, transporting herdsmen in confusion with their flocks, plucks up the little buildings in passing, and storms away against the greater—whole cities it pulls away, whole peoples entangled in their towers!

But this is only a stream; what of the earth's truly great rivers, the Rhône, the Rhine, the Danube? Can we imagine the Danube's flow,

> when it is no longer scouring the spurs or the middle of the mountains but is harassing their very crests, carrying in its course the sodden flanks of hills, and shattered cliffs, and headlands of vast extent which have torn away from their parent body as their foundations collapsed? At last, finding no outlet (for it has dammed itself up by its own action),

> it turns in on itself, a global mass, and swallows an immense region of lands and cities in a single maelstrom. And all this while the rains persist, and the sky grows heavier and piles evil on evil with the passing of time: it was cloud before, now it is night, night dreadful with the terror of a flickering, ghastly light. Again and again the lightning flashes, the storm winds make the ocean shudder . . . .

A very similar word picture of the Deluge (which, I believe, must ultimately be derived from Seneca) will be found in a Windsor manuscript of Leonardo da Vinci;[49] but I do not know that anyone ever dismissed *that* as an *ecphrasis*.

Seneca had also, in his mind, seen the stars collapse on themselves. Leaving aside, for the moment, a surrealist chorus in the *Thyestes* (827–84), I would draw the reader's attention to a strange passage in the *de Beneficiis* (6.22), where he pictures the consequences of a lapse of benevolence in the sun and moon.

> All those heavenly bodies, separated by immense intervals, and posted for the protection of the universe, would desert their stations. There would be instant confusion in nature. Star would ram star. Natural harmony dissolved, the divine world would collapse into ruin. In mid-course, the latticework moving at immeasurable speed would abandon its alternations, guaranteed for so many ages; the bodies that now pass and repass in turn, and so maintain a proper balance in the firmament, would be burned up in a sudden blaze; that great variety would be fused, all would end in one. Fire would be master of the whole, fire succeeded by a motionless night. So many divine beings sucked into an endless whirlpool!

And once, for a brief moment, there is a fantasy worthy of a Michelangelo or a Blake: the lonely God after such a cosmic collapse, a God totally at rest, sunk in his own thoughts.[50] Here the circle comes full circle, however; for in this passage Seneca is making the point that those thoughts will be no different from the thoughts of the Stoic sage in prison, exile or shipwreck. I cannot too often stress the unity of the world which Seneca had inherited and made his own; a moral and physical unity from the depths of the universe to the individual human soul.

Enough, perhaps, has now been said to demonstrate the range of Seneca's visual imagination, and the manner in which it can illuminate and realize his Stoic cosmos. But one special aspect of it remains to be considered—an aspect predictable enough, no doubt, to an ancient Stoic, but not so immediately obvious to the modern reader. Moral realities, in this mind, assume shapes no less pictorial, and indeed dramatic, than physical realities:

> *Thus let us picture Anger!* Her eyes are on fire; she is clamorous, hissing, bellowing, groaning, screaming, making any fouler noise you care to think of. In both her hands—since she never thinks about protecting herself—she is waving weapons. Wild, bloody, scarred, bruised dark with her own lashings, with the walk of a maniac, clouded deep with darkness, charging here and there, ravaging, routing, agonized by the hatred of all, and of herself more than any if she can find no other way of doing harm. She is as dangerous as she is hateful: she longs to overturn earth, oceans, heaven.

Such is the "hideous face of a hideous emotion."[51] It will be observed, with interest, that the destructive force of this emotion is no less powerful than that of the Deluge in the *Naturales Quaestiones*; equally, it extends to the whole cosmos. Briefer, but hardly less vivid, moral personifications of a similar type occur several times elsewhere in Seneca: Virtue and Pleasure (*Vit.Beat.*7.3); Fortune (*Cons.Polyb.*2.2); and Clemency, bringing sudden peace at her entry into the house (*Clem.*1.5.4). Seneca visualized these —to him—fundamentally important powers with the same clarity as he could visualize, say, the collapse of the stellar system. But no passage makes this mental habit of his clearer than a quite casual remark in the *Letters* (113.26), where he is reducing to absurdity the earlier Stoic view that the Virtues are *animalia*. It is a remark which, I suppose, briefly allows us a glimpse into the innermost part of his workshop. If virtues are animals, his argument runs, then it will follow that all sorts of improbable entities are animals also. "I just split with laughter when I try envisaging a Solecism as an animal, and a Barbarism, and a Syllogism; and when, like a painter, I try assigning them their appropriate outward shapes—*et aptas illis facies tamquam pictor adsigno.*"

tamquam pictor: like a painter. There, I believe, is one important clue to the creation of the Senecan tragedies. Another is Seneca's total imaginative assimilation of a basically Stoic cosmos and Stoic ethics. A third is the terrible immediacy which these ideas came to acquire for him, probably in his middle years as exile and dynast, certainly by the time of his retirement from court in 62 A.D. And not only for his own sake: I have already given instances, earlier in these pages, of his preoccupation with the destruction of the world through human passions, and of the visionary urgency that appears in his last works.

Longum iter est per praecepta, breve et efficax per exempla: instruction is the long road around, the short and effective road through example. This truly Roman principle, laid down in *Ep.*6.5, operates from end to end of the rambling, conversational prose works of Seneca. Again and again the modern reader, bored (he well may be) by a page or so of exhortation to Virtue, is on the point of dropping the book, when he is shocked back into attention by a brilliantly raelized, nervous paragraph; the inevitable *exemplum* has succeeded the *praecepta*. Seneca, as he himself several times admits, is but an amateur moralist.[52] As a creative word-painter, he is a superb professional, as we see both in the prose *exempla* and, above all, in those extended, fantastic *exempla* in verse, the tragedies.

Having said that, one has said, in a sense, all that matters. In the dramas those Senecan qualities which I have tried to delineate through the survey of the prose works, but which appear in those works only by brilliant flashes, operate continuously and on the grand scale. The acute moral sensitivity, the painter's eye and ear, the indifference to the modern (and, I would add, high Victorian) distinction between the moral and physical worlds—all these are combined and sustained. Further, unlike any other surviving works from Seneca's hand, the dramas aim at being works of art. For they are molded by a triple discipline. The Senecan moral-physical universe, strewn in confused pieces through the conversational prose writings, is here shaped and defined by the limitations of verse, of dramatic form, and of mythic subject.

Before exploring the consequences of this view in more detail I think it right to pause over certain external aspects of the tragedies. I shall put forward my opinion about them rather dogmatically, not because I do not know that they present complex and important problems to any serious student of Seneca (or of

European drama), but because they belong only to the background of the present essay.

Were the tragedies intended for acting on a stage? We cannot, in method, be certain. Not a scrap of unambiguous evidence concerning the production or non-production of *Senecan* drama has come down to us; we have simply the bare Latin scripts, without commentary, without any of the enormous apparatus with which the Greeks of antiquity surrounded *their* classical tragedies. Not is much light shed by a consideration of the Neronian theater in general: the results point all ways. Though I do not know of any evidence which indicates beyond doubt that any first-century play was written for recitation by a single voice, there are certainly indications that some plays were composed for recital rather than full theatrical production.[53] Leaving aside the intervening quasi-theatrical phenomena which also delighted Neronian audiences, the mime, the pantomime, the operatic rehashes of scenes or parts from Greek drama, we come, at the other end of the scale, to straight theater. For this last there is, in fact, a fair amount of evidence in Seneca himself.[54] Where the Senecan tragedies are concerned, therefore, our only resource is the texts themselves. In these I find nothing unactable, if allowance is made for a few stage conventions that would be moderate by Jacobean, let alone Aeschylean or Restoration, standards. But that decision is, admittedly, subjective; far less subjective, if subjective at all, is the question of the speakability of Senecan drama. Practical experiment in the tape recording of scenes from the *Phaedra*[55] convinced me, and I believe would convince anyone else who tried it, that Senecan dramatic verse is designed, no less than the verse of Marlowe or Racine, for its effect on the ear, not on the eye; and that that effect is shattering. Retranslated, even by amateurs, into the sound-medium, the long speeches almost of themselves generated passion, the verbal epigrams (dull on paper) acquired a cutting edge, the texture and forward movement of the scenes were restored. That the verse was intended for speaking, then, I have no doubt; and if that can be admitted, the conclusion inevitably follows that it was intended for speaking by *different voices for the different parts*. Those, and there are many, who blandly assume that the Senecan dramas were recited in an auditorium by a single voice, like an epic or a history, are hereby recommended to try, say, *Medea* 168–171:

