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Senecan Drama and Stoic Cosmology
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CHAPTER SEVEN

The Rage to Embrace Nature

Some years back Hugh Kenner published an elegant volume entitled *The Stoic Comedians* about Flaubert, Joyce, and Beckett, three writers of epic each of whom, Kenner argues, attempts in his own fashion to prepare an exhaustive inventory of the environment.[1] In the case of Flaubert Kenner goes, predictably, to the two collectors Bouvard and Pecuchet, with their tapeworm lists of data and events. In Flaubert's distancing and ironizing treatment, the lists get the better of their originators. The rhythm of the enterprise is that of a cold-storage plant; the dynamism of the natural life is stultified in the interest of progressive completeness and seriality. In Joyce's *Ulysses*, the collector's work is quite different. The world of Dublin is turned into a living encyclopedia, but the impetus in charge is lyrical. There is little doubt of the intimate, vital, though not unironical, relationship between the heroes of the story and the myriads of details absorbed into their lives. In Beckett's novels, on the other hand, the task of the collector becomes the task of clearance. The paralyzed hero, stripped of any trace of agility or intensity, ticks off the fragments of an inert world with a view to attaining emptiness and silence. All three authors, Kenner argues, attend to the variety and the copiousness of the world around us. They, or their characters, for their own moral or aesthetic satisfaction, endeavor to master the riotousness of nature, or to make it part of themselves. And that, Kenner believes, is the comedy of their Stoicism.

Perhaps Kenner was influenced by Wilhelm Dilthey, who, more than any other intellectual historian, has insisted on the Stoic legacy in

1. Hugh Kenner 1962. It should be said that Kenner's slant on Stoicism is entirely different from the one argued in this essay: "The Stoic is one who considers, with neither panic nor indifference, that the field of possibilities available to him is large perhaps, or small perhaps, but closed. Whether because of the invariable habits of the gods, the invariable properties of matter, or the invariable limits within which logic and mathematics deploy their forms, he can hope for nothing that adequate method could not foresee. He need not despair" (p. xiii). For Kenner, the Stoic works like a laboratory technician.

the modern interpretation of the world in which we live and of its history.[2] Of the Stoic contributions, from Chrysippus to Posidonius and beyond, to the exploration of the various domains of the natural world there can be no doubt.[3] From Varro to Nigidius Figulus and A. Cornelius Celsus, the Roman encyclopedists worked in the tradition initiated by Chrysippus and his followers. The elder Pliny's *Natural History* is, in many of its formulations, a transmitter of Stoic research,[4] largely based on the work of Posidonius, though also indebted to many other scientists. The inclusiveness of that research, stretching all the way from psychology and zoology and aesthetics to the study of the moon's phases, would in Seneca's day have been recognized as Stoic rather than representative of one of the other Hellenistic schools.[5]

In any event, Kenner's model of the Stoic inventory, the rage to control nature by means of catalogues and serial logging, is a valuable contribution. In the novelists he discusses, it is the characters who devise the lists and itineraries in measuring themselves against their surroundings. With Seneca, the incorporation of man into an enumerative lexicon of the world is a necessity of the genre, a characteristic of Stoic tragedy. Or, to put it in another way, in Seneca the triumph of the extended syllabus is so overwhelming that the agent surrenders his role as enumerator (or discarder) and is himself pulled into the whirlpool of the inventoried universe. It is a universe in which he is both at home and an alien. Cataloguing is his strategy of distancing and familiarization. With his catalogues, the threatened hero declares both his control and, more profoundly, his capitulation before the enormity and the changeableness of that which he cannot master because he is an inseparable part of it and it is part of him. The meteorological and celestial systems spin their cycles through the resistant souls of Hercules and Atreus and Medea.[6] Humanity and its environment can no longer be said to confront each other. In the face of the threat of cosmic imbrica-

2. Dilthey 1960.

3. But see Dihle 1986: among the Stoics, the sciences are not *epistēmai*, authoritative knowledge, but useful parts of the propaedeutic that feeds into philosophy proper.

4. Kroll 1951, p. 301. Cf. also Kroll 1930 and Sallmann 1975, who emphasizes Pliny's eclecticism but also characterizes the mixture of science and popular philosophy as "*letztlich Stoisch*."

5. Cf. now the recent attempts to demonstrate the importance of Stoic science in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century philosophy and science: Shapiro 1974; Schmitt 1978; Barker and Goldstein 1984.

6. Cf. Segal 1983b.

tion, of all being in all, the catalogue furnishes the poet with a saving grace, with the chance of maintaining a seeming separation and a working transparency.

The generic pressure exacts catalogues from both choruses and individual speakers.[7] Catalogues are, of course, an ancient literary legacy. From Homer's familiar checklists of troops and clothing and lines of descent to Aeschylus's roll calls of barbarian leaders in *Persae* and beyond, the device of the inventory, both choral and monologic, had served a variety of purposes. But in the earlier traditions the catalogue had been, if not incidental, at least sufficiently isolated to be savored in its place, as a move of retardation or climaxing. In Seneca no such specialization is in evidence. Senecan dramatic language realizes itself most fully in the catalogue. One might go so far as to say that the catalogue is the principal building material of the drama.

But the catalogue also forms a grave obstacle to the shaping of a dramatic structure in need of tension, mass, and weight. For each item in the catalogue strains against its neighbors as if it were the only one that counted. In their togetherness, the assembled units crowd against one another and defy the expectation of hierarchic shapeliness. To quote Hannah Arendt:

> The collector's passion . . . is not only unsystematic, but borders on the chaotic, not so much because it is a passion as because it is not primarily kindled by the quality of the object—something that is classifiable—but it is inflamed by its "genuineness," its uniqueness, something that defies any systematic classification.[8]

In Seneca's examination of the vastness of nature, the fluidity of that nature chokes off the instinct for classification. The passion of the speakers puts the emphasis where Arendt says it belongs: on the unique particulars, the fleeting objects snatched from the vortex and exhibited in the rolling registers of the Senecan tirade.

In the preface to the third book of *Naturales quaestiones* (5–7) Seneca says that it is better to study nature and ethics than to write of the exploits of kings and nations; it is better to study the future rather than the past. The figures upon whom on this occasion he turns his back are Alexander, Philip, and Hannibal. In the tragedies, however,

7. The topics dealt with in choral catalogues are conveniently surveyed in Cattin 1963a.

8. Benjamin 1969, p. 44.

he trains his sights upon legendary heroes who are cut from the same cloth as Alexander and Hannibal. The truth is that neither in his treatises and letters nor in his dramas does he concern himself with either the future or the past. Both of them come in as auxiliaries to support the principal focus, which is entirely upon the here and now, in the form of either a despotic present or an equally burdensome philosophical generality. Together they make up an aggregate vision that ties in with every facet of the Stoic scientific tradition. The catalogues are the indispensable instrument of that vision.

The system of coordinates turned to profit by the essayist and poet to install his inventories extends both vertically and horizontally. Rather than ticking off the textual evidence in laborious detail—no one who has studied or, better, recited the dramas can have missed the vehemence of the protracted inventorying—it will be useful to summarize the copiousness of this dimensional expanse. The vertical perspective is announced at the beginning of book 2 of the *Naturales quaestiones:* Seneca proposes to divide cosmology into the three strata of *coelestia, sublimia,* and *terrena:* the things in the heavens, the things more directly above us, and the things on earth. The division and the particulars are explained in what follows. In the drama the stretch of verticality is at least as wide as it is in the books on natural science. It spreads from Jupiter and Apollo in their Olympian heights to the gloomiest specters of lowest Tartarus. Between these supernatural termini, important to the Stoics, with their attachment to traditional religious credence, lie the zones that interest the scientists: the astral vault studied by the astronomers; the winds and the atmospheric phenomena of the meteorologists; the geographers' surfaces of land and sea, along with the plants and the beasts surveyed by the biologists; and, finally, everything that is located below the surface of the earth, investigated by experts in matters of mining, earthquakes, and the conjuration of the ghosts. Medical and psychological concerns also find their way into the registers; they too come under the rubric of the vertical articulation of spatial plenitude.

Horizontally, the fullness of experience is gathered along a historical axis, extending from the distant past to the cataclysmic future, via mythology and historiography and sociology and eschatology, with lists of notorious ancestors and their exemplary misdeeds, and anticipations of future disasters endemic in the Stoic dogma of cosmic periodicity. Compressed between the frightful past, with its litany of he-

roic crimes, and the horrors of the future, the mundane present (that is, the Roman reality) leads a meager and fitful (but equally cadastral) existence, shadowed despairingly in the choral essays and in the inferences to be drawn from the pronouncements of the characters. As I have said, both past and future are, dramatically speaking, drawn into a larger, non-topical present. Medea, Oedipus, and Lycus are with us now just as overwhelmingly as is the doomsday of *ekpurōsis*. But as we scrutinize the reign of the catalogue in Seneca's art, diachrony helps us to sort out the materials.

Some catalogues are severely limited dimensionally and in their field of speculation. The drama of the collapse of the zodiac (*Thy* 844ff.) lists, in unrelenting sequence, the various disorderly motions of fully fifteen constellations and their major stars. More typically, verticality and horizontality are, in obedience to *krasis*, combined into compound structures.[8] Astronomy and mythology, history and meteorology, anatomy and apocalypse support one another.[9] Jointly they form ensembles of references cited by the Senecan enumerator, or engulfing him in the moments when he feels himself going under. The Stoic tragedian, building his characters into an imposing network of environmental causes and restraints, has that network express itself in vast tallies of personal and contextual associations. On several occasions, for instance, Seneca pictures somber groves in which the portrayal of human trepidation or villainy is enlivened with catalogues of trees. *Oedipus* 530ff. names cypress, oak, laurel, linden, myrtle, alder, and pine to anticipate the horrified response of the woods and the whole earth to the success of the necromancy, itself liberally endowed with catalogues enumerating the legendary troops of hell (585ff.). The cursed copse in which Atreus is reported to be performing his heinous business (*Thy* 650ff.) is similarly alive with a particularized awareness of the data of the environment. Elsewhere Seneca chronicles great maritime undertakings, in which history, mythology, geography, and meteorology combine to form aggregate scenarios.[10] In his *Epistles* Seneca

9. Compare the analogous phenomenon in Posidonius's work studied by Schmidt (1980).

10. Cf. the elder Pliny *NH* 2.167–70. For geography, see also Cattin 1963b. Walter (1975, p. 26) speaks for the majority of scholars when he talks of the "*unnatürliche Vielzahl*" of the items in a Senecan geographical catalogue, and of their Alexandrian ostentation of learning and their "*klanggewaltiger, pathetischer Sprach- und Versprunk*." Walter's further notion (p. 146) that the geographical catalogues reflect the ideas of peace, leisure, and security seems to me remarkably shortsighted.

deprecates journeying: *animum debes mutare, non coelum;* change your spirit, not the locale (28.1).[11] But he continues, not insignificantly:

> licet vastum traieceris mare, licet, ut ait Vergilius noster, "terraeque urbesque recedant": sequentur te quocumque perveneris vitia.
>
> Though you manage to cross a vast ocean, though, in the words of the great Vergil, "lands and cities vanish in the distance," your vices will accompany you wherever you stop.

