Senecan Drama and Its Antecedents

R. J. Tarrant

Harvard Studies in Classical Philology, Vol. 82 (1978), 213-263.

SENECAN DRAMA AND ITS ANTECEDENTS

R. J. TARRANT

IN all the vicissitudes of critical opinion which Seneca's tragedies
have undergone, they have been consistently linked with and com-
pared to the tragedies of fifth-century Athens. Whether the result was
the exaggerated esteem which Senecan drama enjoyed in the sixteenth
and seventeenth centuries[1] or the unmerited contempt to which it was
subjected in the nineteenth,[2] critics generally assumed that Attic
tragedy was both the model for Seneca's work and the proper standard
for its evaluation. The present century has brought a needed revision of
these assumptions. Much attention has been devoted to Seneca's own
artistic aims and methods,[3] and they have been shown to be so different
from those of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides that any assessment
of Senecan tragedy based on competition with his fifth-century pre-
decessors now seems naive and misguided.

Welcome though this change of perspective is, it seems in its effect
on modern criticism of the plays to have gone both too far and not far

[1] The most notorious pronouncement is that of J. C. Scaliger (*Poet.* VI.6):
"Seneca . . . quem nullo Graecorum maiestate inferiorem existimo: cultu uero
ac nitore etiam Euripide maiorem. Inuentiones sane illorum sunt, maiestas
carminis, sonus spiritus ipsius." (The criteria of this judgment are those of
Quintilian *Inst.* 10.1.97.)

[2] A. W. Schlegel, *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Litteratur*[2] (1817)
II 27f: "Sie sind über alle Beschreibung schwülstig und frostig, ohne Natur in
Charakter und Handlung, durch die widersinnigsten Unschicklichkeiten
empörend"; D. Nisard, *Etude de moeurs et de critique sur les poètes latins de la
décadence*[5] (1888) I 117ff: "Chercher un art dramatique dans les tragédies de
Sénèque, ce serait tout à la fois perdre son temps et se donner fort inutilement
le facile avantage de critiquer le poète pour des fautes qu'il a voulu faire"; H. E.
Butler, *Post-Augustan Poetry* (1909) 74f.

[3] Two influential studies deserve particular mention: O. Regenbogen,
"Schmerz und Tod in den Tragödien des Seneca," *Vorträge der Bibliothek
Warburg* 1927/28, 167–218 (= *Kl. Schr.* [1961] 409–462), and C. J. Herington,
"Senecan Tragedy," *Arion* 5 (1966) 422–471.

enough. Not far enough, in that much modern analysis of Senecan tragedy, even when it seeks to isolate uniquely Senecan aspects of dramatic form, continues to place it in an unproven direct relationship with surviving Greek tragedy.[4] Too far, in that an increasingly popular approach takes Seneca's artistic independence from the Greeks as justification for reading the plays as isolated documents, as though nothing else in ancient literature were relevant to their interpretation.[5]

No work of literature can make complete sense when removed from the literary context in which it was formed. This is particularly true of Latin literature, with its great sensitivity to models and its highly developed techniques of imitation, and among Latin poets few give more evidence than Seneca of having been shaped by earlier literature. What follows is an attempt to place Senecan drama more precisely in its proper literary context.[6] I shall argue that fifth-century Attic tragedy was in many cases a remote and not a proximate source for Seneca; using the evidence of dramatic technique, I shall try to show how Seneca's plays employ a later Greek dramatic form for which the earliest surviving evidence is in New Comedy; finally I shall suggest that Seneca's conception of tragic form and style, as well as much of the content of his plays, came to him from Latin writers of the Augustan period.

I

The only complete specimens of tragic drama which survive from the ancient world are the thirty-two plays attributed to Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides and the ten plays attributed to Seneca.[7] What is known

[4] Below, pp. 216f.

[5] A few recent examples (from among many): N. T. Pratt, "Major Systems of Figurative Language in Senecan Melodrama," *TAPA* 94 (1963) 199–234; W. H. Owen, "Commonplace and Dramatic Symbol in Seneca's Tragedies," *TAPA* 99 (1968) 291–314; J. P. Poe, "An Analysis of Seneca's *Thyestes*," *TAPA* 100 (1969) 355–376; D. J. Mastronarde, "Seneca's *Oedipus*: The Drama in the Word," *TAPA* 101 (1970) 291–316; G. Braden, "The Rhetoric and Psychology of Power in the Dramas of Seneca," *Arion* 9 (1970) 5–41; and many (not all) of the studies by German scholars collected in *Senecas Tragödien*, ed. E. Lefèvre (1972; Wege der Forschung 310). Application of this critical procedure has hardly been restricted to Seneca; it has been perhaps the dominant tendency of classical literary criticism for a generation.