Nurse: Rex est timendus. *Medea*: Rex meus fuerat pater.
N.: Non metuis arma? *M.*: Sint licet terra edita!
N.: Moriere. *M.*: Cupio. *N.*: Profuge. *M.*: Paenituit fugae.
N.: Medea, *M.*: Fiam! *N.*: Mater es. *M.*: Cui sim vides![56]

hat can a *single* reciter make of that? Does he speak alternately of opposite sides of his mouth, or what? And indeed, what s a reader make of it when he eyes it on the printed page? elieve that there is only one answer to this, and to the innumerle similar passages in Seneca: they are meant to be spoken; and y are meant to be spoken by a separate voice for each part.

f that point is conceded, the Senecan tragedies are, for all ential purposes, true drama, and to be treated as such by the ic. Whether they were accompanied by action (in fact, anyone who has tried to *speak* a Senecan scene will probably find t some action and gesture follow irresistibly), whether there s a raised stage, scenery, masks—these are marginal and antiarian questions, insoluble on our available evidence. On the ernal aspects of Senecan drama I shall speak more briefly. *The horuses*: by the standards of fifth-century Greek tragedy their havior is flatly incomprehensible. But why judge Seneca, in or other matters, by the standards of fifth-century Greek gedy, as if nothing had happened since to the world or to the ater? (I suppose it is some time since people abandoned the ctice of measuring Horace by Alcaeus, or Lucan by Homer.) e often-made suggestion that Seneca's choruses operate somet in the sporadic manner of Hellenistic comic choruses[57] ms to me very plausible, and to dispose of almost all the diffiies; though certainty cannot be attained. Of the contents of songs in Seneca we shall see more later; but a word should uid here about their technique. Once again, as with the diape, the *sound* matters immensely. Seneca's generation, like s (and like Euripides'), was suffering from a failure of nerve, d the tragedies are compelling evidence of this; but, unlike s, it was certainly not suffering from a failure of ear. In their rely rhythmic aspect, the Senecan choruses are to me the most eresting poems that survive from the first century A.D. And the rhythmic virtuosity—to put the matter at its lowest—of the alled "polymetric" choruses with which he experimented in *Oedipus* and *Agamemnon*, there is just no parallel in ancient n. We have to range more widely, backward to classical

Greek lyric, forward to . . . Milton? I do not try to fool the reader into supposing that Seneca's poetry, or his technique, is up to those standards. I do ask him, if he has any Latin, to reserve his judgment and to listen:

> Heu quam dulce malum mortalibus additum
> vitae dirus amor, cum pateat malis
> effugium et miseros libera mors vocet
> portus aeterna placidus quiete.
> Nullus hunc terror nec impotentis
> procella Fortunae movet aut iniqui
> flamma Tonantis.
> Perrumpet omne servitium
> contemptor levium deorum
> qui Styga tristem non tristis videt
> audetque vitae ponere finem.[58]

A prose paraphrase might run:

> Ah, it is sweet yet cruel, the evil love for life imposed on man, when he has an open refuge from his troubles—Death's freedom beckoning to the sufferer, a waveless harbor of everlasting calm. He who hears her will feel no terror, not the gale of raging Fortune, not the flames shot by the cruel Thunderer. He will break his way out through any slavery if only he can despise those ever-changing Gods; if he can look on Hell's sad river without sadness; if he dare end his life.

The relation of the Senecan tragedies to the Greek tragedies on the same themes is a subject which long mesmerized the learned. Term papers and dissertations pullulated, comparing (with a small, mad smile) the *Agamemnons* of Aeschylus and Seneca. Perhaps the most accessible summary of such labors is to be found in F. J. Miller's appendices to his Loeb edition of Seneca, where "Comparative Analyses" of the respective Greek and Senecan dramas are laid out on facing pages. They form an entertaining study. The spoken scenes rarely correspond—and then only with the aid of yawning blank spaces on one side or the other—while the choruses just don't correspond at all. With equal

ise, and with equally disconcerting results, one might draw Comparative Analyses of Homer and the *Aeneid* on facing es, or of the *Antigones* of Sophocles and Anouilh. But even a mparative Analysis, in fact, does not suffice to reveal the pro-dity of the differences between Seneca and the Greeks: it ard even to think of any single line in the Greek so-called ginals which Seneca has, in any sense, translated. He has, in-d, borrowed his general plots from the Greeks, and he has rowed (or presumed his hearer's knowledge of) many scenes several speeches. And it is true that in such cases a circum-ct comparison of Seneca with his models can throw light on art of both—in very much the same way as, for instance, a mparison between the *Eclogues* of Virgil and Pope would throw ht on *their* artistic methods. But on the whole the relation is particularly close, and for most critical purposes is probably ignored. In my experience, one comes closer to a just under-nding and enjoyment of, say, the Senecan *Oedipus* if one thinks t neither as a "translation," nor as an "adaptation," but as a ronian Fantasia on a Theme by Sophocles." A fantasia in a cal idiom all its own.

This brings me back from an admittedly condensed review of rnals to the main topic of this essay: the Senecan tragedies themselves, as expressions—perhaps the finest, certainly the artistically shaped—of the unique Senecan sensibilities and hts which I have traced in the prose works.

Let us review four propositions about Evil, which I suppose of vital importance to Senecan thought generally, but above the creation of the tragedies:

1) Evil is something material, with effects no less material than e of, say, fire. "Is a napalm bomb a sin? Is sin a napalm b?" Seneca would have had difficulty in distinguishing be-n the two questions; witness his Ghost of Tantalus in the logue of the *Thyestes*, whose advent sears the orchards, dries e streams and melts the mountain snow; or his Oedipus, who es with him an evil that has infected the Boeotian skies with ilence.[59]

2) Evil takes its rise within a tiny but measureless space,[60] the ndual human soul. If it is not checked within that space by pposing force of reason, no check remains between it and ours. There, in the soul, is the crucial and the final battlefield.

3) The most terrible and most immediate disasters result from

the victory of evil in the soul of a prince. It is at once amplified. A nation, or a world, will feel its consequences.

4) Although there is no check to evil once let loose on the world, there is one thing which it cannot vanquish—a soul with which *reason* has won the battle. To such a soul even physical death is no injury, but a sort of triumph. Its integrity remains.

Though the phraseology of these propositions is out of fashion, they are in themselves perhaps not so farfetched as might appear to a modern at first sight. On some not altogether superficial views, 3) has been exemplified in our own time, in the histories of Germany and Russia, and was certainly not meaningless to Roman contemporaries of Caligula and Nero. And I do not think that we customarily sneer at 1), 3) and 4) when we find them operating, as we do, throughout the dramas of one of the greatest of ancient poets, Aeschylus. Only 2), the most characteristically Stoic of them all, implies a psychology that has never been fashionable, at least in such rigorous terms. But be that as it may, let us temporarily accept all four for the purposes of Senecan criticism.

For it was undoubtedly with these propositions in mind that Seneca selected his Greek mythic themes, and transformed them. Thereafter, the unrestrained pictorial imagination came into play, giving color, form and depth to Evil itself; creating, as it were, violent impressionist canvases which bear little relationship to the Greek Old Masters. People speak much of what they call Seneca's rhetorical exaggeration, when phenomena occur such as the Ghost of Tantalus or the Senecan Oedipus, just cited. They might equally well use the same language of Van Gogh's "The Starry Night" in the New York Museum of Modern Art. Stars aren't like that, like great catherine-wheels; but that is what stars feel like. A Senecan tragedy, by similar means, tells what evil feels like to an acutely sensitive mind under abnormally evil conditions. The perpetual criticism that Seneca's characters and situations are unrealistic seems to me to miss the point. He is not trying, even in the sense that Aeschylus did (let alone Sophocles and Euripides), to present the actions of human beings. His emphasis is on the action of Evil, and of the emotions which generate it; the human actors, the palaces, the landscapes, the starry heavens themselves, are subordinate to this action; they are its external manifestations. If to us they seem pictorially exaggerated, the Stoic moralist will probably have his answer ready.

"you *cannot* exaggerate the shape of Evil, if you have ever conceited it in your own soul; it fills your heaven."

Although I am primarily concerned, through most of this essay, to rescue Seneca from what seem to me misapprehensions about his art, I do not wish to glide over its limitations. One of the most serious of these appears in the very fact that it is possible, in some degree, to draw up the scheme of a typical Senecan tragedy—something which no one in his senses would attempt to do for the tragedies of the Greeks. The minds of the Greek dramatists were wide open (which is perhaps one reason for the fascination they have exerted on many subsequent revolutionary periods, including our own). The mind of Seneca, on the other hand, is not open, but operates within a well-defined, quasi-rigorous system. Hence a greater intensity, and a surer sense of direction, in the Senecan dramas, but at the same time a loss of flexibility in composition. Personally, I am grateful to Time for preserving our seven complete Senecan tragedies;[61] they provide an experience for which I look in vain elsewhere in European literature. I doubt, however, whether Seneca could profitably have composed many more than seven in so limited a genre.

The scheme of a Senecan tragedy is easily defined. Although the tragedy is formally divided into five acts by the choral songs,[62] the course of the plot, viewed as a whole, falls into three movements only, of gradually increasing length. For short, I will call them titles: The Cloud of Evil (this coincides with a formal division, the Prologue); The Defeat of Reason by Passion; finally, The Explosion of Evil, consequence of that defeat.