And he secures the authority of the warning with a reference to Socrates' notorious reluctance to leave the limits of the city. In the Greek dramatic tradition, choruses frequently express the wish to fly from the scene of suffering or horror before them, a wish necessarily aborted by the convention that the chorus remain in place. In Seneca escape from suffering is equally futile, and where he features a change of scene, as in the dramatic catalogues of sea voyages, the *vitia* return us, as it were, to the point of departure. It is not that the vices accompany the Argonauts and the expedition to Troy across the waters; rather, the voyages are a confirmation of the voyagers' fallibility, and the stages of the journey, painstakingly catalogued along with the mythological motives that prompted them, duplicate the rungs on the ladder of their decline.[12]

For Marlowe it has been demonstrated that all the journeys of Tamburlaine and his friends were planned, route by route and place by place, on one of the best atlases available, the *Theatrum orbis terrarum* (1584) of Ortelius.[13] And, characteristically, the journeys planned are not in England or nearby France, but in distant Africa and Asia during a bygone age. Likewise, Seneca's geographical lists rarely touch on Italy. But the maps on which he relied were not those of the cartographers. They were the creations of the mythographers and the poets who drew on the myths, reinforced by the imperial propaganda of conquest and colonization, and by the common belief that heaven and hell may be reached if only you travel far enough.

At *Troades* 814ff. the catalogue of Greek destinations awaiting the Trojan captives is in some ways much like that of a Greek dramatic chorus; it is in fact an analogue to Euripides' *Trojan Women* 205ff.,

11. Cf. also *TA* 2.13, and Lipsius 1939, bk. 1, chaps. 2–3.

12. I suspect that the prominence of journeys and cosmography in Marlowe's dramatic work derives from similar impulses.

13. Boas 1940, pp. 88ff.

though the initial question, *Quae vocat sedes?* Where shall we be going? echoes another Euripidean passage, *Hecuba* 444ff. Thirty-three destinations, the Senecan count, constitute a series long enough to try anyone's patience, and the form, an insistent cannonade of questions (is this where they are going to take us?) underlines the artificiality of the exercise. Here the challenge of flagging the totality of the Greek world, starting in the northeast and ending with the southwest, appears to have proved irresistible to Seneca. Still, the essay conveys an obvious message of man's inhumanity to man. And that message is further darkened by the skilful dovetailing of gloomy mythological memories and ritual references, by derogatory comments on many of the sites listed, and above all by the language of variability and hatred and ruin—of Pleuron *virgini inimica divae,* a foe of the virgin goddess; Pelion where Chiron *ingentes acuebat iras,* kept whetting the immensity of his wrath; restless Euripus; and the various localities vulnerable to the winds—that marks this characteristic passage. The choral essay is, in this instance, all catalogue and nothing else. The Aeolic meters of the sequence, largely sapphics and a few irregularly placed adonics, add their own formal irony to an inventory that allows no scope for the sentiment with which sapphics were originally identified.

The third chorus of *Medea* (579ff.) finds the odium of a wife spurned more devastating than flame, wind, thunderbolt, the violence of the east wind, the Danube and the Rhône in full spate, and the snows melting on Haemus. For each of these comparisons a literary antecedent could easily be found; the pastoral source of the last item is obvious. It is their linkage in a compound catalogue that counts. The construction is skilful. Of the briefly cited entities at the start of the catalogue—fire, wind and water, the hurled bolt—the central meteorological items are subsequently expanded into the tabulation of a specific wind and specific rivers. The disarray and the destructive power of the several meteorological and geographical entities are brought into the compass of Medea's growing passion. The catalogue then modulates into an essay on excessive deeds that invite divine punishment: the first maritime undertaking, the astral tripping of Phaethon, Erysichthon's (?) despoliation of the groves of Pelion, and, finally, the voyage of the Argo (cf. also *Med* 301ff.), a crowning expansion of the motif of dangerous waters, with eight of the participants listed as the deserving victims of their own folly, and four additional sufferers, only loosely connected with the crew, brought in to round off the roll

call of legendary characters who have found themselves at odds with the natural order. That is the viewpoint of the chorus, timid women who fear for their mistress. Within the larger scheme of the play, the effect of the multiple catalogues is to weave Medea's purpose into a world experienced on a plurality of levels and to emphasize the integration of the human and the cosmic. In this mosaic of *sumpatheia* and *contagio,* the ostensible theme of divine punishment is lost from sight.

The nurse's catalogue of the sources from which Medea obtained her poisons (*Med* 670ff.), followed by Medea's invocation, in her own voice, of the hellish powers, combines geography with the exotica of botany and zoology. Moreover, this exercise in the importation of far-flung resources is said, at the start (674), to be a *maius monstrum,* a greater demonstration of prodigious power, than an earlier exploit in which Medea had merely attacked the gods by pulling down heaven to her level. From the perspective of the exploitation of *sumpatheia,* reaching into the furthest corners of the known world for the horrors of a witch's brew is indeed a greater achievement than the mere act of joining heaven and earth, a juncture given in the very premises of Stoic cosmology.

Once again, Seneca's catalogue is based on an Ovidian model, Medea's elaborate arrangements for the rejuvenation of Aeson (*Metam.* 7.179ff.). In the Ovidian account her preparations include a real journey, lasting nine days and nine nights, to the various districts whose simples she needs, just as later, after the death of Pelias, she is shown travelling long distances to escape to Corinth. Seneca's version is distinguished by the feature that Medea does not travel; from the command station of her *penetrale funestum,* her sanctuary of death, she unfolds her powers and calls upon the various regional ingredients to come to her of their own volition. As the nurse describes it, and as Medea refers to her past successes in overturning the laws of nature (752ff.), Medea's conjuration of the noxious powers of the earth is an execution, in performance, of that rage to control the cosmos in which we have recognized the dramatic equivalent of the Stoic scientific impulse. Toward the end (817ff.) mythology is brought in, in the shape of Prometheus, Hephaestus, Phaethon, Chimaera, the Colchian bull killed by Jason, and Medusa, to invest the caustic agent in the gift for Creusa with polygenetic potency.

The prologue of *Phaedra* falls under the same heading. Medea's

combinatory magic carries the stamp of ugliness and monstrosity; Hippolytus's call upon his huntsmen to spread out is designed to provide a foil of confidence and cheerfulness against which to read the subsequent disasters. The catalogue of the localities where the men are to do their hunting stretches across northern Greece, and, with an invocation of Diana, goes transoceanic. It might be argued that the old Greek tension between natural peace and the bloody implications of hunting is alive here also. On the whole, however, the spirit of joy prevails. The summons gives us the picture of a young man's mind, free and vital and untainted, happy in the beauty and the variety of a world to be tracked. The address is preposterous only if we apply to it the standards of a realism that would run afoul of any theatrical standard save that of the cinema. The expansive run-down of the various kinds of hounds going after their specific prey, of the different weapons and techniques used by the huntsmen, and of the Attic demes most promising for the pursuit of game, followed by the invocation spelling out Diana's power over a multitude of regional beasts: all this is orchestrated to suggest a nature to be grasped, a nature that appeals with its color, diversity, and sheer physical impact. Hippolytus, too, is a Stoic comedian, another Balbus, eager, not only to take inventory, but to conquer an environment that appears to open itself up to him with the help of the divinity. We are here closer to Joyce than to Flaubert or Beckett; the impulse is one of panoramic lyricism. Dramatists like Hardy and Claudel have worked in the same medium.

The eventual spuriousness of the sense of security and well-being implied in Hippolytus's hunting summons is brought out fully, if briefly, in the geographical chart of Hercules' last speech, a series of questions at the conclusion (1321ff.) of *Hercules Furens*. In spite of the offer of hospitality extended by Theseus, Hercules knows that his grand adventure in conquering nature has failed. The awareness of that failure awakes in him, for one last time, the old pattern of geographical itemizing, both as an expression of the hopelessness of the ambition, and, perhaps, as a signal of submission. The rhetoric is interrogatory; but the influence of Theseus, that rare Senecan figure, a man capable of moderate emotions and not sickened unto crime or self-destruction, helps Hercules, and us, to disregard the questions and convert them into an appeal for shelter and a possible salvation. The catalogue ends delicately with a hidden reference to Attica, the traditional refuge and cleanser of sinners. Nevertheless, Hercules, mythology teaches us, was not to be its beneficiary. The mood of Hercules is more persuasive than that of Theseus.

Contrast the earlier report of Hercules' journey through the underworld, delivered by Theseus in conversation with Amphitryon (658–829), and anticipated in the second chorus (524–91). The choral passage offers us the contrasting of two worlds, one heroic, occupied by Hercules, and one musical, the domain of Orpheus.[14] The two worlds are one, seen from different vantage points; they are both Hades, once visualized as the frozen north, and again conceived of as a region of vapors and melting fusion. From Theseus's later rhetorical masterpiece (762ff.),[15] we can take it that in this play Hades stands for the world as a whole. Hercules' harrowing of Hell is a grim recapitulation of all the travels that have filled his working life. As John Herington and others have seen, this Baedeker tour through the various stations of the underworld is not an interminable display of misplaced topographical virtuosity but an extended surrogate account of what Hercules is and stands for, and thus, especially in the overcoming of Cerberus, a doublet of the multiple killing that is to follow.[16] Its position before the murders, and its mistakenly triumphal touches

> iam nullus superest timor:
> nil ultra iacet inferos.
>
> At last all fear is vanished;
> There is no world beyond Hades.
> (*HF* 891–92)

are dramatically effective. Its synthesis of infernal topography, Hesiodic-Ovidian personifications of social ills, sluggish streams and gloomy swamps, mythological exempla of rewards and punishments (with the punishments receiving the lion's share of attention), and the spectral appearance of the various monsters previously vanquished by the hero, climaxing in the confrontation with the generously polymorphous Cerberus, a trivialized equivalent of Hippolytus's sea monster: all these details work together, by a process of coextension, to acquaint us with what it means to be a traditional hero in a Stoic uni-

14. Cf. Segal 1983a.

15. A good analysis may be found in Dingel 1974, pp. 121ff.

16. Herington (1966, p. 199) takes issue with T. S. Eliot 1927. Cf. also the mixed feelings of Lessing concerning Theseus's report: "Endlich aber . . . fängt er eine lange und prächtige Beschreibung an, welche an einem *jeden andern Orte* Bewunderung verdienen würde" (Lessing 1890, p. 179; my emphases).

verse that closes itself off to the sectarian bidding to live in harmony. Just before the catalogue of criminals in Hades begins, there is a transitional maxim:

> sanguine humano abstine
> quicumque regnas: scelera taxantur modo
> maiore vestra.
>
> You who wield power do not
> Spill human blood; your crimes will be computed
> A hundredfold.
>
> (*HF* 745–47)

The rhythm of Theseus's exposition matches the rhythm of Hercules' story: the quiet detailing of the antechambers and of the judges is analogous to the quiet calm of Hercules' return, before the convulsions of his madness set in. The conquest of Cerberus is the mythological and magical equivalent of the killing of Lycus and, more important, an index of Hercules' murderous nature.