[6] I owe much to the work of Friedrich Leo, in particular to his study of dramatic monologue, *Der Monolog im Drama* (*Abhandlungen der Göttingen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften*, Phil.-Hist. Kl., N.F. X [1908]), to W.-H. Friedrich's *Untersuchungen zu Senecas dramatischer Technik* (1933), and to O. Zwierlein's *Die Rezitationsdramen Senecas* (1966).

[7] Eight of these ten plays may be confidently regarded as genuine; the *Octauia*

of tragedy between Euripides and Seneca — the tragedy of the fourth century and the Hellenistic age, of the Roman Republic and the time of Augustus — is at best fragmentary, at worst purely conjectural. Some comparison of Seneca with fifth-century Greek tragedy can thus hardly be avoided. Further, since there is no doubt that the mythic plots and the basic structure of Senecan drama have their ultimate source in classical Greek tragedy, such comparison is to an extent justified. What seems questionable is the assumption, still widespread in the criticism of Senecan drama, that every Senecan play is a direct adaptation (however free) of an extant or lost play by one of the Attic triad. For the most part this belief seems to rest on nothing more than a general similarity of plot and characters. Certainly it is impossible to assemble for Seneca a body of recognizably immediate translations of lines or speeches in his alleged Greek models, as can be done for the Republican Roman adapters of Attic tragedy.[8] In addition, for at least one play, the *Agamemnon*, direct evidence exists to show that Seneca's model was not the extant *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus.[9] Even if no fragment of another treatment had survived, comparison of Seneca's play with that of Aeschylus would reveal an almost complete absence of similarity in structure and characterization; the only points of contact are in elements virtually required by Seneca's choice of this mythic plot. On the basis of this play, one might conclude that Seneca had never read Aeschylus. The impression formed by comparison of the two plays is confirmed by the remains of plays on this subject by Ion of Chios, Livius Andronicus, and Accius; these fragments contain several important plot elements which appear in Seneca but not in Aeschylus,[10] thus demonstrating that Seneca's principal model was a post-Aeschylean play.[11] Yet so well

---

is now almost universally (and rightly) considered un-Senecan; opinion about the *Hercules Oetaeus* remains divided, but the stylistic evidence presented by W.-H. Friedrich (*Hermes* 82 [1954] 51–84) and B. Axelson (*Korruptelenkult* [1967]) seems decisively to disprove its authenticity.

  [8] The attempt has been made more than once: cf. W. Braun, *Rh. Mus.* 20 (1865) 267ff (*Phoenissae*), 22 (1867) 245ff (*Oedipus*); R. Schreiner, *Seneca als Tragödiendichter in seiner Beziehung zu den griechischen Originalen* (1909); C. Zintzen, *Analytisches Hypomnema zu Senecas Phaedra* (1960). In all cases the great majority of the parallels adduced concern similarity of plot and situation rather than close verbal correspondence.

  [9] For details see my edition of *Agamemnon* (1976) 10ff.

  [10] For example: an extended narrative of the Greeks' return from Troy, Agamemnon's murder at a banquet, and a confrontation after the murder between Electra and Clytemestra.

  [11] F. Leo, *Geschichte der römischen Literatur* (1913) 70f.

established is the belief that Seneca turned directly to the great trage-
dians of the fifth century for his material that the majority of recent
writers either implicitly assume[12] or openly assert[13] that Aeschylus'
Agamemnon was the original of Seneca's play. While *Agamemnon* is
admittedly an extreme case, what is patently true of it is at least
arguable for several other plays: the similarities between Seneca and
Sophocles or Euripides largely concern the identity of the characters
and the main events of the plot,[14] and so are inadequate to establish
Seneca's dependence on fifth-century tragedy or to exclude the
influence on him of lost intermediate treatments of the same material.

An argument of a different kind may be added here. It is not implaus-
ible that Seneca was aware of and adopted a small number of the most
popular Greek tragedies, for example Euripides' *Heracles*, *Medea*, and
Troades or Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*. The assumption that Seneca's
plays have for their immediate models Greek tragedies of the fifth
century, however, entails a more complex and debatable hypothesis.
Deviations from the alleged Greek source, in cases where this source
survives, are generally explained as the result of conflation with a
second or even a third Greek play; Seneca is thus thought to have
practiced the same sort of *contaminatio* as Plautus and Terence. So, for
example, traces of both *Hippolytus*-plays of Euripides and of Sophocles'
Phaedra have been discovered in Seneca's *Phaedra*,[15] his *Hercules Furens*
is said to contain a chorus grafted onto Euripides' *Heracles* (the alleged
primary source) from Euripides' *Phaethon*,[16] the *Troades* has been
analyzed as an amalgamation of scenes from Euripides' *Andromache*,
Troades, and *Hecuba*,[17] the *Agamemnon* is said to have incorporated a
speech from Euripides' *Alexandros*.[18] The knowledge of Greek tragedy
presupposed now appears wider and more detailed, perhaps in fact too

---

[12] *Seneca: Agamemnon* (1976) 10 n.3.