The Senecan Prologue has none of the dynamics of a Sophoclean, nor even the detailed, lively narrative of a Euripidean. We see a solitary,[63] over-life-size figure brooding on the stage. Neither its physical nor its intellectual lineaments become clear to the audience in the course of its opening speech. Instead, that speech creates an aura of evil around it; either the soul (and, of course, the landscape) is clouded with the terror of past wickedness, or passion is gathering, threatening wickedness in the future. In *Agamemnon* the figure is the ghost of Thyestes, carrying a load of guilt that checks the stars in the sky (53–56). Elsewhere under a night sky, spangled with the constellations that commemorate the illicit loves of Jupiter, appears the figure of Fury in the Prologue to *Hercules Furens*, lashing herself into fury. The guilt of Oedipus, of Tantalus (in the Prologue to

Thyestes), even of Hecuba (Prologue to *Troades* 40), is reflected, or externalized, in the entire surrounding landscape, and beyond; and the raging sorceress Medea will shake the light from heaven as easily as she will shake the marriage torches from the hands of her enemies (*Med.*27–28). Only once is this pattern varied, in *Phaedra*—a play which, together with *Thyestes*, is complicated by the presence of a noble character who confronts, and ultimately is overwhelmed by, the central stream of evil. *Phaedra*, by a brilliant stroke, opens with a solitary figure whose state of soul is symbolized in the landscape, but it is the figure of the noble Hippolytus—noble by Senecan standards, for he is an outrider of the Age of Gold. The dark figure of Phaedra, in the throes of the battle between passion and reason, is postponed until the next scene.

This Prologue to *Phaedra* deserves further consideration, for it embodies, in a short space, much that is typical of Senecan art. It is composed in light, running anapaests, a rhythm which Seneca handled with great *brio* and tunefulness; we have to wait four centuries, until Boethius, for anything near a similar mastery of it. As with all Senecan verse, only reading aloud will do it justice, but I invite the reader to weigh the Latin sounds of, for instance,

Ite, umbrosas cingite silvas,

or of

si quem tangit gloria silvae.[64]

The content of the song, a solo by Hippolytus, will enrage the literal-minded. It is a lighthearted summons to a hunt, a hunt that rampages all over Attica from the wooded glens of Phyle[65] to the headland of Sunium, from Marathon to Thria. This is no picture of any single hunter's glade: it is a wide aerial view (reminiscent of the landscape in the *Consolatio ad Marciam*, quoted earlier), which occasionally dives to ground level and picks out a detail, the alder copse in the plain, the victim's spoor sharp in the morning dew. Then the song moves to the Huntress, Diana, and her far-flung worshipers across the known world, from Hyrcania by the Caspian Sea to the ridges of the Pyrenees. It ends with the clear baying of hounds calling Hippolytus from the stage—

pin a monstrous hunt that never was and never could be, *kept in a young man's imagination*. In short, just as in the normal Senecan prologue, so here: whether horrific or beautiful, the visible scene described by the speaker is not described for itself—indeed, in itself it is impossible—but is the amplifying medium which conveys the state of the subject's soul. For it is on this that all issues depend in Senecan tragedy, no less than in Senecan prose. How else (Seneca might ask) should one convey the fresh, cool integrity of Hippolytus—that integrity which belonged to the earliest age of man, described by Hippolytus himself later in *Phaedra* (525ff)?[66] Another typically Senecan element in this opening song is its outward movement from the Attica of the Heroic Age to lands which the Mycenaeans never knew. I mentioned Hyrcania and the Pyrenees; add the Sarmatians of northeastern Europe, the tribes around the Danube, the Armenians, the nomads of Arabia and of the Libyan deserts. Seneca's characters are tied only loosely to any specific place or time, and that by way of a courteous gesture to the Greeks. In practice, they are supranational. They speak with the voice of the Roman Empire, which in turn, for Seneca and some other Stoics, was ideally the Human Empire, the *Cosmopolis*.

To me the same principles which I have here illustrated from the Senecan prologues seem to operate throughout the tragedies. In general, they are obviously not difficult to apply; but it is worth drawing attention to one special application of the principle that moral and psychological states are regularly reflected in, and represented by, what we should call physical phenomena. The descriptive speeches in Seneca have often been criticized; even Eliot, in his introduction to the *Tenne Tragedies* (p. x), makes merry at Seneca's expense over the long description of Hell by Theseus in the middle of *Hercules Furens* (650–827). Why indeed should Hercules' family be entertained in so ghoulish a fashion immediately after the hero's unhoped-for return, and while he is "engaged in a duel on the result of which everybody's life depends"? Eliot might have asked more: why does the first part of the choric ode continue the same ghastly theme? Why did Seneca, in this matter, deliberately and blatantly depart from Euripides, who in his version gave as little emphasis as he could to Hercules' legendary descent into Hell? Sheer artistic irresponsibility, is Eliot's implied answer; poor, weak Seneca has fallen once more for the blowzy charms of Rhetoric, he has com-

mitted another *ecphrasis* for the transient delight of some Roman drawing room or other. But experience of Seneca teaches me to beware of such answers, and to suggest another. "So you think, in your pride, that you have now escaped the Styx and the ghosts?" cries Juno in the Prologue to the tragedy (90–91); "*Here* I will show you Hell!" She then conjures the creatures of Hell to take possession of the hero's mind. I suggest that when Theseus, in this great central interlude between the return of Hercules and his apparent triumph over his enemies, describes the dark caverns, the tortures, the waste lands[67] of Hell, he is not only describing what Hercules has been through; he is indicating what Hercules, for the moment, *is*. Many other long descriptive passages in the Senecan tragedies, which either are without precedent in the Greek so-called originals, or fantastically expand hints found there, can be interpreted in a similar way—and, to my mind, gain greatly thereby in relevance and power. Such are the great storm scene of *Agamemnon* (421-578—preceded by the scene in which Clytemnestra collapses before the onset of passion, followed immediately by the chorus on Death as the *harbor* from the storm of life, which I quoted earlier); the incantations of *Medea* (670–842); the necromancy of *Oedipus* (530–658); and the frightful description, not only of the murder of Thyestes' children, but also of *the place where Atreus murdered them*, in *Thyestes* 641–788 (where 641–682 are given entirely to the visual background of the crime). Like the landscape in the *Consolatio ad Marciam*, such passages can be, and usually are, dismissed as mere rhetorical word paintings. But it may be seen on sympathetic inspection that, again like that landscape, they are word paintings with a distinct moral and artistic purpose.

After the prologue, with its solitary figure casting gigantic, distorted moral shadows across a vast background, the second of the three major movements in a Senecan tragedy may appear livelier and less complicated; this is the movement which I have entitled, for short, the Defeat of Reason by Passion. At first sight it is certainly closer to the Greek dramatic norm than the prologue. The shadows fall away, the human figures multiply, move into the foreground, converse in sharp, direct dialogue. For a moment, the perplexed Hellenist may feel that he has come home.

He will soon find out his mistake. Our cool modern assumption that Greek tragedy must be the ultimate criterion for Senecan tragedy leads, almost every time, to a dead end. Similarly, one

the factors in Western Europe's very belated recognition of Greek tragedy was the cool Renaissance assumption that *Senecan* tragedy was the ultimate criterion. Better, perhaps, to avoid either extreme, and to take each type of tragedy, in the first instance, on its own terms.

The second acts of five out of the seven genuine and complete Senecan tragedies[68] present a character meditating a passion or crime, and arguing with another character (usually an inferior) as to whether or not he should give in to the temptation. It is important to notice that the corresponding Greek dramas, Seneca's alleged models, either do not contain such a situation at all, or handle it in an entirely different way. We are dealing here, in fact, with an element that is peculiarly and demonstrably Senecan. That it was felt as such by near-contemporaries is proved by the two plays in the corpus which are probably by followers of Seneca. *Hercules Oetaeus*—composed by a talented writer who has inherited several of Seneca's gifts, but not, alas, his sense of proportion—devotes more than 300 lines (233–568) to Deianira's discussion with the Nurse as to whether she is to give way to passionate jealousy and poison the robe. And I do not believe that it has been sufficiently recognized that the historical tragedy *Octavia*—the work of an inexperienced but not insensitive amateur—is composed of such situations almost from end to end. Octavia dissuaded from passion by her Nurse, Nero dissuaded by Seneca, Poppaea by *her* Nurse, Nero by the Prefect—these are the scenes which form the body of the *Octavia*.[69]

Lest there be any misunderstanding, I here offer a list of such situations in the genuinely Senecan tragedies:

Phaedra 129–273: The Nurse, who already knows Phaedra's guilty passion for her stepson, tries to reason her out of it; but only, when Phaedra announces that no *ratio* (265) will prevent her suicide, the Nurse succumbs to Phaedra's *furor* (268), and instantly offers her services for the seduction of Hippolytus. (The resemblances to the scene between Phaedra and the Nurse in Euripides' *Hippolytus* are few and superficial.)[70]

Medea 150–175: Medea is dissuaded from her *dolor* (151), *ira* (157), and *dementia* (174) by the Nurse, but without effect. The situation is repeated, but more vividly, at the beginning of the third act (380–430), where the Nurse laments Medea's total subjection to *insania*, *furor*, *ira* and (389) "every passion." (There is no corresponding situation in Euripides' *Medea*.)