The instances I have cited come under the general heading of geography, though they have much else, especially mythology, mixed in with them. Mythology provides one of the principal horizontal ingredients in Seneca's compound itineraries, especially, but not exclusively, in choral essays. The labors of Hercules (*Aga* 808ff.), the curse on the Labdacids (*Oed* 709ff.), Tantalus and his house (*Thy* 122ff.), and the fates of the Argonauts (*Med* 579ff.) are ever available to intensify the resonance of the choral contribution. The multiple filiations of the families and the kingdoms of myth are an analogue of the dovetailed cosmos. What is more, Seneca was able to count on an educated audience, on cognoscenti. In cursing the unknown killer of Laius, Oedipus (*Oed* 260ff.) goes far beyond the discretion of Sophocles and says: may he contract an awful marriage, may he produce disgusting children, and may he kill his parent, and thus do what I have successfully avoided doing! The irony, if such jackhammer obviousness can be honored by that name, is of the winking, conspiratorial kind. Again, Seneca has the knack of combining two or more strands of mythology into meaningful patterns. In the same play, the ghost of Laius is reported to call on the Theban women to conduct their orgies and mutilate their sons:

> vibrate thyrsos, enthea gnatos manu
> lacerate potius—maximum Thebis scelus
> maternus amor est.
>
> Brandish your sacred staffs; and with your hands,
> God-driven, tear your sons—in Thebes no crime
> Is greater than a mother's love.
>
> (*Oed* 628–30)

The implied moral of Laius's advice is that Jocasta would not now be in trouble if she had gone the way of Agave.

Often the surface relevance of the legends chosen is questionable. What do the labors of Hercules have to do with the death of Agamemnon and the vision of Cassandra? The initial claim that Hercules, too, is an Argive, and the terminal hint (*Aga* 865–66) that Hercules once defeated Troy, seem embarrassing in their apparent design to manufacture a makeshift relevance. These substitute linkages may be regarded as sops to conventional expectations of structural tightness. The same is true of the rhetorical ploy of "Why should I mention . . . ?" that, in imitation of Greek models, sometimes breaks up the sequential monotony.[17] The artifices do not deceive; the overriding impulse is one of unapologetic accumulation. Narrow pertinence is, in the spirit of Hannah Arendt's aperçu, sacrificed to a more broadly conceived affinity. Seneca's larger purpose allows a grander frame of reference and the collection of distant materials. In a world governed by *sumpatheia*, the relevance of precedent is buried under the need for plenitude.

Mythology extends into the paradigmatic past, in the guise of human masks, the wealth of biological life, of cosmology, geography, psychology, and sociology. The bloodthirsty figures of myth, Seneca tells us in an extraordinarily strident paragraph of his prose (*Ira* 2.35.5), can be used for philosophical purposes, to show up the ugliness of the monster passion, wrath. In *Octavia* the empress compares herself, to her own disadvantage, to Electra (59); the nurse compares Octavia, Poppaea, and Nero to Juno and Jupiter and his many paramours (201ff.). Later Nero is said to be another Typhon (238). Because *Octavia* is a *fabula praetexta*, a historical drama, it can use mythology in a way that is not available to a play about legendary characters. Comparing of one mythical persona with another is not unknown on the Greek stage; but the constant doubling employed in *Octavia*, clinching the moral standing of a character by means of an identification with a mythical figure and a well-defined legend, is a new and, on the whole, disappointingly constrictive device. The drama-

17. At *HF* 386–89, for example, the chorus has four such *quid?*s.

tist's practice reminds us of Nero's predilection for the acting out of mythical parts; he was famous for his interpretation, or dancing, of the characters of Orestes and Alcmaeon, to flaunt the mythological antecedents (and quasi-justifications) of his own matricide.

It is of interest, however, that even in this new medium the catalogue remains in force. History may be more dreadful than myth; but the full sounding of that dreadfulness is left up to the tried mechanism of the inventory. Thus *Octavia* goes back to the techniques of *Agamemnon*, the prologue of which, spoken by Thyestes, "explains" the crimes of the characters who are about to appear by an enumeration of the vices of their progenitors. The richer the inventory, the more forcible the impression that the personae of the present drama cannot help their viciousness. It is the inescapable consequence of circumstances lodged in the past and thus beyond their control. Or, to put it more forcibly, the multiple catalogue helps to establish the plenitude of the destabilization in which the agents of the tragedy are inevitably caught up.

In this respect the mythological catalogue has an effect that runs counter to the supposed aim of the paradigms and maxims discussed in an earlier chapter. Sickness and crime, embodied in powerful and serial precedent, put moral exhortation in the shade, hostage to a large range of literary erudition. The dwelling on the colorful plenitude of a "sympathetic" environment allows the aesthetic to gain a clear ascendancy over the moral. Hence the serial indulgence, the frequent unwillingness to leave well enough alone and to hold the catalogue entries to a decent modicum. A squeamish intelligence, bound to an earlier tradition of decorum and economy, will object to the seemingly endless stringing together of parallels. One may wonder why the Trojan chorus in *Agamemnon* (670–90) must touch, not only on the legend of Philomela and Procne, but on swans, halcyons, and the priests of Attis, as the captives voice their view that not even the most notorious mourners in mythology and zoology could cry enough to do justice to their and Cassandra's sufferings.

Similar objections may be, and have been, raised to a host of overextended rehearsals of analogues. When Hercules returns to his country, with Cerberus somehow in tow, he asks Apollo to hide his face so that he, the god of purity and artistic refinement, will not have to look upon the beast (*HF* 592ff.). Thereafter Seneca has Hercules continue with the same plea to Jupiter, Neptune, and anybody who might be looking, though the original motive is barely applicable to these more rugged witnesses. This kind of fullness answers to the formulaic "If any god . . ." (of which a fine example occurs in the first chorus of *Thyestes* [122 ff.], with its multiple repetition of *si quis* . . .). That invocation combines a geographical catalogue with a learned, because anonymous and periphrastic, list of divinities. The effect is one of great formality. The sentence is long, too long, even self-indulgent; a champion of succinct communication is likely to snort, "Rhetoric!" But it should be remembered that this is the chorus speaking, and the chorus is, traditionally, a ceremonial instrument. What is more, the chorus here has the task of voicing moral outrage at the crimes committed in the house with which they are associated. There is some justice, both in their appeal to a plurality of gods, and in their not naming the easily identified divinities, as if the crimes were such that even the gods ought to be protected from them by a circumvention of their appellative vulnerability.

But consider the remarkable use to which Seneca puts mythological plenitude in Juno's prologue in *Hercules Furens*. After wondering how the object of her hatred can be defeated, and concluding that Hercules can be undone only by himself:

> quaeris Alcidae parem?
> nemo est nisi ipse: bella iam secum gerat!
>
> You seek a match for Hercules?
> There is none but him; so he must face himself!
> (*HF* 84–85)

she offers an inventory of the hellish powers needed for such a war (and presumably available in Hercules' own heart, as they are in hers): the Furies, Styx, unnamed savage spirits, the goddesses Discord, Crime, Treason, Flaw, Rage, Megaera (one of the Furies, here singled out above the others), and in the end—a shock—Juno herself:

> nobis prius
> insaniendum est: Iuno, cur nondum furis?
>
> but we must lead
> The round of madness. Juno, where is your rage?
> (*HF* 108–9)

In the course of her inspection of all the forces of turmoil located both in the world at large—earth, sea, air, hell, and heaven—and in Hercules' heroic bosom, which are needed to bring about the fall of her

enemy, Juno comes to realize that she is Hercules' clone, and that by activating what is disruptive within her she can ignite the desired process. There is no better passage in Seneca to illustrate the reciprocity, the irrationality, and the transferability of passion. By the same token, the formal use of the mythological inventory gives it the freighted power, the lumbering grandeur, that the Stoic tragedian, like the Stoic comedian, embraces.

That Seneca is in full control of his uses of mythology is shown by such a passage as *Phaedra* 435ff., the nurse's first speech to Hippolytus, in which an encomium of sex is developed without the slightest recourse to obvious mythological precedent, except for a few allegorical labels—Bacchus, Venus, Mars, Styx—that are part of the language of philosophy as found in Empedocles and Lucretius. When Seneca does "indulge," as he does in the first chorus of *Phaedra* (274ff.), where the power of love is exemplified in the experiences of Apollo, Jove (as bird and as bull), Diana, Hercules, the Nereids, and a motley collection of animals, the secret lies with this courage to go beyond the bounds of an antiquated decorum, and to let abundance find its own proper limits. The choral series ends upon a note of shocking anticlimax:

> quid plura canam? vincit saevas
> cura novercas.
>
> No need of more examples; the pain of love
> Defeats the hate of stepmothers.
> (*Phae* 356–57)

The last beasts mentioned in the catalogue, the *Lucae boves* (elephants?), are outdone in their susceptibility to love only by women like Phaedra. Phaedra turns out to be the crowning cap of a protracted and heterogeneous *praeteritio* on the power of *Cupido* and *Venus*.[18] The *amor pleni* of the Senecan dramatic style, which finds its fullest expression in the catalogue, is not a mark of willfulness, bad taste, or lack of discipline, but a deliberate shock mechanism in the service of his Stoic commitment. Like the *amor pleni* of archaic vase painting, Seneca's procedure limns the aggregate nature of a crowded and often gro-

18. Strictly speaking, Senecan dramatic speech does not recognize *praeteritio* or *priamel*, since it lacks unitary referents. The catalogues are selective, even precariously selective, essays in the intimation of total nexus and *sumpatheia*. Nor, again, is there an art of the encomium, but only a glancing off the immediate (human) focus to the larger environment.

tesque world. The archaic *horror vacui* was an expression of joy and exuberance; the Senecan fullness carries a very different stamp. The gain in aesthetic variety and cosmic exhaustiveness is also, in the end, a gain in moral insight. Ultimately the moral wins out, not in the shape of exhortation but in the subtler format of the enumerative specification of horror.

One difficulty with this approach to Seneca's art of the catalogue is that we cannot tell whether the dramatist ever constructs a catalogue in such a way as to suggest significant irregularities. After defeating the tyrant Lycus, Hercules proceeds (*HF* 900–918) to worship Minerva, Bacchus, Phoebus, Diana,

> fraterque quisquis incolit caelum meus
> non ex noverca frater.
>
> And any brother of mine who lives in heaven
> Not born of Juno.
> (*HF* 907–8)

The reference to brothers not born of his stepmother, implying that Hercules is the equal of the divinities he has named, is certainly peculiar, and hubristic. As he prepares for the sacrifice to be conducted jointly by himself and Theseus, he mentions Jupiter, Minerva, Vulcan, Zethus, Dirce, and Cadmus, some of them via periphrasis. There is something erratic about the catalogue; can Zethus and Dirce, mortal figures of local legends, appear side by side with the great divinities for purposes of cult, and what does Cadmus, the founder of Thebes, have to do with Theseus? Amphitryon's declaration that Hercules' hands are covered with blood shows that the hero is polluted. The pollution is spiritual as well as physical. With

> preces
> love meque dignas
> prayers
> worthy of Jove and me
> (*HF* 926–27)

the disease is patently rampant: Hercules is unable to separate himself from the level of Jupiter's divinity. Here then we seem to have a case of Seneca building inconcinnity into a catalogue, or rather two connected catalogues, with the intention of telling us something about the condition of the speaker. But we cannot be sure.

A proper investigation of the art of the catalogue would also have to

inquire into the details of the composition: the incidence of circumlocutions, the spatial disposition of the various units, the use or nonuse of descriptive adjectives, of narrative elaboration, and so forth. Here it is my intention only to suggest that the longueurs and internal disparities of these inventories should not be shrugged off as so much misdirected facility. Each of them may, with some ingenuity, be discovered to answer to a specific dramatic need, whether of retardation, build-up, characterization, consolation, and much else. Many of them will, on the face of it, appear jejune and mechanical, and it is notorious that the same series, or very nearly identical series, occur irritatingly often in a number of plays. Others produce a resonance that moves and fires the imagination; as an example of the latter I would cite the list of grievers who mourned alone and, for that reason, derived no satisfaction from their grief (*Aga* 670ff.).