[13] Most recently W. M. Calder III, *CP* 71 (1976) 27ff.

[14] F. Leo, *Observationes Criticae in Senecae Tragoedias* (1878) 147: "ille enim
nec secutus est Graecos praeter argumenta."

[15] C. Zintzen (above, n. 8); B. Snell, *Scenes from Greek Drama* (1964) 23ff;
note, however, the properly cautious remarks of W. S. Barrett, *Euripides:
Hippolytus* (1965) 16f.

[16] C. K. Kapnukajas, *Die Nachahmungstechnik Senecas in den Chorliedern des
Hercules furens und der Medea* (1930) 7ff; J. Diggle, ed., *Euripides: Phaethon*
(1970) 96f.

[17] W. Braun, *De Senecae fabula quae inscribitur Troades* (Progr. Wesel 1870);
W. M. Calder III, *Wiss. Zeitschr. d. Univ. Rostock*, Ges. und sprachwiss. R. 15
(1966) 551–559.

[18] L. Strzelecki, *De Senecae Agamemnone Euripidisque Alexandro* (1949); cf.
Seneca: Agamemnon (1976) 16f.

great to be plausible for a Roman writer of the first century A.D. (as distinct from one of the Republican or Augustan period). Certainly the citations of Greek tragedy in Seneca's prose works do not give the impression of wide or deep familiarity: almost all the passages cited are well-known *sententiae*, many of which could have reached Seneca through earlier Latin sources.[19]

It emerges that the direct derivation of Senecan tragedy from the works of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides is not as well established as recent opinion has generally supposed; the confidence with which this relationship is asserted in the one instance in which it is demonstrably absent (*Agamemnon*) justifies a degree of suspicion concerning similar statements about other plays.[20] To cast doubt on this widely held assumption would have broader consequences: an element of distortion could be demonstrated in studies of Senecan dramatic technique, however meticulous, which use fifth-century tragedy as their only source of comparative material,[21] and attempts to reconstruct lost tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, or Euripides on the basis of presumed or alleged Senecan imitation would merit even more skeptical treatment than they receive at present. In order to accomplish this revision of current views, however, it is not enough to assert the possibility that Seneca used lost postclassical[22] plays as his models. In the study of sources, as in textual criticism, sound method discourages the postulating of intermediate stages of transmission when no positive evidence requires their existence. To offer such evidence for the influence of postclassical tragedy on Seneca is the purpose of the next section.

II

If the general similarity of Seneca's characters and plots to those of fifth-century tragedy is too slight a basis on which to determine Seneca's primary models, attention must be directed to less obvious

[19] *Seneca: Agamemnon* (1976) 9.

[20] For example, C. W. Mendell, *Our Seneca* (1941) 4: "Seneca had before him the *Oedipus* of Sophocles when he wrote his play of the same name"; C. D. N. Costa, ed., *Seneca: Medea* (1973) 8: "So far as we can judge, Seneca's chief model was Euripides' play."

[21] Among recent publications B. Seidensticker's *Die Gesprächsverdichtung in den Tragödien Senecas* (1969), K. Heldmann's *Untersuchungen zu den Tragödien Senecas* (1974) and W.-L. Liebermann's *Studien zu Senecas Tragödien* (1974) are all to some extent affected by this limitation.

[22] The term "postclassical" is used throughout as a conveniently brief designation for ancient drama after the end of the fifth century B.C.

aspects of his plays. It is the premise of this argument that more reliable evidence of Seneca's antecedents is to be found in the area of "dramatic technique," that is, the practices and conventions which govern on a large scale the arrangement of action into a recognizable dramatic structure and on a smaller scale the deployment and behavior of actors and chorus on the stage.[23] The study of dramatic technique has been an object of much fruitful research in both Greek and Latin drama in recent decades;[24] when applied to the question of Seneca's debt to his fifth-century predecessors, it shows clearly that Seneca's technique is in many respects not that of the fifth century, but rather of a time after the death of Sophocles and Euripides. In the following pages the practices which Seneca shares with postclassical drama are listed and briefly discussed. Because of the almost total disappearance of post-classical tragedy, many of the conventions noted can only be documented from Seneca and New Comedy: when this occurs it is a plausible inference that the practice in question was also present in tragedy of the postclassical period, and that it reached Seneca through tragic rather than comic models.[25]

FIVE-ACT STRUCTURE

The most obvious and well-known difference of dramatic technique between Seneca and fifth-century tragedy is Seneca's adherence to a structure of five acts: that is, almost all his tragedies comprise five sections in iambic trimeter separated by four choral odes.[26] Of the eight plays whose Senecan authorship is secure, only the *Phoenissae* departs

[23] In discussing Senecan drama, language relating to the theatre (for example, "on stage" and "off stage") is employed in a purly figurative sense, and carries no suggestion that Seneca's plays were intended for stage presentation.