Thyestes 176–335: Atreus, swollen with *ira* (180), *furor* (253), *rabies* (254), *dolor* (299), discusses with an attendant his proposed crime against his brother. The latter at first offers reasons against it, but after line 219 his resistance weakens; during the later part of the scene, while the hideous plan is evolved, he becomes a loyal accessory, as his parting words show. (None of the eight Greek tragedies entitled *Thyestes* is extant.)

Agamemnon 108–225: Clytaemnestra, in a turmoil of passion—*dolor, timor, invidia, cupido, ira, spes* (131–142)—is dissuaded from it by a Nurse, who urges her (129–130) to try the effect of delay, even if she will not accept the claims of *ratio*. In this play, by exception, the inferior's arguments temporarily convince the superior; the intervention of Aegisthus, and a second long argument (226–309) on the relative advantages of passion and reason, are necessary before Clytaemnestra finally and totally capitulates to passion. (There is, of course, no corresponding situation whatever in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*.)

Troades, 203–352: Pyrrhus, cruelly urging the sacrifice of Polyxena, is dissuaded from his plan by a strangely subdued and gentle Agamemnon, who has learned humility and mercy from the fall of Troy (250–270), and has seen enough of *ira, dolor* and *furor* (280–283). But Calchas' announcement of a new omen ratifies Pyrrhus' plan. (There is no corresponding situation in Euripides' *Hecuba* or *Troades*; though Seneca's moving characterization of Agamemnon here may owe something to the former of the two plays.)

There is great variety in the detailed handling of these scenes; a variety imposed partly by an external factor, the traditional myth, partly by the art of Seneca. But the general similarity is plain, and so is its crucial significance for the plot of a Senecan tragedy. A duel is fought out in each case between the passions of one character and the reasons offered by the other; the passions conquer; and from that conquest catastrophe follows directly. Now it is surely impossible to dissociate this phenomenon of the Senecan tragedies from the Stoic doctrine on the passions which is assumed, with more or less modification, throughout Seneca's prose writings.[71] In particular, one of the details of that doctrine should be recalled here: once passion has completed its victory in the soul, the effects are immediately visible and tangible. There is a ghastly change in the victim's face, coloring, voice and gait. R. L. Stevenson's account of the dissolution of Dr. Jekyll into Mr. Hyde would be no excessive caricature of the psychosomatic process envisaged by Seneca (who would probably have applauded Stevenson's story from end to end). Nor should we be in too much haste to criticize the Senecan doctrine as unrealistic: Seneca had himself looked into the face of the madman Caligula.[72] The same transformation is described again and again in the tragedies, most notably at the beginning of the third acts of *Phaedra* (363–383) and *Medea* (380–396), when the moral surrender of the respective heroines is complete.[73]

This cannot be coincidence. The Passion-Reason scenes in the tragedies must have been created with conscious and deliberate reference to the doctrine so familiar to us from the prose works. Hence perhaps the colorlessness (so often criticized) of the inferior of the two characters in such scenes, and the fact that on two occasions[74] the inferior finally capitulates in the most abrupt and improbable manner, and thereafter serves as accessory to the projected sin; the *idea*, as so often in Seneca, overrides the demands of the factual realism and even of individual characterization. One is almost tempted to speak of allegory, and to interpret some of the scenes as symbols of the crucial battle within the single soul of Phaedra, Medea or the rest. Or even to go further, interpreting those heroines themselves as mere allegories of the passions from which they suffer: "I see the face of Passion (*vultum furoris cerno*)!" cries the nurse at the terrible entry of Medea (*Med.*396); and indeed, Seneca's whole representation of Medea, yearning for an evil that will shake earth and heaven (line 45), bears a remarkable likeness to his portrait of anger in the *de Ira* 2.35, quoted earlier. But to allegorize the tragedies entirely is to be too crude. It is to deny Senecan tragic art one of its greatest charms, a charm which it shares with much of our own recent literature—the free, ambiguous interplay between objective and subjective.[75]

Five of the seven tragedies show the defeat of Reason by Passion taking place before our eyes, in a sharply defined Second Movement. *Oedipus* and *Hercules Furens* are only exceptional in that the genesis of evil is placed, respectively, before and outside the body of the action. In Seneca's *Oedipus*, as in Sophocles', the fatal errors are already committed before the drama opens. Yet here the resemblance to Sophocles practically ends. The Greek tragedian represented the gradual discovery of the truth through the very brilliance of Oedipus, and his concurrent passage from

confident majesty, through nervous tyranny, to psychological and political annihilation. Seneca neglects the latter aspect of the Oedipus story and treats the former perfunctorily (compare his recognition scene with that of Sophocles!). His emphasis, already in the Prologue, is on the evil *per se*; even there its presence is felt by an oppressed and frightened Oedipus, who, without knowing precisely why, at once assumes the guilt for the pestilent skies and the dying citizens. From then on, far from being discovered by him, the evil closes in on him, manifesting itself in ever more elaborate and grotesque shapes—the divine oracle, the obscene details of Teiresias' sacrifice, and finally the ghastly train of royal phantoms. *Hercules Furens* likewise, if I understand Seneca's conception of the story, offered no occasion for a Passion-Reason scene. Hercules, one of the nearest approaches to an ideal Stoic sage that the world has yet beheld,[76] could not be brought on stage dickering with his passions like a Medea or a Phaedra. Seneca, therefore, like Euripides, has the passion violently injected from the outside; unlike Euripides, however, he actually shows the generation of that passion, during the Prologue, in the heart of Juno.[77]

The last, and the longest, of the major movements in a Senecan tragedy was entitled, above, "The Explosion of Evil." (From some points of view "The Implosion of Evil" might be equally appropriate; let the reader choose.) The factual details of disaster in the several plays are to a great extent predetermined by the Greek fable concerned. Oedipus, as you might expect, is blinded; Medea murders her children; and Thyestes duly dines on his. We see the profound difference between Seneca and the Greeks not in such narrative data, but in emphasis and attitude.

Enough has already been said in the course of this essay to indicate what these differences are. In sum: the vivid and sensuous narratives of Greek tragedy can be read (and, I would say, *should* be read in the first instance) as *representations of people in action*, whatever ulterior symbolisms and abstract truths may be discerned through that action. Senecan narratives, on the other hand, cannot be so read, for they are *representations of passion in people and things*. The symbolic and the abstract have entered into the fabric of the drama.

In the Third Movement of a Senecan tragedy the shock wave of evil races outwards, prostrating both the wicked and the noble, and rarely stopping short of the stars—though it is often left uncertain whether those stars really belong to the visible firmament. The modern theater electrician, faced with a Senecan production,[78] would have to ponder the text very carefully before he actually turned down the lights, or set them flickering across the background, at such passages as *Agam.*727 (the light goes out in the sky for Cassandra) or *Med.*787ff (Medea sees the moon racing through heaven); at *Herc.Fur.*939ff (the sky blackens, and Hercules sees the monstrous constellations, Lion and Bull, preparing for a fight) he had better keep his hand from the switchboard;[79] in *Thyestes*, on the other hand, he would certainly be kept busy.[80] But in all these instances, even the last, the moral and physical phenomena are really inextricable. The reader of Senecan drama should never forget that devastating interchange between the Nurse and Medea (*Med.*164–167): "The Colchians, your people, have left you; you can put no trust in your husband; of all your great resources nothing remains."—"*Medea* remains! In me you see the ocean and the land, and steel and fire, and gods and lightning bolts!"

—Abiere Colchi, coniugis nulla est fides;
nihilque superest opibus e tantis tibi.
—Medea superest. Hic mare et terras vides,
ferrumque et ignes et deos et fulmina!