We must disregard, for our present purposes, the important question of how we might distinguish the successes and the failures in this kind of dramatic writing. What calls for an explanation is the compulsive frequency of the catalogues. It is futile to suppose that a play heavily endowed with the spirit of enumeration, like *Phoenissae*, is for that reason alone a work of inferior quality. Inventories smother and infect all the texts, until their function as dramas is very nearly undone. This is part of Seneca's design. For the loyalty of the speakers is, above all, to the task of making contact with an overwhelming universe, more so than to the requirement of fitting elegantly into a well-crafted plot.

In the light of the importance of this species of rhetoric, the rhetoric of enumeration rather than the rhetoric of confession, in the texts, it is not improper to speak of Senecan drama as one kind of epic drama. The propensity to take stock by means of catalogues and serial elaborations marks a special way of looking at what matters in life. To be sure, that way of looking is very foreign to the purview of the Greek epic poet, who had virtually no interest in the manifold macrocosm shrouding the hero. But the paratactic rhythm of enumeration, the tendency to run the motor before starting to drive and keep on driving, the stylization of the verbal body through formulas and iteration: in all these and similar respects the procedure of the Senecan dramatist shares more with the epic bard than with the writer of action drama. That Seneca has some inventories that are less compelling than others; that on occasion he can mislead his audience by throwing in details that fail to promote the larger causes he favors, cannot be denied. But unless its intrinsic need of the catalogue, and the latter's broad usefulness, are recognized, a true appreciation of the value of Senecan drama is beyond our grasp.

Under the aegis of *sumpatheia*, a Senecan character is largely a bundle of drives found elsewhere in the world, each of them ready to receive the signature of other drives and materials and to adapt its complexion. If that is true—if, that is, the dramatic agent is no more fixed in his bearings than the encompassing world of which he is a part—how is the character to maintain the special position granted him by the history of drama? Is not one of the fundamental conditions of serious drama the integrity, if not the isolation, of the tragic hero in his stand?

When a television gangster is cornered and at his wit's end, he draws his Saturday-night special and sprays bullets all around him. He continues shooting until the chambers are empty. Desperation cancels the limits of discipline and calculation. What does the Senecan hero-villain do when *he* is trapped, immobilized in his expectations, and blocked by the obstacles that open up before him? He launches cries all around him, or rather away from himself, just as the criminal tries to give himself some elbow room with his bullets. But this broadside, clothed in the elevated speech of traditional iambs, fails in its task of clearing maneuvering space.

We are here turning to a very specialized use of the inventory, the Senecan hero's *Schreirede* or *Schreikatalog*.[19] The trapped hero, abandoned by his fellows or alone with his dismal victory and conscious of its insufficiency, turns away from himself and zeroes in on the various

19. Heldmann (1968) speaks of *quiritatio*, an old Roman term signalling the call of a citizen to other citizens to help him. *Quiritatio*, or Heldmann's translation *Zetergeschrei*, does not quite fit my purposes, since he associates it chiefly with invocations by the chorus, and since the move I am interested in, the *Schreirede* of the cornered hero, is most definitely not addressed to his fellow citizens, who in fact have no standing in Seneca's largely uncivic drama. The characteristic forms of *Schreirede* are found, in brief compass, in some of the choruses (example: *Tro* 122ff.). This is not surprising; the communal grief voiced in Greek choruses exhibits similar traits. But the *Schreirede* of the individual speaker is Seneca's special contribution to dramatic speech.

targets of his environment.[20] He reflects upon his ancestors; he draws imaginary pictures of ravenous animals and poisonous plants; he envisages masses of earth, the waves of the sea, and the contest of the winds. A special preference leads him to the celestial sphere, with its gods, its sun, its stars, and the zodiac, the most authentically animal zone of the heavens, usually pictured in a state of derailment. Often the ticking off of the environmental plenitude is interminable; as in the catalogues discussed above, there is no natural limit to the variety of cosmic constituents to be brought in. The despairing hero is even less motivated than the choruses or secondary characters to arrive at a terminus. He directs his attention to all corners of the universe, as if he wished to draw out as long as possible the furlough from his own distress. Theoretically the tirade should be unstoppable. There are always further powers of nature to turn to for comfort and instruction in this cruel implementation of the Stoic command to "live in harmony." It is cruel because there is not the slightest hope of satisfaction. Given the premises of *sumpatheia*, the world, far from having anything to teach, conspires to assist the hero in his crash.

But even where the *Schreirede*, the tirade, is not strictly in catalogue form, its serial extension, the details of its syntax, and especially what I would call the technique of *deflection*, speak to the same point: the rage to turn to nature and entreat her, hopelessly, to annul, and at the same time enhance, the speaker's isolation.

> sustines tantum nefas
> gestare, Tellus? non ad infernam Styga
> te nosque mergis rupta et ingenti via
> ad chaos inane regna cum rege abripis?
> non tota ab imo tecta convellens solo
> vertis Mycenas? stare circa Tantalum
> uterque iam debuimus: hinc compagibus
> et hinc revulsis, si quid infra Tartara est
> avosque nostros, hoc tuam immani sinu
> demitte vallem, nosque defossos tege
> Acheronte toto. noxiae supra caput
> animae vagentur nostrum et ardenti freto
> Phlegethon harenas igneus totas agens

20. Cf. Frick 1951, p. 39, apropos of Garnier's Thésée: "He invokes heaven and hell to slay him. This storm of furies, snakes, and lightning-bolts is the concrete visualization of the disaster that has struck the soul. Garnier's characters are unable to grasp pain and suffering in the language of the soul" (my translation). The final proposition seems to me implausible. Garnier prefers the environmental formulation to the purely psychological or introspective mode.

> exitia[21] supra nostra violentus fluat—
> immota tellus, pondus ignavum iaces?
>
> Earth, can you bear this dread atrocity?
> Why not plunge us, with you, down into Styx
> And violently, vastly, sweep both king and kingdom
> Into the yawning void? Why not uproot the homes
> And raze Mycenae? Both of us have long
> Deserved to stand with Tantalus. Let all
> The globe be unhinged; if life exists below
> Hades and our fathers, in that bottomless
> Embrace lodge us, and bury us in Acheron.
> Let noxious specters roam above our heads,
> Let fiery Phlegethon with his seething silt
> Extend his fury over our undoing—
> But, Earth, you stay inert, a slumbering mass?!
> (*Thy* 1006–20)

These are Thyestes' lines, immediately after he has contributed his famous Senecan version of the Aristotelian *anagnōrisis: agnosco fratrem*, "I recognize my brother," or, to draw out the implications, "Now I know who and what my brother is." Let us call the speech a declamation.[22] Declaiming allows both the maximal voicing of passion and a cushioning of the spontaneity of that passion through the employment of certain rhetorical devices. In Thyestes' speech the "I" of *agnosco* is immediately deflected by the address to Tellus, the earth (both a goddess and the material fundament), who remains the addressee throughout this segment of the declamation. Deflection, the sustained suppression or attenuation of the first-person focus, is an important element of the *Schreirede*.

As Hieronimo, in *The Spanish Tragedy*, imagines grief to spread outward and to color the world at large, only to be stopped by the heavenly walls where Justice and Revenge are imprisoned, so Thyestes, after recognizing the severed heads of his children, immediately launches into an oration rebuking the earth for not swallowing him (*Thy*

21. Against Zwierlein, but with Giardina, I retain the manuscript reading.

22. The standard discussions of declamation are Bonner 1949 and Winterbottom 1980. Cf. also Russell (1983), who defines "declamation" in a way—"firm organization"—that might make its applicability to the Senecan tirade doubtful (p. 2). In the present context, I have in mind "declamation" as a mode of delivery, i.e., "declaiming" or "rant." For Senecan rant in particular, see Specka 1937 and Wanke 1964, pp. 117ff. On this topic, as on all questions pertaining to the formal aspects of Seneca's dramatic art, Canter 1925 provides much useful material but little in the way of an analysis of how the rhetorical stratagems are used to further the drama. Canter's treatment of declamation, singling out nine modes or procedures and illustrating them with texts from *HF* and *Tro*, is found on pp. 55ff.

1006ff.). This is dramatically and psychologically acceptable. It is also symptomatic of a sensibility that takes refuge from painful privacies in a longer view and thus, as it were by dissociation, confirms the larger unities. It can take the form of accusing a god or the gods for their share in the disaster, a move that is vastly more common in Senecan tragedy than in its Greek predecessors. It can take the shape of a general disinclination on the part of heroes and heroines to talk about themselves in the first person. "Was't Hamlet wronged Laertes? Never Hamlet . . ." gains some of its third-person clarity from its nature as an enthymeme, but the Senecan depersonalization has something to do with it also. In general, Shakespeare does not favor this particular legacy. It is instructive to compare a passage from *Thyestes* with one from *Richard III*, a play that is, of course, in some ways heir to the Senecan tradition. First the Shakespearean example. Richard says:

> I am determined to prove a villain,
> And hate the idle pleasures of these days.
> Plots I have laid, inductions dangerous . . .
> (1.1.32–34)

The strongly concentrated first-person reference can be paralleled in other British intrigue plays, from the moralities to Jacobean revenge drama. Contrast Seneca:

> aliquod audendum est nefas
> atrox, cruentum, tale quod frater meus
> suum esse mallet.
> It is time to commit a flagrant,
> A murderous transgression such as my brother
> Would wish to be his.
> (*Thy* 193–95)

The Aristotelian requirement of an agent bending his mind upon himself and his needs and structuring the future so as to conform to his wishes is abandoned in favor of a virtual dissolution, if not of the intentional self, at least of simple self-reference.

This temporary angling away from private experience to externalization would seem to be at odds with the phenomenon of self-dramatization discussed earlier. But in fact, as we shall see, the deflection is merely another way of measuring and plotting the distance between the suffering ego and the gallery before which the ego acts out its needs. And often the devastated ego is brought back into the picture, after the summons of aid or endorsement from the larger world has, predictably, come to naught:

> quas miser voces dabo
> questusque quos? quae verba sufficient mihi?
> How shall my suffering express itself?
> Will lamentations serve? Will words avail?
> (*Thy* 1036–37)

Thyestes recognizes his earlier imprecations for what they are: words, facundity, the transformation of powerful, but mute, feelings into a speech that by its very forms betrays its helplessness. The hero has turned into a messenger of his own fate. As messenger, he adopts a perspective in which the locale, the antecedents, and the divine powers count for at least as much as the motives of the agent. But the messenger is also a demon; his rage to be in tune with the world also comes through as a powerful delusion that he is in control of the world and can address plausible commands to its various constituencies. In the workings of the tirade, there is no appreciable difference between the utterances of a Juno (*HF* 1ff.) or a Fury (*Thy* 23ff.) and the speeches of Atreus or Oedipus. Atreus's first speech (*Thy* 176ff.) starts with a rebuke to himself, and then, via the nominative *iratus Atreus*, glides off into directives addressed to a cosmic armed force that includes his own *animus* (192) as one of its soldiers.

Both ancient and Renaissance rhetoricians interest themselves in the *figurae* associated with the expression of the passions, the *figurae patheticae* or *affectuosae: apostrophe, interrogatio, exclamatio, hyperbole*, and many more. All of them help to engineer the deflection. They serve to turn the speaker away from himself, in the direction of a universe that, he hopes, will respond sympathetically to his personal agony.[23] This turning away is precisely the move Hercules counsels each of the gods to make in the face of the monstrous Cerberus:

> aciem reflectat oraque in caelum erigat
> portenta fugiens.
> (*HF* 602–3)

The eyes must be averted and turned to the sky, the earth, or any one of the large cosmic sectors privileged to represent the environment.