[24] The importance of this approach to dramatic texts may be traced in part to Tycho von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff's *Die dramatische Technik des Sophokles* (*Philologische Untersuchungen* 22 [1917]), cf. H. Lloyd-Jones, *C.Q.* n.s. 22 (1972) 214ff; the studies of Friedrich Leo, especially those relating to New Comedy, also deserve mention in this connection. The work of Tycho and Leo had a decisive impact on Eduard Fraenkel, whose studies of both Greek and Latin dramatic technique (of which *Elementi Plautini in Plauto* [1960] is the best known) continue to exert considerable influence. Several of the points of technique considered here have now been discussed in greater detail by O. P. Taplin in his forthcoming book *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* (1977).

[25] W.-H. Friedrich (above, n.6) 2; F. Leo (above, n.6) 40.

[26] On the entire subject see K. Anliker, *Prologe und Akteinteilung in den Tragödien Senecas* (1960). In terms of fifth-century technique Sen. *Oed.* 882ff and 980ff are both act-dividing odes, since they are preceded by an exit and followed by an entrance, cf. Taplin (above, n.24) 49ff.

widely from this arrangement; it lacks a chorus and consists of several iambic scenes of unequal length juxtaposed rather than organically linked. There are indications that *Phoenissae*'s structure was not without precedent in postclassical tragedy;[27] in any event its deviation from five-act structure is clearly not in the direction of classical Greek form.

A less striking exception to the five-act rule in Seneca has been seen in *Oedipus*, which contains five choral interventions (110–201, 403–508, 709–763, 882–914, 980–997) and thus, apparently, six acts; but while *Oedipus* 882–1061 certainly represents a deviation from Seneca's normal practice, the resulting structure does not need to be interpreted as a six-act play. If it is observed that the choral sections 882–914 and 980–997, particularly the second, are considerably below the usual length of an act-dividing choral ode in Seneca, and that the iambic sections 915–979 and 998–1061 together form a normally-sized Senecan final act,[28] two other explanations may be offered. First, 980–997 is not an act-dividing ode, but a choral statement within the fifth act.[29] In terms of the structure in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* (to which Seneca's play happens to correspond rather closely at this point), 882–914 would correspond to the stasimon ἰὼ γενεαὶ βροτῶν (1186ff) while 980–997 would represent a somewhat expanded equivalent of the lines ὦ δεινὸν ἰδεῖν πάθος ἀνθρώποις (1297–1306) in which the chorus react to the appearance of Oedipus. Against this view is the fact that 980–997 are anapestic dimeters, Seneca's favorite meter for choral odes; there is no other place in the genuine plays where the chorus have anapests within an act.[30] Second, lines 882–914 and 980–997 are meant to be taken as a pair, and thus serve somewhat the same function as a divided strophic pair in Greek tragedy.[31] This reading accounts for the verbal similarities between the two sections (*fata*, 882– *fatis*, 980; *postes sonant*, 911– *sonuere fores*, 995) and for the relative brevity of each if taken singly. In thought as well the two pieces form a connected pair, voicing the customary Senecan reflections on the perils of high position (882ff) and the inevitability of fate (980ff); the tentative suggestion of limited

[27] Below, p. 228.

[28] *Oed.* 915–979 and 998–1061 together give an "act" of 129 lines; compare the final acts of *Troades* (124), *Medea* (149), *Phaedra* (125), *Agamemnon* (156), and *Thyestes* (143).

[29] *Oed.* 882–914 would form an act-dividing ode of shorter than average length (33 lines) but compare *Pha.* 959–990 (32) and 1123–1153 (31).

[30] The restriction is not observed in *Hercules Oetaeus*, cf. 1151ff, 1208ff, 1279ff, 1983ff, or *Octauia* (below, n.34).

[31] The two sections do not correspond metrically, but Seneca seems in general to have abandoned this principle of classical technique.

freedom made in 992f (*fata si liceat mihi | fingere arbitrio meo*) is canceled by the unqualified statement of 980 (*fatis agimur; cedite fatis*). By separating these two contemplative sections and arranging them in this order Seneca achieves a progression of thought as well as greater prominence and definition for the play's final actions;[32] similar parallels between two act-dividing choral odes are not easily found elsewhere in Seneca.[33]