Is it naive, perhaps, this interplay between the psychological and the celestial? But you will find it in some of the greatest of English tragedies: in the night of Duncan's murder, and throughout *Lear*. Once seen in this light, Seneca can be left to interpret himself. It is needless to pursue the course of the evil in detail through the several tragedies. But before we take leave of the third movement, I should like to recall the fourth of the propositions which seem to underlie Senecan drama: Evil may overwhelm, but cannot truly vanquish, the soul in which Reason has won the battle. To Seneca, as we saw earlier, the greatest of all dramas was the drama of the Stoic Cato battling with Fortune (a battle which, as we know and Seneca knew, ended with Cato's death at Utica). *Spectaculum dignum deo dignum*: here is a gladiatorial duel worthy of the sight of God![81]

A number of the Senecan tragedies contain minor figures who, in the midst of the explosion, give way neither to passion in themselves, nor to the evil which advances on them from the external

world. Such are Cassandra and Electra in *Agamemnon*, perhaps Jason in *Medea*, certainly the Trojan characters in *Troades*. When these have to die, as all too often they do, they face death itself fearlessly, or even with a kind of exultation. Consider the appearance of Polyxena in the last moment before she dies, victim of the stupid passions of Achaean princes:

> Ipsa deiectos gerit
> vultus pudore, sed tamen fulgent genae,
> magisque solito splendet extremus decor;
> ut esse Phoebi dulcius lumen solet
> iamiam cadentis, astra cum repetunt vices,
> premiturque dubius nocte vicina dies.[82]

Such transfigurations at the moment of suffering we associate more with Christian martyrologies than with tragic princesses. But here we should recall that the Stoics, as well as the Christians, had their martyrology (in which Seneca himself claims an honorable place). It is not, I think, fanciful to see in Polyxena, and in most of the other minor characters mentioned above, *exempla* of Stoic living and Stoic dying, sketched in more or less detail.[83] In two Senecan tragedies, however, such a noble figure is not merely sketched, but brought out in full color: *Phaedra* and *Thyestes*. This is certainly one of the chief reasons why, for me, those plays rank as the finest in the Senecan corpus. There is not merely the obvious consequence of an increase in sheer theatrical power (so considered, the confrontation of Phaedra with Hippolytus, and the scene where Atreus offers Thyestes the regalia before the gates of the Pelopid palace,[84] rival almost any scene from Greek tragedy), but a greater richness and depth in all respects.

Without doubt Hippolytus and Thyestes, as Seneca conceives them, are noble characters; and they are Stoics. Not, of course, perfect Stoic sages, for not one of those is found in many centuries; but Stoics of the large class to which Seneca himself belonged, who have seen the ideal and are struggling after it as best they may.[85] The relationship between the attitudes of Hippolytus, Thyestes and Seneca in his prose works is so close that it cannot be due to coincidence. When Hippolytus is tempted by Phaedra's nurse,[86] he replies with a long speech (483–564) in which he defends the virtuous innocence of the woods, equating

with the innocence of the Age of Gold; the speech is paralleled, in some verbal details, by Seneca's *Letter* 90 on the same ject.[87] After he has said his say, the Nurse laments (580–) that her words make no more impact on him than sea waves ting against a rock—an image which elsewhere in Seneca plied exclusively to the assault of evil on the philosopher.[88]

Thyestes' speeches in *Thyestes* 404–420 and 446–470 parallel speech of Hippolytus very closely in tone and in detail. But estes' case is more complex. Unlike Hippolytus, he has known ury, power and guilt; it has taken exile and poverty to bring to his present understanding. Now, recalled by Atreus in preed reconciliation, and faced again by the glittering palace, is filled with sorrow: "Back to the woods [412]! . . . Be, in that state which all men think hard, I was brave and py [417–18] . . . . But at the height of my power I never ed from terror, from fear of the very sword hanging at my [447–49] . . . . Out of experience I speak: one may choose fortune in preference to good [453–4]!" It is, to me, almost nceivable that Seneca could have written such lines without cious reference to *his own* exile and recall; the language is ally reminiscent of his own words in the *Consolatio ad Helam*.[89] Certainly *Octavia*, composed a few years after Seneca's th, attributes to its stage-Seneca a speech which combines ents from that *Consolation* with the speeches of Thyestes and Hippolytus. Seneca is there shown bitterly regretting his re- to the height of power from that happy exile among the re- rocks of Corsica,[90] where he had had leisure to improve his by studying the majestic courses of the stars;[91] he ends with talgic picture of the Golden Age, and the decline of the an race thereafter.[92] The *Octavia's* unknown author, who was ubtedly someone close to Seneca, therefore saw nothing odd dentifying the views of Thyestes and Hippolytus with those e Master.

Thus seen, the two plays acquire an added poignancy. Into , and especially into *Thyestes*, there enters something that cends the mechanics of a plot, or the cold abstractions of a sophical system. Seneca's own experience is present here. whole career is a record of that terrible incompatibility be- the inward and the outward life, and his struggle to choose ween the demands of the two. Abide by the inward life like polytus, and you will be wiped out; weaken, and compromise

(however innocently) with the outward life, like Thyestes, and you will be worse than wiped out. That is the dilemma of the practicing Stoic, and, some might think, of the practicing human being. Nowhere that I know is it posed with crueller force than in *Thyestes*. Those who have merely read a synopsis of its plot, and some who have read further (including even Eliot), regularly single out this tragedy as the supreme example of Senecan bloodiness. But perhaps we have seen enough in the course of this discussion to realize how these horrors should be understood. The mad, meticulous murder-ritual in the Palace yard, the diabolical cookery, the garlanded reveler quaffing wine and blood with unaccountable tears—for Seneca these are only pictorial by-products of the more terrible realities with which he was concerned in the tragedies, the prose and the Julio-Claudian court. *Thyestes* is in fact the most clearly Stoic, and in some ways the most compassionate and human, of the dramas. Anger, insatiate ambition, the intolerable choice between political kingship and the kingship of the mind, are not exactly dead issues yet, though we may be shy of formulating them this way. Nor, or course, are we accustomed to transcribe psychological and moral collapse into terms of a pre-Copernican night sky; as Seneca does in the last chorus of *Thyestes*, where the Zodiac slides madly into the abyss, its gleaming signs entangled and running wild, the Bull goring Gemini, Sagittarius at long last loosing his arrow from the snapped string. . . .

What kind of drama is this? I have suggested above that Senecan tragedy, on unprejudiced inspection, proves to possess many of the qualities that we still associate with the greatest drama: speakability; actability; powerful theatrical situations; conflict both between minds and within minds; and what we may describe (shortly and, by Senecan standards, not quite accurately) as an unrestricted symbolic use of the concrete universe for the abstract, which gives his text, rightly read, the immediate impact of nightmare—just so do our dreams operate in conveying the psychic state. Yet in one most important respect these tragedies differ from almost all the other great tragedies of the Western world: they do not doubt to the very end, they leave no ultimate questions

open. To the Stoic, as (it is said) to Isaac Newton, the Universe is a cipher that only waits to be cracked. If we could see it all, we should see the adamantine chains, cause linked to cause, in which all reality is bound, in which God himself, though by his own will, is prisoner.[93] *Agunt opus suum fata:* the fates go on with their own work.[94] Even as things are, with vast discoveries still to make,[95] the Stoic has seen enough into his moral-physical reality to understand and formulate the practical rules of Fate's game with the individual. And in these tragedies the rules are every time obeyed, the game is played out.

With such a rigid system implied in it, with such unquestioning faith in the ultimate workings of the world, with such a desperately urgent sense of the absolute reality of sin and virtue—this drama can only properly be classed as religious drama. Our earliest ancient tragedies, the first plays of Aeschylus, composed when the Western world was just emerging into an era of free inquiry, show many of the same qualities (some instances have been noted here and there in this essay). Our latest ancient tragedies, those of Seneca, seem in this and some other respects to mark the beginning of the reverse process, the transition from free inquiry to an era of religion.

Yet to suppose on these grounds that the tragedies have now lost their meaning, that they could only make sense to a limited (and long dead) circle of Stoics and Neronians, would be mistaken. Though their formulation is strange to us, they seem, once understood, to touch on permanent realities in the human condition. True, as Regenbogen pointed out in a fine study,[96] the Western world has tended only to come back to them at the periods of its greatest emotional, religious and intellectual strain, when the universe seemed to be falling about its ears: it was during the crisis of the sixteenth century that in England Thomas Newton produced his *Tenne Tragedies*; on the Continent some of the most perceptive criticism—and, incidentally, the last complete commented edition of the *Tragedies* yet [97]—came from the generation that had witnessed the bestialities of the Thirty Years' War. Regenbogen could, perhaps, have offered further examples: his own study of the tragedies, and the distinguished series of German studies on the same lines which succeeded it, coincided with a period when continental Europe was entering and passing through a nightmare. (The sense of immediate reality in those studies contrasts strangely with Eliot's leisurely, detached, purely *literary*

essay, published in England during the same year that Regenbogen's lecture was delivered.) The pessimistic, in some moods, may wonder whether the nightmare has not since spread, whether human passions have not now begun to threaten, literally, the existence of the earth and the innocence of the sky. "Marke thou," says the sixteen-year-old Elizabethan in his preface to the translation of *Oedipus*, "what is ment by the whole course of the History: and frame thy lyfe free from such mischiefs, wherewith the world at this present is universally overwhelmed, the wrathful vengeaunce of God provoked, the Body plagued, the mynde and Conscience in midst of deepe devouring daungers most terribly assaulted." Nevile was living through the religious crisis of the Renaissance, but with only a few changes his words would apply to the crisis of our own time.