23. For "Anrufungen an die Dinge der Natur" in Greek drama, see Schadewaldt 1926, pp. 64ff.

The syntax of deflection is an extraordinarily interesting topic.[24] I said earlier that Seneca's supposed rant is not a matter of diction but a function of his syntax and the emotional energies heralded by that syntax. The character of that syntax may be summarized by saying that it forsakes assertion or description for modalities. Of the many striking modes of the grammar of the tirade, six may be singled out and illustrated by pointing to the lines in the outburst of Thyestes cited above. First, there are the imperatives (1015), addressed to gods, to environmental bodies, and to the speaker's own organs and faculties as if they were independent of his control and cognate with the cosmic faculties (which, of course, as we have seen, they are). The vast bulk of imperatives in Seneca are not practicable orders or requests urged upon plausible executors, but "rhetorical" imperatives, that is, imaginary, inoperable, and channelled toward levels of authority unresponsive to the speaker's wishes, precisely because the distance between speaker and addressee is unfathomable.[25] Second, there are the jussives and injunctives (1016–19), third-person imperatives directed at the same addressees as the second-person imperatives, and equally unpromising, but by dint of the impersonality of the construction investing less of the agent's ego in the pronouncements. The third variety is one signalled by words like *debet* or *decet*, in the present or the past tense (1011–12), a formulation marking off the speaker's sense of what moral or esthetic standards would seem to demand. Like the other moves it pleads a demonic decorum: a monstrous event is invoked as befitting a sense of monstrous passion.

Next we find what is perhaps the most frequent syntactical move, the exclamatory question (1006–7, 1020), often in the negative (1007–

24. Cf. Fantham 1982, pp. 92–103, "Senecan Syntax and Features of Diction," and especially p. 97: "Every use of the *subjunctive* is represented, but independent subjunctives and usages with conditional and concessive force are particularly common." Madeleine Doran has done important work on the syntax of dramatic speech; see her 1976 book, especially her essays on if-clauses in *Othello* (chap. 3) and on the rhetoric of command in *Lear* (chap. 4). Her characterization of the language of *Lear* as a "rhetoric of fiat, pronouncement, objurgation, imprecation, petition, interrogation" is appropriate also to most of Seneca. It fits *Lear* because that play features a degree of cosmic *sumpatheia* in its language and its conceptions that affiliates it more than other Shakespearian plays with the Senecan drama of the period. It is evident, however, that where Shakespeare knows how to calibrate and vary the syntax of expostulation in tune with the specific schema of the drama, Seneca shows less suppleness, less due timing, a smaller range of the pitches of intensity. The aggressiveness of Thyestes and the defensiveness of Clytaemestra are cast in roughly the same syntactic and stylistic mold.

25. For a highly sophisticated treatment of syntactical moves in dramatic speech, see Mastronarde 1979, esp. chap. 1.

11), professing the surprise or resentment of the speaker at the failure of the world to have noticed his distress or to have moved in sympathy with it. Series of questions bundled together are a common occurrence in Greek choruses (for example, Eur. *Hipp.* 141–60), but their frequency in the speeches of individuals is a Roman innovation. The exclamatory question may also appear in the form of a pure exclamation: shame upon the external powers for not responding in condign fashion! The response hoped for is one of resonance or companionship in destruction. Finally, though less commonly, this dissatisfaction may be voiced in the form of future indicatives, predictions against hope that the powers will, in the end, respond fittingly after all.[26]

These are the basic rhetorical moves. Each of them may be constructed in its own subtly variant fashion; all, or at least some of them, are usually combined into the larger compound structure that constitutes the *Schreirede*, the heightened speech whereby the character (or the chorister) deflects his glance from his own person and frantically looks for sympathy in the presumptively "sympathetic" universe. The modal constructions are eminently suitable to express the angling away from the focus on the "I" that deflection demands. *Troades* is, as in so many other ways, distinctive in Seneca's dramatic corpus in that one of its characters, Ulixes, makes it his business to pinpoint and puncture the defensive maneuvers of Andromache, his frantic and inventive adversary.

Invocations of deities or cosmic powers are common enough in Greek tragedy, both on the part of the chorus and on the part of suffering individuals. They are usually brief, rapidly hurled at three or at most four addressees, and the deflective momentum is caught short by a steady insistence on the complaining or supplicatory "I." Calling out to the gods or to the cosmic powers is a beneficial cliché for one trying to master his emotion or trying to gain a distance from the enormity of his complaint. It often suffices to remind the speaker of the sheltering bond that ties him to the larger universe and legitimates his self-respect.

Euripides' Hekabe (*Hec.* 68ff.) invokes Zeus's lightning, Night, Earth, and the gods of the nether regions. The appeals are combined with references to the queen's own feelings; they form a comment on her dream of Polydorus, and a request to save him. By the same token,

26. For such future constructions, see Westmann 1961.

a series of interrogatives and exclamations (154–76), constituting Hekabe's response to the news that Polyxena will be sacrificed, and addressed, first, to herself, and then to potential helpers, to her Trojan companions in trouble, her aged foot, and Polyxena, clearly move within a narrow radius. The cries, objurgations, and appeals of Sophocles' Heracles (*Trach.* 983ff.), perhaps the model for *Hercules Oetaeus* 1131ff., are self-referential, and integrated into the dramatic action, in a way that the later writer's are not.[27] An appeal to the powers of heaven and earth, like those of Prometheus (Aesch. *Prom.* 88ff., 1091ff.), is a climactic indication of the speaker's momentary sense of abandonment. But, like its peers in other Greek plays, it tends to be brief and unadorned. And there are always those on the Greek stage who are ready to find fault with a language that is excessive. As the Euripidean Theseus (*Hipp.* 916ff., 925ff.) challenges mankind, complaining that there is no reliable index to separate the just from the unjust, Hippolytus criticizes his interrogative and exclamatory extravagancies (934–35), with no allowance for the substantial amount of plain argumentation embedded in Theseus's utterance.

The only figure in extant Greek drama whose speech resembles that of the Senecan heroes in their hour of anger or desperation is Aeschylus's Cassandra. But her role as a visionary puts her in a special class. What is more, her invocatory language is, at regular short intervals, spelled by the chorus's questioning, and thus never reaches the sustained pace of the Senecan tirade. Finally, we should remember that in Euripides the lyric outbursts of heroes and heroines are almost invariably followed by reflective and argumentative *logoi,* demonstrating that the imprecation or the complaint is merely a partial documentation of the sum of the character's feelings. The combination of aria and speech, or of passionate speech and discursive argument, keeps the cumulative utterance firmly within the boundaries of a stable self.

Contrast the monologue of Seneca's Clytaemestra (*Aga* 192–202). The series of commands, impersonal observations, questions, and third-person jussives in the passive voice successfully screens out any

27. Clemen 1961, pp. 216ff.: Sophocles expresses what goes on in Heracles' mind; Seneca catalogues suffering and decay. Sophocles' Heracles wants to die; Seneca's wants the world to collapse. Clemen has an interesting analysis of how Tudor laments differ from the Senecan analogues (pp. 211ff.). See also Borgmeier 1978, pp. 306–7, a comparison of *Thy* 192–94 with Shakespeare's *Richard III* 1.1.30–32. In Seneca, the address is to the *animus* and the statement is impersonal; in Shakespeare, the "I" holds center stage.

intimation of the first person. Even in the climactic vision (199–202) of her own and Agamemnon's deaths, the incorporation of her own self is hidden behind the use of the second-person *tuum,* just as Juno, in *Hercules Furens* (75–88), runs through her imperatives, questions, and jussives not to goad herself, but her *ira,* the fury she shares with the hellish forces swirling about her. Only the end of Juno's speech (109ff.), after she has raised the external powers to assist her, or rather to act in her place, settles down to an unrefracted sequence of first-person accents.

With the substitution of the second person for the first at *Agamemnon* 192–202 we may compare *Phaedra* 1183–90, part of Phaedra's death speech.

> non licuit animos iungere, at certe licet
> iunxisse fata. morere, si casta es, viro;
> si incesta, amori. coniugis thalamos petam
> tanto impiatos facinore? hoc derat nefas,
> ut vindicato sancta fruereris toro.
> o mors amoris una sedamen mali,
> o mors pudoris maximum laesi decus,
> confugimus ad te: pande placatos sinus.
>
> There was no leave to join our hearts, But now
> Our destinies may meet. Die for your lord,
> If you are guiltless; if you have sinned, for love.
> Am I to claim my husband's chamber, stained
> By what I have done? All that is lacking now
> Is that you pledge your innocence and savor
> Your wedded bliss! No! Death, we turn to you;
> You alone provide the cure of a desperate love,
> The splendid refuge of an injured shame:
> Death, spread your soothing arms!

Here the first person is not entirely bracketed, but the acrobatics of the personal grammar are equally impressive. Within the succession of a few brief lines, the queen hides her concerns behind the impersonal *licet,* the second-person imperative, the first-person singular deliberative, the second-person conditional, and the first-person plural. The same variability of personal reference marks the Senecan tirade in many other instances, and on occasion has worried scholars.[28] At *Medea* 397ff. and 426ff. the heroine's pronouncements alternate be-

28. Tarrant's rejection of *Aga* 545–46 and 548 (1976, pp. 278–79) is in part owing to his dissatisfaction with the change from indirect speech to direct speech, from *se* to *me.*

tween the first and the second persons, a remarkable departure from Medea's singular preoccupation with her resolute and scheming "I." This shifting back and forth between the first and second persons,[29] between the singular and the plural, and between various modes of the verb is the Senecan way of promoting, even in the case of the purposeful Medea, the lesson that fixity is eroded in a drama answering to *sumpatheia*. The referential grammar signals the inevitable lack of stability, *das Zerrissene*, in the lifeforce of the agent. Stoic psychology and Stoic science meet, as they should, on the common ground of the proposition that a passionate soul is at odds with itself. Euripides furnished the tools for dramatizing internal conflict, including, on occasion, the hero's or, more likely, heroine's apostrophe of her (or his) spirit or heart. Seneca universalizes the tendency and builds it into the cosmic panorama of his *Schreirhetorik*.[30]

Deflection is the common standard of the Senecan tirade. Phaedra's beautifully controlled confession (*Phae* 592–671) is set off by the flare-up of the astounded Hippolytus (671–97), a succession of exclamations, jussives, and the other figures I have mentioned: Jove, send down your thunderbolt! May the world collapse and go retrograde! Sun, hide your face! and so forth. Again, after invoking various divinities and spirits, and picturing Jason's exile abroad, Medea (*Med* 37ff.) girds herself for action: she will slaughter the victims on the altar. What follows are various deflective moves. It may be useful to log the sequence and label the moves (the possessive pronouns in brackets are not in the Latin):

> [My] Heart, inspect the entrails, cast off fear. [imperative]
> Corinth will see Colchian crime. [future third person]
> [My] Mind is stirring up evils. [present third person]
> I have mentioned trifles, what I used to do as a girl.
> Let a heavier grief rise. [jussive]
> Motherhood warrants a greater crime. [*decet*; cf. above, p. 182]
> Rage, gird up for death. [imperative]
> Let the tale of your rejection match that of your wedding. [jussive]
> How will you leave the man? [question; future second person]
> Break [your] idleness. [imperative]
> Let the home won by crime be left by crime. [jussive]
>
> (*Med* 40–55)

29. In a different context, of greater epistemological consequence, compare the play between *je* and *moi* in modern French thought coming out of Diderot.