Whatever view is taken of the structure of *Oedipus*, Seneca's general fidelity to a five-act arrangement is beyond question.[34] This principle of division is, of course, foreign to Greek tragedy of the fifth century, and is indeed not directly attested for Greek tragedy of any period. Traces of a five-act structure have been seen in various Hellenistic literary productions, most notably in the *Exagoge* of Ezechiel, an account of the Exodus from Egypt in dramatic form preserved in the *Praeparatio Euangelica* of Eusebius;[35] these efforts, however, have been unconvincing when not misguided.[36] Indirect evidence must be used. Horace's prescription of five acts for tragedy in *Ars Poetica*[37] makes it very probable that this arrangement had become canonical in post-Aristotelian literary theory.[38] For comedy there is direct evidence in the papyri of Menander, in which the location of the choral interludes (perhaps not written by the playwright and therefore not transmitted) is explicitly marked by

[32] The treatment of this question by W.-H. Friedrich (above, n.6, 148ff) displays some of the excessive rigidity which attends many important analyses of dramatic technique. Friedrich describes *Oed.* 980–997 as "a surplus chorus" which Seneca originally composed as an alternative to 882–914 and which was inserted after 980 by a negligent author or an arbitrary editor. Friedrich's argument is that 978f (*rigat ora foedus imber et lacerum caput | largum reuulsis sanguinem uenis uomit*) should introduce Oedipus directly, but in *Agam.* 586ff Clytemestra's announcement of Cassandra and the Trojan captives is separated from Cassandra' first speech by a choral meditation (589–658), and in *Phaedra* the messenger's account of Hippolytus' death is separated from the arrival of his remains by a short choral ode (1123ff).

[33] The last two odes of *Phaedra*, 959ff and 1123ff, are the only possible instance.

[34] The *Hercules Oetaeus* also conforms to this structure (the acts comprise 1–103; 233–582; 706–1030; 1131–1517; 1607–1996); the *Octauia*, however, is constructed on quite different principles, and only one act-dividing choral ode can be readily identified (273–376).

[35] Text and bibliography in B. Snell, *TGF* 1 (1971) 288ff.

[36] For example, five-act structure has been seen in the puppet show described by Hero of Alexandria (on which see my edition of *Agamemnon* [1976] 21).

[37] *Neue minor neu sit quinto productior actu | fabula, quae posci uult et spectanda reposci* (189f); see Brink ad loc. for discussion and bibliography.

[38] There is no mention of such a restriction in Aristotle's remarks about the structure of tragedy (*Poetics* 1450b26f [ch. 7], 1452b14ff (ch. 12]).

the direction χοροῦ (*sc.* μέλος). The *Dyscolus* is unmistakably divided into five acts by four such entries;[39] in the surviving parts of four other plays (*Aspis, Epitrepontes, Samia,* and *Sicyonius*) two of these directions marking the end of an act have been preserved, and the disposition of the remaining material into a five-act structure presents no difficulties.[40]

The regular use of a five-act structure by Menander is now rightly regarded as established. In the absence of equally direct evidence for the structure of tragedy in the fourth and third centuries B.C., it is impossible to determine whether fourth-century tragedy and comedy developed independently along similar lines or whether a structure first evolved to suit the needs of New Comedy was then adopted as canonical by theorists (and also, presumably, by practitioners) of tragedy. What seems certain is that Seneca is in this respect the heir to a change in dramatic form which took place after the fifth century. He either worked from models already in five-act form, or else his idea of tragic structure had been so thoroughly determined by this postclassical canon that he recast whatever arrangement he found in his sources to fit this shape.[41]

USE OF THE CHORUS

In classical Greek tragedy the lyric odes of the chorus serve as much to bind a play together as to divide it into episodes. Furthermore, the normally uninterrupted presence of the chorus from the *parodos* to the end of the play provides a stable background and often a public dimension against which the speeches and actions of the individual characters are conducted. This integration of the chorus and the action, sometimes loosened in the later plays of Euripides,[42] was significantly eroded by Agathon's substitution of odes on stock themes (ἐμβόλιμα) for odes designed for a specific dramatic context;[43] at a later date the

[39] Following lines 232, 426, 619, 783.

[40] In *Aspis* following lines 249 and 390; *Epitr.* 171 and 418; *Samia* 420 and 615; *Sicyonius* 149 and 311. There are also single ΧΟΡΟΥ indications in *Misumenus* (following line 275) and *Periciromene* (following line 266). (All line references are to the O.C.T. text by F. H. Sandbach.) The evidence of the Mytilene mosaics also supports an upper limit of five acts for Menander (cf. Brink on Horace *A.P.* 189f): cf. A. Blanchard *REG* 83 (1970) 38ff.

[41] Seneca could, of course, have read of the five-act rule in Horace, but it would be strange for him to have observed this precept so faithfully while in general showing so little regard for Horace's advice about tragedy.

[42] Below, n.48.