NOTES

[1] *Seneca his Tenne Tragedies translated into English*, edited by Thomas Newton, anno 1581; with an introduction by T. S. Eliot (Bloomington and London 1966).

[2] No less than five translators are concerned, all of whom actually worked in the sixties of the century, with the exception of Newton himself. See Eliot's Introduction, xlv.

[3] My quotation from Studley's *Hippolytus* provides many examples. Of all Newton's contributors only Jasper Heywood, the translator of *Hercules Furens*, *Troades* and *Thyestes*, puts up any resistance whatever to this temptation.

[4] For evidence on the Greek tragedies entitled *Thyestes*, I refer to A. Nauck, *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*[2] (Leipzig 1889) 988 (*Index Fabularum*); and, for the Sophoclean versions, to A. C. Pearson, *The Fragments of Sophocles* (Cambridge 1917) II.91ff, 185ff.

[5] A fair example of these is probably the third edition of W. Beare's *The Roman Stage* (London 1964). It devotes some half-dozen pages in all to the Senecan tragedies (234–36, 351–54), and even those pages are mostly concerned to show, not without indignation, that they are impossible to stage—a conclusion which would have startled the Elizabethans. Beare's general opinion of the tragedies is summed up in a sentence on 235: "The Senecan tragedies are simply artificial imitations of Greek tragedy, worked up in the style of the Silver Age, and they are meant to be declaimed, not acted."

[1] Sen. *Med.* 375–79, and, e.g., Beare (*op. cit.* in note 5) 354.

[2] The chief exceptions are the two *Consolationes* written in the later part of his exile (41–49 A.D.) to his mother Helvia and to Polybius' freedman Polybius, both evidently oblique pleas for pardon; and the *de Clementia* addressed to Nero early in his reign, and apparently designed as a general program for the new regime. But even these contain relatively very few direct references to Seneca's own activities.

[3] There is no satisfactory account of Seneca's life (outward or inward) in our language. A convenient assemblage of the hard facts will be found in Schanz-Hosius, *Geschichte der römischen Literatur* II[4] (Munich 1935) 680–82. As an elegant first introduction to the subject I would recommend a little book by Pierre Grimal, *Sénèque: sa vie, son œuvre; avec un exposé de sa philosophie* (Paris 1948). Unfortunately, the latter is hardly documented in detail at all, and also paints Seneca in unbelievably rosy colors. I wish those colors were justified; but one does not normally suffer from an acute sense of guilt, as Seneca did from end to end of his life, without reason.

[4] M. Préchac, "La date de naissance de Sénèque, *REL* 11 (1934) 96.

[5] *Q.N.*1.16: one of those surrealist passages in Seneca, of which more will be said later.

[6] *Ep.*8.1: "I feel myself, Lucilius, not just being improved, but being transformed."

[7] *Ep.*34.1: "I increase, I exult, I shake off my age and grow warm with zeal." The assonances, as well as the feeling, of this sentence might well belong even to the late Middle Ages. Seneca is here rejoicing over his protégé Lucilius' progress in philosophy; for this missionary zeal, the reader may compare *Ep.*8.1–6, and *Q.N.*3 *praef.*

[8] *Ep.*28.1–6: quoted here only in part.

[9] Perfectly intelligible, if one recalls mid-first-century political conditions. It is probably no coincidence that the only historian known to me who has made much headway in the political interpretation of Seneca's prose writings spent her formative years in East Germany.

[10] There are in fact some indications that Seneca took a practical interest in shorthand. Isidore of Seville (*Etymol.*1.22.2) says that he made great improvements in it; and this is not necessarily contradicted by Seneca's derogatory remarks about its inventor in *Ep.*90.25.

[11] This seven-book work is usually thought to have been composed very early in the reign of Nero; after rereading it for the purpose of

this article, I cannot resist the conjecture that Nero's professor was subjected to some early version of the publish-or-perish rule. Imposed, perhaps, by Agrippina? One would readily attribute so fiendish an innovation to the later Julio-Claudian epoch.

[17] In Haase's edition (Leipzig 1851) of the complete works—which is also the last edition of any major portion of Seneca's prose works whatever that attempts to help the reader to follow Seneca's thought, both by typographic means and by the inclusion of a full index of subject matter. It is a sign of the general drift of Western classicism since that time that later editions, far more "scientific" though they are, offer no such aids. A solid stream of thoughtfully constituted text, an index of proper names, and an index of *testimonia*, are the most the reader can now expect. This is unfortunately true even of the otherwise excellent text of the *Letters* recently published by L. D. Reynolds (Oxford 1965).

[18] See *Ep.*113, largely on the extreme Stoic view that the virtues are *animalia*. Seneca has a good deal of quiet fun in deducing from this that "circumspect walking" is not only an *animal*, but spherical.

[19] *De Ira* 3.6.1; *Cons.Helv.*6.7; 8.4; *Ot.Sap.*5.6; *Q.N.*7.25.1–2; *Ep.* 104.23.

[20] *Ep.*88.7.

[21] *Ep.*115.3–4.

[22] *Ep.*112.4.

[23] *Ep.*110.6–7, answering Lucretius' famous equation of the superstitious man's fear in the light, with the child's fear in darkness (2.55–56).

[24] *Q.N.*6.1.

[25] *Q.N.*2.59.

[26] *Ep.*91.1–2.

[27] E.g., *de Ira* 3.16–21.

[28] "To show the might of supreme vices in the supreme estate," *Cons. Helv.*10.4.

[29] *Q.N.*3.27–30, especially 30.7–8.

[30] *Ben.*7.27.

[31] E.g., *Cons.Marc.*9 and 14–15 (the *funera Caesarum*); *Cons. Polyb.*11; *Tranq.*11.7. But the most vivid picture of all, as so often, is found not in the prose works but in the tragedies: *Herc.Fur.*838ff, where those crowds are likened to the *populus* streaming towards the theaters of Rome on a festival day—the ultimate ancestor, perhaps, of Dante's more elaborate (but not, to me, more compelling) image of the crowds on the bridge during the Jubilee. (*Inferno* 18.28ff).

[32] The Senecan doctrine on the collapse of *ratio* in the clash with the passions is to be found in some brilliant chapters of the *de Ira*, which every reader of the *Tragedies* (especially of *Medea* and *Phaedra*) should consult: 1.1, 1.7–10, 2.35.2, 3.4.1–3. *Ep.*114.22–25 is also worth looking at.

[33] E.g., *Cons.Helv.*13.3.

[34] For which one of the many Senecan equivalents is *mors . . . computata nascenti est*, "death was (our) sentence at birth," *Cons. Marc.*10.5.

[35] E.g., *Prov.*2.10; *Ep.*70.14, 91.21; *Phaedra* 139; *Troad.*144–164.

[36] The Latin text is slightly confused here in the manuscripts. I have translated what seems to me the least unlikely restoration of it, dropping *ripis* and adopting P. Thomas' *palude* for *pavidae*.

[37] E.g., *Centuries of Meditations* 3.3 ("The corn was orient and immortal wheat . . ."). Though this writer never, to my knowledge, mentions Seneca in the *Centuries*, I believe investigation might show that he had made Seneca his own, no less than had Montaigne and some of the Elizabethans.

[38] *Cons.Marc.*18.7, from the newborn infant's vision of the world, which I have already quoted in part: "Here you will see vessels making for lands they do not know."

[39] Duly noted by Christopher Columbus, and probably of far more importance in the pursuit of his dream than Seneca's oftener quoted, but vaguer, prophecy of Atlantic discovery in *Medea* (375–79).

[40] A half-line from Virgil's famous ant simile, *Aen.*4.404: "A black column marches in the plain."

[41] *Cons.Helv.*8.6.

[42] *Ben.*4.23.

[43] *Ep.*90.42: compare 102.28, for the brilliance of the light among the stars.

[44] *Cons.Helv.*8.6; cf. 6.7–8.

[45] *Q.N.*3.16.4ff.

[46] *Ep.*21.5 (*profunda supra nos altitudo temporis veniet*).

[47] *Q.N.*7.25.3–5.

[48] Apart from the passage immediately to be quoted, see *Cons.Marc.* 26.6; *Cons.Polyb.*1.2; *Epigram* 7.5–6 (if this is really by Seneca); *Ep.*71.12–13; *Q.N.*6.2.9. A speech put into Seneca's mouth in the pseudo-Senecan historical drama *Octavia* (377–437), if taken as a true record of Seneca's opinions, would imply that towards the end of his life Seneca, like the early Christians, expected the catastrophe to happen very shortly. The speech is followed immediately by the entry of Nero, almost as if he embodied the ultimate climax of sin.

[49] MS 12665; an easily accessible translation is in Irma A. Richter, *Selections from the Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci* (Oxford 1952) 187–93.