30. Tarrant (1976, p. 195, on *Aga* 108f.), concedes: "Philosophical overtones are perhaps not to be ruled out . . . : S. may be alluding to the assent of the *animus* requ[illegible]"

This is the final section of a much longer speech, Medea's first in the play, relatively subdued because of its initial position, but already marked all the way through with the signatures of deflection. As we have mentioned, Medea, of all of Seneca's heroines, is more likely to speak in her own person, to be unsqueamish about the "I," than others. The fourth line of the summary presented above (48–49) is one such reminder of her capacity for introspection and prideful revelation of self. Even so, she lets her *animus* or her *mens* speak for her. The addresses to herself in the second person suggest that this is not a simple matter of rhetorical synecdoche but part of the Senecan rhythm of heroic deflection. It is as if the heroes have to assure themselves of the vitality of a world external to themselves, or at least not initially identified with themselves, and presumably controlled from the outside, before they can face up to their own troubles. Personal interests are weighed off against larger concerns, and enveloped in them before their rawness is ready for exposure. When Theseus employs jussives to dispose of Phaedra:

> istam terra defossam premat,
> gravisque tellus impio capiti incubet.
>
> Let her be plunged deep in the ground,
> And may the earth crush down her villainous head!
>
> (*Phae* 1279–80)

he is arranging for a concrete and lasting envelopment of the sort the Senecan heroes call for again and again as they bid nature and the natural elements to come to their aid or bury them.

It would be otiose to cite further instances. We should mention, in passing, that deflection, the dramatized interaction between the struggling or decomposing self and the living cosmos, is at the bottom of another feature of Senecan dramatic writing that has often been commented on: the slowness of the action.[31] There is, properly speaking, no room for action, but only for anticlimactic events stipulated to occur after the language of "let there be" has created its own peculiar effect. One line of criticism has explained the poverty of the action by arguing that Stoicism values the will more than the deed;[32] hence Senecan drama favors analysis of mental operations over action and a substantial plot line. This seems to me mistaken. Greek drama and Senecan drama do not really differ in this respect. Both of them em-

31. Herrmann 1924, p. 537.

32. Knoche 1941.

phasize motivation, intention, value judgment, the proclamation of a human commitment. In both traditions, action, the performance of deeds and their consequences, is kept at arm's length from the center of the stage and is largely narrated rather than staged. What makes Senecan tragedy so special, and so slow, is not the focus on the human will but the evaluation of the pressure of the environment upon that will.

In Greek drama, action is suggested, and at the same time displaced, by the author's play with intentions, with memories, and with the clash of contrary wills. In Seneca, the intentions, the memories, and the wills are themselves subjected to the bodily stricture of a universe that is felt to be both kindred and hostile, both responsive and diseased; hence the promise of action is infinitely delayed. Critics have spoken of the futility of action,[33] the disconnectedness of the drama, the dissolution of the dramatic body.[34] The usual explanation is to put the blame on the rhetoric, on an irresponsible or at least excessive recourse to declamatory speech, as if speech were an impediment to the dramaturgy.[35] But in Seneca the rhetoric is our most telling clue for an understanding of the dramatic design. The slow-motion reel of Deianira's account of how she received the drugged blood from Nessus (*HO* 491ff.) gets its stationary quality, if not from the language, from the vision of the world expressed by that language, a world in which wild nature, myth, and human feelings jostle each other in frightened conjunction. The interest is not in temporal sequence but in spatial thronging and accumulation.[36]

Seneca does not give us the progression from beginning to middle to end. His prologues preempt the plot; his choruses are only in the rarest cases organized with a view to what comes before and after; and he

33. Henry and Walker 1965.

34. Regenbogen 1961, p. 430: "Der Dramenkörper löst sich . . . auf." Cf. Friedrich 1933 (who, however, exempts *Med* from the charge of *Auflösung*), and Tarrant 1976, pp. 3ff., 217. Attempts to assert the unity of the plot structure of individual Senecan dramas have, by and large, been unsuccessful. It should be said, however, that plot structure, the causal filiation of human design and action, is not a necessary feature of dramatic quality. The approach of Marx (1932, pp. 57ff.), followed or modified by others, dividing the Senecan drama into predictable blocks defined by mood and psychological dynamics, does not, to my mind, carry greater conviction. Perhaps the closest modern analogue to Seneca's dramaturgy is to be found in Maeterlinck's early work, the *drame statique*, about man waiting to be caught up by death.

35. Altman 1978, chap. 8, in its own way an informative discussion of the uses of rhetoric in Senecan drama. Heninger (1960, p. 183) finds that Chapman is keenly sensitive to speech but inattentive to larger structure.

36. Owen (1970) has some good remarks on the collapsing of time distinctions to gain dramatic ends.

permits himself revealing inversions, as when the raging Hercules desires first to storm heaven and afterwards to take the Mycenaean fortress: a *proteron husteron* that makes no sense as a structural unit.[37] It is discontinuities and inversions like these, and the disregard of action per se, that have facilitated the traditional view that Seneca did not mean his dramas to be performed. What more plausible proposal than to say that these plays are to be savored as lyric poems, as moving pictures for the imagination, rather than as staged dramas, inasmuch as a staged drama (so the conventional wisdom holds) depends on an orderly and compelling chain of purpose and action. It need hardly be pointed out, at this point in the twentieth century, that the modern experience of drama has dealt a death blow to this legacy of Aristotelian functionalism and nineteenth-century realism.

The slowing down and disassembling of the machinery, then, are part of the Senecan tragic vision. The speakers are detached from their moorings in a dramatic curve because the space that embraces them means more to them than their developing relation to other speakers. I said earlier that every speaker is his own messenger. Messengers are best equipped to reflect the disregard of dramatic momentum. Whether it is Talthybius rehearsing the epiphany of Achilles (*Tro* 168ff.), Theseus dwelling on Hercules' triumph in the underworld (*HF* 662ff.), or Eurybates detailing the storm that overtook the victors at Troy (*Aga* 462ff.), the grinding slowness of the report, and its brake upon anything that might be regarded as the plot line, are part and parcel of a grand system of deflection.

That the hero wishes nature to experience the same turbulence that he suffers in himself is symptomatic of the purpose of the outward glance. Greek heroes and choruses seek from the cosmic powers cited the assurance they have fleetingly surrendered. Whether marked as prayers or as laments, the Greek invocations are mechanisms of contemplation and of composure. The established cadences of choral inventories, often listing cult centers and cult areas, generate a mood of certitude. Preferably they constitute the troughs between dramatic climaxes. In entreating the far-flung potencies of their world, including the vengeful demons of the underworld, a Senecan Hercules or Oedipus, or a Juno, can no longer hope for the recourse the cry is designed to elicit. Nature is no more reliable, no more powerful, than the agent

37. Friedrich 1967, p. 104, commenting on *HF* 955ff.

who appeals to it. In a sense, these appeals are now superfluous, or tautological. The imperatives and subjunctives might equally well be indicatives, descriptive rather than incantatory. For after all the world cannot do other than conspire with the shattered human life. This the hero knows, or divines. But the modal constructions are demanded by the tragic vision of loss. Seneca is unthinkable without the menacing fervor, the enervating length of the inventory, and the extraordinary surge of expressive means, with its imperatives and the subjunctives and anaphoras that mark the abortiveness of the appeals. The syntax of the vain hope of salvation is a kind of atavism, underscoring the impression of turbulence by the factitiousness of the ritual gesture. In his impotence the speaker takes refuge with an equally impotent nature. The congeries of futilities sharpens the impression of a tragedy that is cosmic as well as personal.

The abortiveness of the desire to embrace nature is endorsed even in the more limited strategies of the rhetoric. The art of the trope, of emblems and similes, is a case in point. Walter Benjamin says of Daniel von Lohenstein, one of the authors studied in his book about the German baroque dramatists, that "No other writer approached him in his use of the technique of blunting any tendency to ethical reflection by means of metaphorical analogies between history and the cycle of nature."[38] Benjamin believes that Lohenstein, like others of his period, had large compendia of analogies and emblems at his disposal for extensive and often random use in his works. Such compendia go back to Andrea Alciati's seminal compilation of 1531, which itself has its roots in ancient theory and practice.[39]

When Balurdo in act 1, scene 3 of *Antonio's Revenge* speaks of "an abominable ghost of a misshapen simile," this is an acknowledgment that the sympathetic imaginings of Antonio can, in a spirit of mockery,

38. Walter Benjamin 1928, p. 90; the translation is that of Osborne 1977, p. 89. For an early critique of the indiscriminate use of comparisons by baroque dramatists, see Breitinger 1740, p. 224. For "exaggerated comparisons" in Seneca that influenced Elizabethan drama, see Cunliffe 1893, p. 19, who cites six passages from the Senecan corpus that served as models.

39. Mario Praz 1964. Praz cites more than six hundred authors of emblem books. For some criticisms of Benjamin's view, see Schöne 1968, pp. 14, 130. The ancient theories of the simile are studied in McCall 1969.

be understood to amount to nothing more than formal embellishments. Seneca's management of comparison and analogy has been studied by a number of critics,[40] many of whom accept the perspective of Balurdo. One scholar comes to the conclusion that Seneca's imagery, though grandiose, systematic, and forceful, is not intrinsic to the specific thoughts and feelings it is designed to illustrate. But he grants that it furnishes a comprehensive commentary upon the action.[41] He glosses its systematic quality by dividing the material along three lines, into "conceptual images," "natural or concrete images," and mixed types. The taxonomy is debatable, but the conclusion that Seneca's pictorial imagination is deployed in aid of a larger dramatic vision is persuasive and squares with the picture I have been developing. It is not my purpose to add to the large literature on the Senecan simile, but simply to indicate, in summary fashion, that in this matter also, *sumpatheia* exacts its toll.

Not that this should cause much surprise. The art of the simile in Seneca derives from the conventions of the epic. At *Troades* 794ff., for instance, Andromache, talking to Astyanax just before he is taken from her, compares his position in relation to Ulixes and herself to that of a calf pressing against its mother to escape the fangs of a lion. This Olympian expansiveness, making Andromache into an epic poet rather than a frantic mother, is characteristic of the medium. In his capacity as his own messenger, every major Senecan character tends to be both lamenter, introspector, essayist, and epic poet.[42] Ulixes is, in this respect, a more narrowly conceived, more purposeful agent, analogous to the nurses and retainers who seek to confine the heroes and heroines to a pacific course of action. The hallmark of his speech is argument, fortified with exhortation. He has less need for comparisons and tropes whose function it is to broaden the perspective beyond the

40. Pratt 1963; Zwierlein 1966, pp. 117ff.; Landfester 1974; Liebermann 1974, chap. 2; Primmer 1976; Henry 1985, pp. 141ff.; cf. also Owen 1968 and the beautiful comments of Herington (1966, pp. 436ff.), on Seneca's visual imagination. See also the splendid remarks of Tarrant (1985, pp. 46–48) on the imagery of *Thy.* Once again Canter 1925 collects a mass of materials.

41. Pratt 1963; see now also Pratt 1983, pp. 32–33. Tarrant (1976, p. 184) finds the simile of *Aga* 63ff., "essentially decorative; like other extended comparisons in Seneca, however, it is allowed to develop beyond the needs of the context and must in the end be choked off with an awkward reminder of the object of comparison." This reads like a parodic evaluation of the Homeric simile; what is more, can decorativeness and excessiveness go hand in hand?