[43] Arist. *Poetics* 1456a29f. (ch. 18). The subjects of Agathon's ἐμβόλιμα are not on record; the mutability of fortune is a plausible candidate, given the popularity of this theme in late Euripides and Seneca (note also Accius 422f R²

active role of the chorus, in particular its contact with the individual
actors, must have been made even more awkward (and therefore more
restricted) by the introduction of the raised stage.[44] There is little
evidence, however, that postclassical tragedy ever took the final step of
abandoning the choral element, as later Greek comedy had done by the
end of the fourth century;[45] the indications are instead that the external
form of the classical tragic chorus was preserved at least until the time
of Seneca.[46]

[*Medea*], *fors dominatur, neque quicquam ulli* | *proprium in uita est;* the meter,
anapestic dimeter, is that most often used in Seneca's choral odes).

[44] G. M. Sifakis, *Studies in the History of Hellenistic Drama* (1967) 113ff.

[45] The indication *XOPOY* (or *XOPOY MEΛOΣ*) appears or has been
restored by conjecture in several papyrus fragments of tragedy (now assembled
and discussed by O. P. Taplin, *LCM* 1 [1976] 47ff), but it does not necessarily
follow that the chorus of these plays played no larger rôle than a chorus in New
Comedy. Two of the fragments in which *XOPOY* (*MEΛOΣ*) is a plausible
restoration are of plays of Euripides, and a third in which *XOPOY MEΛOΣ* is
certain may come from Euripides' *Oeneus* (P. Hib. 4). Euripidean *stasima* and
other choral lyrics might have been omitted in later revivals and their place
marked by *XOPOY MEΛOΣ*, but the entire choral part could not have been
removed without considerable awkwardness. (Taplin argues that *XOPOY*
cannot occur in a fragment of Euripides, since Euripides never allowed an
ἐμβόλιμον to take the place of a specially-composed *stasimon*, and therefore
rejects the proposed supplements and the attribution to the *Oeneus*. But [1] the
liberties taken with fifth-century plays in postclassical productions are unknown,
and may have included suppression or replacement of the difficult lyric parts;
[2] the fragments under discussion might come from actors' texts or from
otherwise abridged versions; [3] not enough is known about the postclassical
use of *XOPOY* [*MEΛOΣ*] to support the strict application of its apparent
meaning in New Comedy ["a song to be supplied by the χοροδιδάσκαλος"] to
its occurrences in tragic contexts.) Furthermore, in P. Lond. 77 (from a post-
classical *Medea*), the scene following the direction *XOPOY* contains an address
to the chorus, showing that the performance of ἐμβόλιμα was not incompatible
with the presence and activity of the chorus during an episode, if required (as in
Seneca). Finally, Republican Roman tragedy, derived from fourth-century as
well as fifth-century models, seems always to have had an active and fully-
composed choral element. While Ezechiel's *Exagoge*, in its complete lack of an
active chorus, comes closer to the form of New Comedy (with the additional
similarity that the first appearance of the chorus is announced; cf. 56ff), there
is as yet no way of knowing the degree to which the *Exagoge* resembles other
tragedy of its time.

[46] The fragments of Augustan and Julio-Claudian tragedy are at least
sufficient to establish the presence of a chorus. Gracchus 2 R², *sonat impulsu*
(Del Rio: -*a* codd.) *regia cardo*, is an entrance announcement similar to Sen.
Oed. 911ff and 995ff (below, pp. 246f), and Pomponius Secundus 8ff R²,
pendeat ex umeris dulcis chelys, etc., come from an invocation of Apollo similar
to that in Sen. *Agam.* 327ff. (Pomponius' line *obrue nos Danaosque simul*, 7 R²,

The Senecan chorus performs many of the same tasks as its classical ancestor: it sings odes, announces the arrival of characters, and engages individual actors in dialogue.[47] Upon closer study, however, Seneca's choruses are seen to obey certain conventions which have no basis in classical Greek tragedy. It has been shown, for example, that the Senecan chorus enters into dialogue with an actor only when no third party is present and able to do so.[48] The convention is rigidly applied even when awkwardness results: in several places, for example, the chorus announces a new arrival at the end of an ode or scene but has no speaking part at the beginning of the subsequent scene (*Ag.* 408ff, 778ff, *Pha.* 829ff, 989f, 1154f, *Oed.* 995ff). These passages show that the Senecan chorus functions on a plane removed from that of the action; when it speaks during an iambic scene, it does so in order to avoid an impasse, not as an involved participant.

The most important difference between Seneca's handling of the chorus and that of fifth-century tragedy is that in Seneca the continuous presence of the chorus from its first entrance onwards is no longer presumed. In classical Greek tragedy the chorus could be removed from the stage after the *parodos*, but wherever this occurs there are explicit and indeed elaborate indications in the text.[49] In Seneca, on the other hand, it may transpire quite incidentally from the remark of an actor that the chorus is absent; there is in fact no reason to believe that the Senecan chorus was thought to be present during the iambic portions, except for those scenes in which it is compelled to speak by the technical

---

might have been spoken by a chorus of Trojan captives.) The often-cited statement of Dio of Prusa (*Or.* 19.5) that the lyric parts of tragedy (not only the choral sections) are no longer performed in theaters cannot be applied to any time earlier than Dio's own; Dio's remarks may not have been true of all theaters even in his own day.