[50] *Ep.*9.16. The bare notion, indeed, does not originate with Seneca, but with the early Stoa; see Chrysippus, *frag.phys.*1064 (von Arnim). But Seneca's treatment of it (actually included by von Arnim as *frag. phys.*1065) is infinitely more imaginative.

[51] *De Ira* 2.35.5; cf. 2.35.3.

[52] See, e.g., *Ep.*27.1, 57.3, 87.5 (*parum adhuc profeci*).

[53] Tac.*Dial.*2–11, passim.

[54] The most important passage is *Ep.*80.7–8, where Seneca is speaking of true and false happiness. An example of the latter (*personata felicitas*, happiness residing only in the mask) is the hired actor who acts a royal part on the stage, draws his day wage, and goes home to sleep on a rag quilt. Seneca quotes some of the lines he speaks (*dicit*); they are quite clearly tragic (probably from plays about the Pelopid house), and were so classified by Ribbeck. Other passages which imply that Seneca had seen, and presumed his reader to have seen, straight theatrical performances are: *de Ira* 2.17.1; *Ep.*76.31; *Cons.Marc.*18.1 (on theatrical props); *Q.N.*7.32.3, where three kinds of very popular spectacle are quite casually referred to, the pantomime, the private theater with stage and masks (*pulpitum; sub persona trita frons*), the gladiatorial games.

[55] I am grateful to H. A. Mason for the first impulse to make such experiments, and to Miss Rosemary Barton and Mrs. G. Amis for their admirable work in carrying them out.

[56] One of the insuperable difficulties for an English translator of Seneca is the slowness of our language in comparison to the Latin can-

on and speed; but here is a plain rendering of the sense of these s: "Beware the King!"—"My father also was a king."—"Aren't you id of arms?"—"No, not even arms sprung from Earth!"—"You'll die it."—"That's what I long for."—"Flee!"—"I've long been sick of t."—"Medea, . . ."—"*Medea* is what I shall become!"—". . . You're other!"—"Yes, and look at the father!" Only speech, and Latin ch at that, can fairly reproduce the helter-skelter duel between on and emotion which is created here.

[57] That is, the Chorus is not always on stage, and need not even ist of the same individual(s) throughout the piece. We do not, of se, know enough about Hellenistic *tragedy* to say whether it fold the same pattern. Yet there is one suggestive piece of evidence. Seneca's *Hercules Furens* (827–29), and again in his *Agamemnon* 8–88)—in both cases, long after the first choral song of the play—an r announces the approach of a band of people, who then proceed ng. This way of introducing a new company of singers is exactly alleled in numerous passages from Hellenistic comedy, which are lected and discussed by E. W. Handley in his commentary on Meder's *Dyskolos* (London 1965) 230–32. The Senecan examples ght be worth adding to his illustrative material there.

[58] *Agam.*589–609, following Richter's text in *Senecae Tragoediae*, R. Peiper and G. Richter (Leipzig 1902). No two of these verses metrically the same, but I try, by indentation, to show the main hmic movements.

[59] *Oedip.*36 (*fecimus caelum nocens*), 79, 631ff, 652, 1052–61.

[60] "So there's nothing you can't measure?" says Seneca to the Roman nomer (*Ep.*88.13). "If you are a real scientist, measure the soul man, tell us how great it is, tell us how minute it is."

[61] This is not the place to discuss in detail the authenticity of the reing three plays preserved in the medieval tradition of Seneca under ame. Briefly: I would be fairly confident that the historical play, ctavia, is not by Seneca, but by a close friend or pupil; my reasons given in *CQ* 12 (1961) 18–30. The same probably holds good of elephantine *Hercules Oetaeus*; for some good arguments, see W. H. drich in *H* 82 (1954) 51–84. As for *Phoenissae*, I follow the maty in assuming that its 664 extant lines, though from Seneca's hand, only an unfinished sketch of a drama—or possibly of two dramas. discussion of Senecan drama in the following pages does not, gendly, embrace these three plays.

[62] Possible, though to me not quite certain, exceptions are *Phaedra* *Oedipus*, which some rate as six-act plays; see K. Anliker's *Prolog und Akteinteilungen in Senecas Tragödien* (Bern 1960) 93–97.

But Seneca's *general* observance of the five-act rule is interesting, in view of the fact that the rule now seems to have been emerging early in the Hellenistic age (see E. W. Handley, *op. cit.* p. 4 [n.57 above] for temperate comments on this question). This observance, like the behavior of Senecan choruses (see n.57 above), may perhaps count as another indication that Senecan dramaturgy was influenced by Hellenistic Greek practice, and may provide another warning against the direct comparison of his technique with that of the fifth-century tragedians.

[63] The appearances of a *second* figure in the Prologues of *Oedipus* (Jocasta) and *Thyestes* (the Fury) hardly alter the dramatic effect of solitude. The extant opening scene of the fragmentary *Phoenissae* (cf. n.61 above) is almost certainly not a Prologue: it has some of the marks of a Senecan Second Act.

[64] *Phaedra* 1 and 28: "Away, surround the shadowy woods!" and "He who is moved by woodland splendor."

[65] Giomini's correction, followed by W. Strzelecki, *Rivista di Cultura Classica e Medievale* 2 (1960) 369–70, of the corrupt place name at line 29; it seems to me as certain as such things can be.

[66] Also in *Ep.*90 and *Q.N.*1.17.5–10; similar views are put into Seneca's mouth by the author of *Octavia* (394ff).

[67] *Herc.Fur.*698–707, a remarkable passage.

[68] It will be remembered (see n.61 above) that I am not counting the *Hercules Oetaeus* or the *Octavia* as genuine, nor the *Phoenissae* as complete. By the "Second Act" of a Senecan tragedy, I mean what students of Greek tragedy, following Aristotle, call the First Episode; in other words, I count the Senecan Prologue as the first act of the five.

[69] The most moving of them, incidentally, and the most interesting to a student of Seneca, is the scene between Seneca and Nero, 371–592. It is by far the earliest extant evidence, apart from such dark allusions as can be gathered from Seneca's own writings, about Seneca's attempted political and moral influence on Nero during the final period of his political ascendency. Though clearly committed to Seneca's cause, the unknown author of *Octavia* should not be ignored on this point. His melancholy and noble Seneca, in daily expectation of the end of the world, confronts the stupid, animal passions of Nero as the very embodiment of Stoic *ratio;* and holds up, as a political model, the mature Augustus (*Octavia* 477ff). The versifier has, of course, recalled Seneca's frequent use of Augustus as a political *exemplum* in the prose writings, especially *Clem.*1.9, addressed to Nero almost at the beginning of

his reign; but there are signs, here and elsewhere in *Octavia*, that he speaks also from direct personal experience of the events he describes.

[70] It is, of course, almost certain that Seneca followed, in part, the plot of Euripides' *lost* earlier version of the Hippolytus (for a recent reconstruction, which uses Seneca's play as a source rather more freely than I would, see B. Snell, *Scenes from Greek Drama* [Berkeley and Los Angeles 1964], c. 2). But there is no evidence at all as to whether that lost version contained a precedent for the Senecan scene now under discussion.

[71] The more significant of Seneca's references to the doctrine are collected in n.32 above; on the psychosomatic effects of passion, see also *Ep.*52.12, 106.5, 114.3.

[72] Suet.*Calig.*50: "Though his countenance was naturally wild and hideous, he deliberately tried to enhance its savagery by grimacing in front of a mirror, so as to produce every possible effect of panic and dread."

[73] Other such passages in the tragedies are: *Med.*849–69; *Troad.* 615–18, 623–26; *Oedip.*921–25; *Agam.*128 (*totus in vultu est dolor,* "all her agony is in her face"); *Herc.Fur.*329–30. Add the non-Senecan *Herc.Oct.*240–53.

[74] In *Phaedra* and *Thyestes*. A third instance will be found in *Hercules Oetaeus*, 233–568, where, as always, the author of this play has a sharp eye for the typically and essentially Senecan.

[75] These terms and concepts are of course alien to Seneca himself, but the effect is there—imposed, as has been suggested in the survey of the prose works, by the Stoic world view which he had made his own.

[76] In his prose works, the patriotic Seneca usually rates Cato the younger a little nearer to the ideal; but he follows the Greek Stoics in his deep respect for Hercules. See *Const.Sap.*2.1–2; *Ben.*1.13.1–3 and 4.31. Any who doubt that he so conceived Hercules in the *Hercules Furens* also should turn again to the majestic prayer for world peace and world innocence uttered by the hero just before his madness (*Herc.Fur.*926–39 (there is no parallel, naturally, in Euripides' version).

[77] *Herc.Fur.*76–86, 108ff. It will be recalled that Euripides' prologue is different (it consists of a dialogue between Amphitryo and Megara); that nowhere in his play is Hera brought on the stage; and that the onset of madness in the center of the play is represented by Lyssa, Frenzy, in person.