42. Good remarks on messengers in Seneca in Liebermann 1974, pp. 58ff.

terms of the business at hand. Choruses, on the other hand, are master employers of whole sequences of comparisons as they comment on their understanding of the dramatic situation. One of the most elaborate series of this sort is found at *Thyestes* 577–95, where the chorus of Mycenaeans hymn what they conceive to be the calm after the storm by means of a long string of maritime images.

Earlier (p. 45 above) I had something to say about the use of the simile by Stoic philosophers. It was found that the earlier Stoics favored imagery taken from ordinary affairs, especially the life of the household.[43] In this respect Senecan drama departs from the Stoic model, for a very good reason. The imagery of Stoic philosophy proper, in all its branches, is designed to illustrate points of doctrine or phases of an argument without at the same time opening up wider horizons of interest. Its art of the simile is, to use a common classification, centripetal; it aims to confine the imagination of the learner tightly to the contours of the item discussed. The epic simile as fashioned by Homer in the *Iliad* is, at its most characteristic and powerful junctures, centrifugal.[44] Its effect is to draw the thinking of the listener into a global reality, of which the event or item in the narrative is felt to be an organic (or, occasionally, recalcitrant) part. There are moments in the epic when the impression is gained that the point of the comparison is not one of subservience, to assist us in seeing the comparandum more clearly or more poignantly, but that the link between comparatum and comparandum, the simile and the narrative item, is one of parity, and functions to make us intuit a more inclusive truth. The famous passage in *Iliad* 4 (141–47), where Menelaus's skin is grazed by an arrow and the light trickle of blood generates a picture of Oriental women coloring ivory cheek pieces for horses, conjures up an ineffable sense of preciousness and delicacy that is, as it were, caught in two of its possible manifestations. Here the illustration brought in is one from household activities rather than the larger natural scene. The idea communicated is one of calm beauty rather than of shared energy. But the principle of the widening horizon, of transcending the specific contours of the comparandum, is the same.

More than his predecessors, Seneca inundates his drama with epic

43. Rolke 1975.

44. The best book on the Homeric simile is still Fränkel 1977. See also Riezler 1936 and Moulton 1977.

similes and analogies. There are as many from inanimate nature as from the life of the animals. The winds and other meteorological phenomena are obvious candidates for exploitation. Scroop's

> Like an unseasonable stormy day,
> Which makes the silver rivers drown their shores,
> As if the world were all dissolv'd to tears;
> So high above his limits swells the rage
> Of Bolingbroke . . .
>
> (*Richard II* 3.2.107–11)

is Senecan (including the small touch of pathetic fallacy in the third line), as is the nervous cataloguing of social and political unrest that follows upon these lines. Just as the comparisons in the *Iliad*, the *Aeneid*, and Lucan's *Pharsalia* complement the scenic limitations of the battlefield or the council chamber with their enlarging vistas, so Seneca's similes, probing, serial, supercharged, back up the vision of a world doomed to integration.

They differ from Homer's subtly allusive ventures in their combination of contrivance and obviousness. The images introduced are usually transparent in their relevance, models of demonstration that a Stoic scientist would have accepted for his own purposes, for the illumination of the objects of ethics, physics, and anthropology. As Atreus (*Thy* 497–504), in an aside, compares his anger at seeing his brother to the controlled fury of a hunting dog, the details of the extended simile may remind us of the elaborate constructs whereby Homer achieves his decentralization of focus. But in Seneca transparency remains the rule; as the dog trails his quarry the emphasis rests throughout on the very same *ira* that Seneca, and his Atreus, have difficulty defining. Likewise, when Ulixes (*Tro* 537–45) points out the dangers of leaving Hector's son, a future Hector *redivivus*, alive, the force of his similes, citing the parallels of bulls, trees, and embers, all of them coming alive again in the second generation, is cumulative and unmistakable. Seneca can be more skilful. At *Thyestes* 707ff. and 732ff., the vicious animal similes that go with the murder scene take us from initial indecision to the unleashed madness of wholesale slaughter. The mirroring of the progression of the event in the development of the similes is, once again, a Homeric legacy. But because it is inherited, and because its realization rarely rises above convention, and because of the frequency of the maneuver, the Senecan simile does not always, on the face of it, elicit our admiration.

We should note, however, that it takes its place within Seneca's greater purpose of portraying a world imperilled, and knowing that it is imperilled, by the effects of *sumpatheia*. The very frequency of the device is an index of its importance in the construction of a world of somber unity. In the few examples of similes I have cited, I have restricted myself to the animal world. Elsewhere many of the facets of the horizontal and the vertical dimensions of which I have spoken are taken up in the similes, and once again meteorological and astronomical phenomena are prominently represented. And because of the contexts in which they are developed, the similes share in the apocalyptic tenor of the tragic impulse. Whereas in Homer the simile contributes to the appreciation of the beauty and the vitality of a stable and meaningful order, in Seneca it is drawn into the cataloguing of an environment in which energy has come apart and meaning is dismantled by the running down of a world clock driven by misunderstanding, passion, and crime.

This is true even when the manifest purpose of the simile is to evoke the abatement of motion and danger, as in the elaborate sequence at *Thyestes* 577ff. We are meant to behold the calm after the storm; the effect of the compound series, technically the old Homeric scheme, is to increase the sense of unease and fear by the ingenious expedient of featuring the storm along with the calm that is supposed to have taken its place. Wild nature and human society, legend and commerce, meteorology and politics are brought together in a frightening mixture, within a choral ode (for once the musical term is more appropriate than the usual "essay"). The interfacing of reality and trope in this baroque structure is exceptional, but the basic pattern is one that generally defines Seneca's use of the simile. For, as I have suggested earlier, Senecan rhetoric does not recognize tropes as tropes; comparison does not pit a primary reality against a merely illustrative prop. The world of the vehicle joins with the world of the tenor in a complex of coextension. *Sumpatheia* endorses both the tension and the virtual identity of *comparatum* and *comparandum,* and encourages the proliferation of the mechanism of analogy. Like the catalogues, the similes crowd in upon the speakers as reminders of an environment in which man is both at home and an alien, and which is himself and his powers writ large.

An even more important rhetorical index of Seneca's undertaking is his unusual handling of the old figure called *ex adynatou*, or more simply *adynaton;* in Latin, *impossibile.*[45]

> The chiefest God, first mover of that sphere,
> Enchas'd with thousands ever shining lamps,
> Will sooner burn the glorious frame of heaven
> Than it should so conspire my overthrow.
> (Marlowe, *1 Tamburlaine* 4.2.8–11)

The *impossibile* is the figure that associates the likelihood of an action or an event with the impregnability of natural law. The famous paradigm is the affirmation of Achilles in *Iliad* 2.234–41; he points to the speaker's scepter: by this dry staff, which will never again grow leaves or shoots . . . and then proceeds to the prediction sanctioned by the appeal to immutable nature: there will come a day when you will need me. The certainty of the prediction or avowal is rooted in the assurance that a living piece of wood, once it has been stripped of life, will not germinate anew. In Homer and in all the early authors who use this rhetorical flourish, the effect of the figure is secure; the natural law and the impossibility of breaching it are unquestioned, and the world of man derives a measure of security from that higher power.

This reliance on the unbreakability of natural law is not entirely unknown in Seneca. A number of cautionary choruses contrast the orderly nature of the cosmos with the disorderly morals of man. More typically, however, Seneca withdraws the certainty. On the contrary, the stronger the appeal to the supposed fixity, the more alarming becomes the suspicion that a terrible irony is at work, and that the oath, hope, or imprecation is misguided from the start. The energy read into the cosmic analogue is felt to be so sweeping as to spill over and dislocate the affairs of this world. Once again, the law is destabilized by the consequences of *sumpatheia* and *krasis.*[46]

Let me begin with a choral passage at the center of *Hercules Oetaeus*,

45. See Henry 1985, pp. 14–20, 197–200, where various types of *adynata* are discussed and tabulated. If we call the action or event contemplated *x*, the following are the main types of the *impossibile:* (1) *x* will no more happen or is no more true than the impossible; (2) *x* will happen when the impossible happens; (3) *x* is like the impossible; (4) the impossible will happen before *x* comes about. Related to the figure, though of slightly weaker force, is its positive congener: (5) as long as natural regularity prevails, *x* will remain true.

46. For something like an *impossibile*—in this case a cumulative sequence of similes—aborted in the Stoic manner, see *Troilus and Cressida* 3.2.165–88.

recited after Deianira has rushed off to die, and before the expiring Hercules is brought on stage. The chorus memorializes the rule, said to be the rule of Orpheus, that nothing lasts forever, by demonstrating what would happen if the rule were overturned. The basic scheme is the conventional one: just as it is impossible for the natural order to be subverted, so what is born, is mortal:

> quod natum est, properat mori.
> (*HO* 1099)

The *impossibilia* are given, not as conditionals, but in the future tense, with awed questions terminating the series.

> iam, iam legibus obrutis
> mundo cum veniet dies,
> australis polus obruet
> quidquid per Libyam iacet
> et sparsus Garamas tenet;
> arctous polus obruet
> quidquid subiacet axibus
> et siccus Boreas ferit.
> amisso trepidus polo
> Titan excutiet diem.
> caeli regia concidens
> ortus atque obitus trahet
> atque omnis pariter deos
> perdet mors aliqua et chaos,
> et mors fata novissima
> in se constituet sibi.
> quis mundum capiet locus?
> discedet via Tartari,
> fractis ut pateat polis?
> an quod dividit aethera
> a terris spatium sat est
> et mundi nimium malis?
> quis tantum capiet nefas
> fati, quis superos locus?
> pontum Tartara sidera
> regna unus capiet tria?[47]
>
> Soon when the day arrives on which
> The laws of the world are overthrown,
> The southern sky will fall upon
> The vast expanse of Africa
> And lock the natives into place.
> The northern sky will fall upon
> The lands that lie beneath the pole

47. In line 1125 I read Leo's *superos* against Zwierlein's *superi*.

> Parched by the icy Boreas.
> And once the sky is gone, the sun,
> Alarmed, will put the day to rout.
> The celestial palace will collapse
> And with it east and west will drown.
> A thrust of death and chaos will
> Destroy the crowded host of gods;
> And in the end death will devise
> A final ruin for itself.
> What space will domicile the world?
> Will Tartarus open its doors
> To host the broken firmaments
> Or is the space that separates
> The heavens from the earth enough,
> Too large indeed, for the world's ills?
> What station will welcome the horror
> Of destiny, and house the gods?
> Shall one terrain hold three great realms,
> The sea, the stars, and Tartarus?
> (*HO* 1102–27)

I have cited the passage at length because its poetic aridity shows with unusual sharpness what the Senecan scheme can become in the hands of a fussy imitator. Ostensibly the chorus develops the picture of the world going under as a window into the horrors attending upon the cancellation of the truth that all must die. But poetically, the cataclysm, designed to be counternatural, a necessary consequence of the breaking of natural law—*legibus obrutis* (1102)—veers from its objective and turns into a cosmic corollary of the deaths of the heroes. The impossibles have become possibles, not to say necessaries. The Senecan view of the world simply cannot accept the fixity of the natural law upon which the figure of the *impossibile* is founded.

A similar use of the figure, though in a minor key, and with the cosmic impossibles converted into human implausibilities, is found in *Phoenissae*. After a vigorous denunciation of his sons, on whose behalf Antigone has been pleading with him, Oedipus confesses that nothing else could move him but his daughter's entreaties:

> hic Oedipus Aegaea transnabit freta
> iubente te, flammasque quas Siculo vomit
> de monte tellus igneos volvens globos
> excipiet ore seque serpenti offeret,
> quae saeva furto nemoris Herculeo furit;
> iubente te praebebit alitibus iecur,
> iubente te vel vivet.