[47] It does not, however, continue the classical practice of concluding the play (except in pseudo-Seneca; cf. *HO* 1983ff, *Oct.* 973ff).

[48] F. Leo, *Rh. Mus.* 52 (1897) 509ff. An earlier phase of the process is visible in late Euripides, where the interventions of the chorus during the episodes pass unnoticed unless only one actor is present (so in *Orestes* and *Bacchae;* in *IA* the chorus is entirely ignored by the characters, even by those who enter in search of a character not on stage; cf. 801ff, 1532f).

[49] The chorus is offstage in Aesch. *Eum.* 232–243, Soph. *Ajax* 815–865 (note 803ff, 866ff), Eur. *Alc.* 747–860 (note 739ff, 861ff), *Helen* 386–514 (note 317–385, 515–527), Eur. *Rhesus* 565–674 (note 523ff, 675ff). The absence of any explicit direction to or announcement by the chorus is a strong argument against the view that the chorus of Euripides' *Phaethon* left with Clymene after line 226 and returned at line 270 (Diggle [above, n.16] rejects a choral exit on other grounds). On the entire subject see now Taplin (above, n.24) 375ff.

necessity mentioned above. The absence of the chorus during an episode is most obvious in these lines of *Phaedra* (599–601):

> (Pha.) Commodes paulum, precor,
> secretus aures. si quis est abeat comes.
> (Hipp.) En locus ab omni liber arbitrio uacat.

The chorus of women who sing the odes of this play are clearly not now on the stage.[50] The action described here will be discussed later, but the present interest of the passage lies in its clear contrast to the choral conventions of fifth-century tragedy. In Euripides' *Hippolytus* Phaedra must explicitly secure the silence of the chorus before setting underway her plot to ruin Hippolytus,[51] while in Seneca's *Phaedra* the chorus remains completely isolated from the intrigue: in place of the chorus Seneca uses the mute *famuli* as witnesses of Hippolytus' incriminating flight (901f, *hi trepidum fuga | uidere famuli concitum celeri pede*; cf. 725ff).

In classical Greek tragedy generally, plotting secret action requires either the acquiescence of the chorus[52] or its absence; the latter is only possible before the *parodos*[53] or in the very rare event of a choral exit.[54] In several plays of Seneca, however, plans are discussed which must by their nature be kept secret;[55] there is no other explicit statement comparable to that in *Pha.* 599ff,[56] but it seems a necessary inference that the chorus is absent during these scenes as well.[57]

In one passage of Seneca the absence of the chorus during an iambic episode does not need to be inferred but is explicitly mentioned in the text. In Act 3 of *Hercules Furens* Theseus relates to Amphitryon and Megara the adventures which he and Hercules have experienced in the

---

[50] W. M. Calder III, *CP* 70 (1975) 35; Calder is concerned to show the feasibility of private performances of *Agamemnon* using a small chorus.

[51] *Hipp.* 710ff.

[52] Instances in Barrett's note on *Hipp.* 710.

[53] So, for example, in Sophocles' and Euripides' *Electra*, in Euripides' *IT*, and in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*.

[54] In all surviving instances of a choral exit except that in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* (above, n.49), some action is planned or carried out which requires the ignorance of the chorus; W. Ritchie, *Authenticity of the Rhesus of Euripides* (1964) 119.

[55] *Tro.* 203ff, *Pha.* 85ff, *Ag.* 108ff, *Thy.* 176ff (*HO* 233ff).

[56] In *Agamemnon* 147 (*tuta est latetque culpa, si pateris, tua*) and 284 (*delicta nouit nemo nisi fidus mea*), however, the speaker clearly assumes that the conversation is not being overheard; Calder (above, n.50) 33.

[57] The choral odes following these scenes of plotting betray no awareness of the crime which is going forward.

Underworld. The narrative culminates in the capture and raising of Cerberus, and then Theseus breaks off with these words (827–829):

> densa sed laeto uenit
> clamore turba frontibus laurum gerens
> magnique meritas Herculis laudes canit.

These lines conclude the act and are followed by an act-dividing ode (830–894); the *turba* whose approach Theseus describes is therefore the chorus of the play, which has been elsewhere during the foregoing act. There is no reason whatever to postulate a subsidiary chorus; such choruses in Seneca, as in Euripides, are used to accompany a major character and to give prominence to his or her entrance.[58] The closest parallels for this announcement of a choral entrance come from Greek New Comedy, in which the appearance of the chorus (usually an ὄχλος) is given as the motive for the suspension of action at the close of the first act.[59] (It must be added, however, that this comic convention developed from announcements of the chorus's first entrance in tragedy,[60] and that the convention as found in Menander is already fully formed in Euripides' *Phoenissae*.[61]) What is most remarkable about Seneca's use of the device in *HF* is its appearance in the middle of the play and the clear evidence which it provides that the chorus has been offstage during the foregoing dialogue scene.