[78] An exciting event, if imaginatively handled; but we shall not see it, alas, until someone composes an actable, speakable translation of the tragedies into twentieth-century English—a very difficult, but not impossible, task. The Elizabethan translations, though actable in their day, are actable no longer.

[79] See Amphitryo's words at 952–54.

[80] *Thyest.*637–38, 776–78, 784ff, 789ff, 891–93, etc.

[81] *Prov.*2.9.

[82] *Troad.*1137–42: "Through shame her eyes are downcast—yet her cheeks are alight, her beauty, at the last, shines with a strange splendor; so is the Sun's light sweeter at his very setting, when the stars are claiming their turn again, and night presses close on glimmering day."

[83] For the radiance of Polyxena in the face of death, see also *Troad.* 945–48. This subtle and powerful play (among the most admired of all Senecan tragedies until c. 1800 A.D.) seems to me primarily a fantasy on the Senecan view of Death as Liberator; a strange fantasy, where the conquerors are in terror, the dead are happy, the conquered and doomed arrive at a sort of happiness. Leopardi comes to mind.

[84] *Phaedr.*583–718, *Thyest.*508–45. Both scenes imperatively require acting, or, at the very least, envisaging. If that is done, it will be found that the regalia scene from *Thyestes* is not altogether unworthy of comparison even with the tapestry scene of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. A man who has found true kingship, in the Stoic sense of kingship over the passions, is offered false, political kingship; and before our eyes, reluctantly and out of mistaken *pietas*, grasps the scepter and puts on the diadem.

[85] For the rarity of the true Stoic *sapiens, quem tot saeculis quaerimus*, see *Tranqu.*7.4–5; also *de Ira* 2.10.6; *Const.Sap.*7.1; *Ep.*42.1 (the truly good man occurs about as often as the phoenix). Throughout his extant works Seneca emphatically denies that he himself is a *sapiens*; rather he is a *proficiens*, an "advancer" (*Ep.*71.29–33, *Cons.Helv.*5.2–3), though as late as *Ep.*87.5 he is still ruefully confessing that he has advanced too little—*parum adhum profeci.*

[86] Reason now perverted to the slavery of Passion? It will be remembered that in the previous act (85–273) the Nurse had at first tried by all means to dissuade Phaedra from her love, but had finally capitulated.

[87] Compare in particular *Phaedr.*483 (the woodland life is *libera et vitio carens*) and *Ep.*90.44 (the Golden Age was *egregia . . . et curae*

...le); 495 (urban man's terror of strange noises) and 90.43; 502–03 (primitive man's aggression is turned only against wild animals) and ...41; 519–20 (primitive man drinking from cupped hands) and 90.14; ...25 (sleeping under the stars) and 90.42.

[88] The image is of course common in Greek and Latin, occurring in many different contexts (e.g., *Aen.*6.470–71). But in Seneca I have found it in the following passages: *Const.Sap.*3.5 (the *sapiens* ...ting all external injuries), *de Ira* 3.25.3–4 (the *sapiens* resisting ...fection of anger), *Vit.Beat.*27.3 (Socrates impervious to slan...). Marcus Aurelius applies the image similarly; see *Meditations* ..., where he urges himself to be "like the headland, against which ... waves break unceasingly; but it stays upright, and around it the ...ing foam is laid to sleep."

[89] With 417–18 compare *Cons.Helv.*6.1 ("let us dismiss the vulgar ... of exile") and 20.1 ("I am happy and high-spirited, *laetus et ...*").

[90] *Octav.*377–82; cf. the passages from *Thyestes* (412–54, *pas...* just quoted.

[91] *Octav.*383–90; practically a condensed versification of a noble ...ge in *Cons.Helv.*8.

[92] *Octav.*395–435; cf. *Phaedr.*526–62.

[93] *Prov.*5.7–8; cf. *Ben.*6.23.1–3; *Q.N.*2.35.2; *Oedip.*980–97; *Herc. ...*178–91.

[94] *Cons.Marc.*21.6–7.

[95] *Q.N.*7.30–32.

[96] Otto Regenbogen, *Schmerz und Tod in den Tragödien Senecas* ...mstadt 1963) esp. 11–25. The work was originally published in ...ge der Bibliothek Warburg 7 (1927–28) 167–218.

[97] J. F. Gronovius, *L. Annaei Senecae Tragoediae passim restitutae ... Gronovii et variorum notis* (Leiden 1661). This was the basis of ...ovius' son's re-edition (Amsterdam 1682) and of Schroeder's ...(1728).

[78] An exciting event, if imaginatively handled; but we shall not see it, alas, until someone composes an actable, speakable translation of the tragedies into twentieth-century English—a very difficult, but not impossible, task. The Elizabethan translations, though actable in their day, are actable no longer.

[79] See Amphitryo's words at 952–54.

[80] *Thyest.*637–38, 776–78, 784ff, 789ff, 891–93, etc.

[81] *Prov.*2.9.

[82] *Troad.*1137–42: "Through shame her eyes are downcast—yet her cheeks are alight, her beauty, at the last, shines with a strange splendor; so is the Sun's light sweeter at his very setting, when the stars are claiming their turn again, and night presses close on glimmering day."

[83] For the radiance of Polyxena in the face of death, see also *Troad.* 945–48. This subtle and powerful play (among the most admired of all Senecan tragedies until c. 1800 A.D.) seems to me primarily a fantasy on the Senecan view of Death as Liberator; a strange fantasy, where the conquerors are in terror, the dead are happy, the conquered and doomed arrive at a sort of happiness. Leopardi comes to mind.

[84] *Phaedr.*583–718, *Thyest.*508–45. Both scenes imperatively require acting, or, at the very least, envisaging. If that is done, it will be found that the regalia scene from *Thyestes* is not altogether unworthy of comparison even with the tapestry scene of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. A man who has found true kingship, in the Stoic sense of kingship over the passions, is offered false, political kingship; and before our eyes, reluctantly and out of mistaken *pietas*, grasps the scepter and puts on the diadem.

[85] For the rarity of the true Stoic *sapiens, quem tot saeculis quaesitum mus*, see *Tranqu.*7.4–5; also *de Ira* 2.10.6; *Const.Sap.*7.1; *Ep.*42.1 (the truly good man occurs about as often as the phoenix). Throughout his extant works Seneca emphatically denies that he himself is a *sapiens*; rather he is a *proficiens*, an "advancer" (*Ep.*71.29–31, *Cons.Helv.*5.2–3), though as late as *Ep.*87.5 he is still ruefully confessing that he has advanced too little—*parum adhuc profeci.*

[86] Reason now perverted to the slavery of Passion? It will be remembered that in the previous act (85–273) the Nurse had at first tried by all means to dissuade Phaedra from her love, but had finally capitulated.

[87] Compare in particular *Phaedr.*483 (the woodland life is *liberum et vitio carens*) and *Ep.*90.44 (the Golden Age was *egregia . . . et* [illegible]

[illegible]); 495 (urban man's terror of strange noises) and 90.43; 502–03 (primitive man's aggression is turned only against wild animals) and 41; 519–20 (primitive man drinking from cupped hands) and 90.14; 25 (sleeping under the stars) and 90.42.

[88] The image is of course common in Greek and Latin, occurring in many different contexts (e.g., *Aen.*6.470–71). But in Seneca I have found it in the following passages: *Const.Sap.*3.5 (the *sapiens* [illegible] all external injuries), *de Ira* 3.25.3–4 (the *sapiens* resisting the infection of anger), *Vit.Beat.*27.3 (Socrates impervious to slander). Marcus Aurelius applies the image similarly; see *Meditations* 4.49, where he urges himself to be "like the headland, against which the waves break unceasingly; but it stays upright, and around it the churning foam is laid to sleep."

[89] With 417–18 compare *Cons.Helv.*6.1 ("let us dismiss the vulgar name of exile") and 20.1 ("I am happy and high-spirited, *laetus et* [illegible]").

[90] *Octav.*377–82; cf. the passages from *Thyestes* (412–54, *passim*) just quoted.

[91] *Octav.*383–90; practically a condensed versification of a noble passage in *Cons.Helv.*8.

[92] *Octav.*395–435; cf. *Phaedr.*526–62.

[93] *Prov.*5.7–8; cf. *Ben.*6.23.1–3; *Q.N.*2.35.2; *Oedip.*980–97; *Herc. F.*178–91.

[94] *Cons.Marc.*21.6–7.

[95] *Q.N.*7.30–32.

[96] Otto Regenbogen, *Schmerz und Tod in den Tragödien Senecas* (Darmstadt 1963) esp. 11–25. The work was originally published in *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg* 7 (1927–28) 167–218.

[97] J. F. Gronovius, *L. Annaei Senecae Tragoediae passim restitutae a Gronovii et variorum notis* (Leiden 1661). This was the basis of Gronovius' son's re-edition (Amsterdam 1682) and of Schroeder's (Delft 1728).