If you command, your father Oedipus
Will swim the Aegean sea; will drink the flames
Which the Sicilian mountain belches forth
Along with molten lava; will breast the serpent
Which, mindful of the golden apples stolen
Persists in its rage; will, if you so command,
Offer his liver to the vultures, or even—live.
(*Phoe* 313–19)

The reference to himself in the third person, the bizarre inventory of near-impossibles, their extraction from myths that have nothing to do with the tale of Oedipus, and the shock effect of the final conceit, all of these mark the passage as a further attestation that the old appeal to natural fixities has become fatefully undermined.

In his own witty way, Ovid anticipates the move by playing with the wonders of mythology in *Tristia:*

credam prius ora Medusae
Gorgonis anguineis cincta fuisse comis,
esse canes utero sub virginis, esse Chimaeram,
a truce quae flammis separet angue leam,
. . . . . .
haec ego cuncta prius, quam te, carissime, credam
mutatum curam deposuisse mei.

I would rather believe
That Medusa's face was ringed with serpent locks,
That a virgin's belly trails with cubs, and that
Chimaera lives, a flaming tanglement
Of defiant snake and lioness,
. . . . . .
All this, my friend, I would rather believe
Than that you have changed your feelings toward me.
(*Tristia* 4.7.11–20)

Credam, used in both movements of the figure, is the operative word. Which is the more believable truth, that his friend will stay true to him, or that the creatures of myth are endowed with unusual shapes? After all, in Ovid's poetic world mythology carries an authority that is hard to gainsay. In its fashion, Ovid's use of the *impossibile* is just as subversive as Seneca's, though less frightening. But compare this Senecan instance. At *Phaedra* 418ff., which is part of the nurse's prayer to Diana-Hecate-Luna to help her make Hippolytus accede to Phaedra's desires, she argues: may he fall in love, just as you will always be unclouded in the night, and as you will never be brought down by Thessalian magic, and as you will never grant your favors to a herdsman. The combination of mythological playfulness with the illusoriness of magic and the airy effacement of the reality of clouds has its own charm. Together these instances of counter-reality do not suffice to set up the *impossibile* that would lend vigor to the nurse's wish. And in fact their very counter-reality is in question.

Thyestes gives us a more characteristic handling of the figure:

amat Thyesten frater? aetherias prius
perfundet Arctos pontus et Siculi rapax
consistet aestus unda et Ionio seges
matura pelago surget et lucem dabit
nox atra terris, ante cum flammis aquae,
cum morte vita, cum mari ventus fidem
foedusque iungent.

Does Atreus love his brother? Sooner does
The Ocean swamp the celestial Bears, sooner
The rampant flood of Sicily stand still,
A full-grown harvest rise from the western sea,
Black night light up the earth; and sooner will
A covenant come to pass between fire and water,
Between death and life, or hurricane and sea.
(*Thy* 476–82)

Thyestes, reluctant to return to the court, but weakening before his sons' cajoling, doubts that Atreus could be favorably disposed toward him. On the surface it looks as if Thyestes were trying to say, in the old manner, that a reconciliation between his brother and himself is unthinkable. But the Stoic substance of his pronouncements, the cumulative dissolution of natural polarities, the grim joy in the apocalyptic neutralization of regularity, augur the very opposite, and one imagines that somehow, latently, we are given to understand that he clings to a paradoxical hope. The singular conceit that the Sicilian turbulence might be congealed, coming as it does within a series of images pointing in the opposite direction, compounds the overwhelming sense of disruption. Because the hero, or at least his speech, knows that nature can, and in the end must, leave its grooves and turn in upon itself, the *impossibilia* virtually guarantee reconciliation. At the same time this reconciliation, should it come about, takes on a monstrous coloring. Thus the figure of the *impossibile* documents the ability of *sumpatheia* to give with one hand what it takes back with the other. It enriches the perceptions and expands consciousness, but invalidates assurance and lays bare secret hopes and fears. The crumbling psyche communes with its surroundings, on a proposed level of parity that t

out to be quite true, but not in the sense intended on the surface. In the present instance, the suspicion that the impossibles are indeed possibles allows Thyestes to hope against hope that Atreus does indeed love him. The ironical reversal, the brutal revelation of Atreus's hatred, returns the figure to the dimensions of its conventional usage, as if cosmic *contagio* were, despite all contrary indications throughout the text, inoperative.

Seneca seems capable, as I have said, of employing the figure in a straightforward, traditional manner. The positive formula termed version (5) in note 45 above comes into play in *Medea:*

> dum terra caelum media libratum feret
> nitidusque certas mundus evolvet vices
> numerusque harenis derit et solem dies,
> noctem sequentur astra, dum siccas polus
> versabit Arctos, flumina in pontum cadent,
> numquam meus cessabit in poenas furor
> crescetque semper.
>
> While, centrally poised, the earth will yet support
> The floating heavens, and the brilliant world
> Threads forth its constant seasons, and the grains
> Of sand are numberless, and day is paired
> With sun, and night with stars; and while the sky
> Revolves the thirsting Bears, and rivers drain
> Into the sea, my wrath will grow forever
> And strive for punishment.
>
> (*Med* 401–7)

Here Medea, relying on the regular behavior of the astronomical and meteorological entities studied by the scientists, asserts the enduring quality of her fury. But again, is this procedure as innocuous as it looks? The rarity of assertions of cosmic normalcy in the dramas exerts its pressure upon the present semblance of confidence. Since the texts, in their totality, fall far short of certifying that normalcy, what is Medea telling us? Medea is a more consistently resolute character, less given to self-doubt or hallucination, than other Senecan principals, but perhaps there is a hint that she has not yet quite reached the final authority that identifies her *furor* with a world in collapse, visually demonstrated by the miracle of the snake chariot and confirmed by Jason's last words:

> per alta vade spatia sublime aetheris,
> testare nullos esse, qua veheris, deos.

> Ride through the aerial spaces of the sky
> And mark that, where you go, the gods are dead.
>
> (*Med* 1026–27)

Megara's use of the figure also appears to come close to the standard mold:

> egone ut parentis sanguine aspersam manum
> fratrumque gemina caede contingam? prius
> extinguet ortus, referet occasus diem,
> pax ante fida nivibus et flammis erit
> et Scylla Siculum iunget Ausonio latus,
> priusque multo vicibus alternis fugax
> Euripus unda stabit Euboica piger.
> patrem abstulisti, regna, germanos, larem
> patrium—quid ultra est? una res superest mihi
> fratre ac parente carior, regno ac lare:
> odium tui, quod esse cum populo mihi
> commune doleo: pars quota ex illo mea est?
>
> Am I to touch the hand soiled with the blood
> My father and my brothers shed in their twin deaths?
> Sooner the east will quench the day, the west
> Will light it; sooner will fire and snow make peace
> And Scylla join her southern shores with those
> Of Italy; sooner will the alternating
> Euboean current cease and stand transfixed.
> You have taken from me all I cherish: my father,
> My kingdom, brothers, my ancestral home.
> Could you do more? One thing is left, dearer
> To me than brother, father, kingdom or my home:
> My hate for you, which, I regret, I have
> To share with all. How small a part is mine!
>
> (*HF* 372–83)

Once again, the passionate sufferer appeals to the invariability of natural processes, in the realms of astronomy, of geography, and the play of the elements, to ratify the survival and permanence of her hatred of the tyrant, her only regret being that she has to share that hatred with the general populace. In what follows she assures Lycus of the certainty of his defeat by a god, reminding him of the miseries and cruel deaths of earlier rulers of Thebes. This is a risky proceeding, since it appears to invest him with an authority analogous to theirs. But disregarding the political awkwardness of that gambit, Megara's *odium,* and her resentment at having to share it, depart wildly from her traditional role as a virtuous and dignified sufferer. Seneca has recast her in the role of a

hater, and a jealous hater at that. Does such a character, unstable and torn as she must be by Stoic and Senecan principles, have the moral right to call to witness the solidity of natural law? And since we know that the sanction invoked is moot, that the course of the sun is not eternally fixed and that the perpetuity of the currents of the Euripus is subject to the perils of *contagio*, what remains of the conventional force of the *impossibile*?

A very special instance of the abortiveness of the reliance upon impossibles is presented in *Thyestes*. Just after the chorus has conjured up an extraordinarily extended and formidable picture of the collapse of the celestial system and the breakdown of the zodiac (*Thy* 789–884), Atreus steps forward and declares:

> aequalis astris gradior et cunctos super
> altum superbo vertice attingens polum.
> nunc decora regni teneo, nunc solium patris.
> dimitto superos; summa votorum attigi.
> bene est, abunde est, iam sat est etiam mihi.
> sed cur satis sit?
> . . . . . .
> utinam quidem tenere fugientes deos
> possem, et coactos trahere, ut ultricem dapem
> omnes viderent.
>
> My reach equals the stars, and higher yet
> My head proudly abuts the lofty sky.
> The royal emblems, the paternal lands are mine.
> Who needs the gods? I have reached my life's desire.
> It is good, yes, more than good; I have all I want.
> But truly: all?
> . . . . . .
> I wish I could retrieve the gods in flight
> And force them all to view the bloody feast.
>
> (*Thy* 885–95)

This is not, strictly speaking, a case of *impossibilia*. But the principles involved in this richly informative sequence are the same. The crimes reported have moved the chorus to announce that the world, especially the stars, are out of joint. This is a canonical declaration of the workings of *sumpatheia*. Immediately thereafter Atreus states, pridefully, that he is now on equal footing with the stars, and in fact stands above them, with his head touching the summit of the cosmos. Such a declaration takes it for granted that the order over which he affirms his superiority, or with which he matches himself, is stable enough to serve as a basis for comparison. He proceeds to equate his cosmic eminence

with his secure possession of the land of his father, but also with a summary rejection of the gods. This remarkable jumble of premises, dimensions, and emotions is bare of any logical consistency, and immediately resolves itself in an admission that perhaps all is not as it should be (890). And he proceeds to wish that the gods, whom he has just rejected, could be compelled to witness his impending act of vengeance. To any audience privileged to watch this drama, the successive steps of Atreus's speech must make it clear that his certainty of himself is a sham, that the authorities to which he appeals are equally unreliable, and that the man and his world are caught in a reciprocal web of fallibility and corruption.

Hyperbole, restlessness, arrogance, delusion, malfunction, and despair are the obligatory expressions of the relation between man and the world in which he is condemned to live, which duplicates his own being. *Schreikatalog*, deflection, simile, imprecation, and *impossibile* work together to remind us that in a drama motivated by the assumptions of Stoic science, man has lost his freedom to chart his own moral course. The Stoic scientist undoes the Stoic sage. Against the background of the more commonly accepted version of what Stoicism means, the conclusion is inevitable: Stoic drama, as Seneca writes it, must be tragic drama. The tragedy is fired by motives different from those at work in certain Greek and eighteenth-century plays in which the principals are given a chance to determine their own fate. Nor is the *admiratio* with which Renaissance theorists invest the heroes matched by the "better than average" moral standing of the agent prescribed in Aristotle's *Poetics*. But if Aeschylus's Clytaemnestra can be the principal of a tragedy, and if the subtleties of the interaction between man and his environment as drawn by Seneca can deepen our sense of risk and struggle without suggesting easy solutions to moral quandaries, the label "tragedy" cannot, I feel, be withheld.