Seneca therefore thought, at least in some scenes, of a chorus which took the stage only to perform its lyric pieces and which retired from sight during the episodes; this is just the sort of chorus one would expect to find in Greek tragedy after Agathon.

Nothing certain can be said about later Greek practice in this respect, and very little about that of Roman Republican tragedy; one fragment of Accius' *Epigoni* (289–291 R²), however, deserves close attention. The lines, although cited by Charisius (*GLK* I.288) as a specimen of tragic Saturnians, are clearly the end of an anapestic section;[62] they announce

---

[58] Barrett on Eur. *Hipp.* 58–71; J. Lammers, *Die Doppel- und Halb-Chöre in der antiken Tragödie* (1931); my note on Sen. *Agam.* 586ff. On secondary choruses see now Taplin (above, n.24) 230ff.

[59] For example, *Aspis* 246ff, καὶ γάρ τινα / ὄχλον ἄλλον ἀνθρώπων προσιόντα τουτονί / ὁρῶ μεθυόντων, also *Dysc.* 230ff, *Epitr.* 169ff, *Peric.* 191ff, and cf. E. W. Handley, *The Dyskolos of Menander* (1965) 171f.

[60] Eur. *Hipp.* 51ff, *Cycl.* 32ff, fr. 105 N² (*Alope*).

[61] *Phoen.* 193ff, ὦ τέκνον ἔσβα δῶμα καὶ κατὰ στέγας / ἐν παρθενῶσι μίμνε σοῖς, . . . / . . . / ὄχλος γάρ, ὡς ταραγμὸς εἰσῆλθεν πόλιν, / χωρεῖ γυναικῶν, cf. E. Fraenkel, *De media et noua comoedia quaestiones selectae* (1912) 71.

[62] G. Hermann, *Elementa Doctrinae metricae* (1816) 388.

the arrival of Amphilocus and prepare for the speaker's own departure:

> Sed iam Amfilocum huc uadere cerno, et
> nobis datur bona pausa loquendi
> tempusque in castra reuorti.

The entrance announcement and the meter point to a chorus:[63] the same form of the anapestic dimeter catalectic (*tempusque in castra reuorti*) occurs in a fragment of Accius' *Philoctetes* which is definitely choral (536 R², *fato expendisse supremo*). It is likely that in each case the clausula marks the end of a section or of an entire ode.[64]

If the lines were spoken by a chorus, it is hard not to conclude that these words announce and motivate the departure of the chorus from the stage. In addition, the words *pausa loquendi* and *in castra reuorti* strongly suggest that this chorus has no urgent reason to leave the stage, and that it is about to *return* to camp because it has performed its ode and its presence is no longer required. The source of Accius' *Epigoni* is not known (a reference to the play in a corrupt passage of Cicero is too uncertain to show that it was Sophocles[65]), but if the reading of the fragment suggested here is correct, Accius is not likely to have found such a choral exit in a fifth-century tragedy.[66]

In at least one important respect, therefore, Seneca's use of the chorus reflects a development which was probably true of postclassical Greek tragedy and for which there may be direct evidence in Accius. Other nonclassical aspects of Seneca's choral technique cannot be convincingly related to a tradition of drama after Euripides and before Seneca, and so must be mentioned with greater caution; it would be perverse to suggest that every deviation from fifth-century technique found in Seneca's plays derives from a lost intermediate source.[67]

[63] O. Ribbeck, however, referred the lines to a scene of dispute among the generals (*Die römische Tragödie im Zeitalter der Republik* [1875] 490f.)

[64] The anapestic dimeter catalectic often appears in this position, cf. Aesch. *Pers.* 149, 154, etc.

[65] *De Opt. Gen. Orat.* 18, *Idem Andriam et Synephebos nec minus [Terentium et Caecilium quam Menandrum legunt, nec] Andromedan aut Antiopam aut Epigonos Latinos recipiunt [; sed tamen Ennium et Pacuvium et Accium potius quam Euripidem et Sophoclem legunt].* Even if the words deleted by Jahn are accepted, Cicero's references to Euripides and Sophocles do not seem exact enough in intention to justify the conclusion that Accius drew on Sophocles for the source of his *Epigoni.*

[66] Other postclassical features of Accius' *Epigoni* are discussed below, p. 249.

[67] For example, the presence of iambic bridge passages for the chorus following all the odes of *Phaedra* (358f, 824ff, 989ff, 1154f) compared with their

In this context a passage of Seneca's *Oedipus* may be cited. At the end of the second act Creon and Tiresias prepare to enter the Underworld in order to question the ghost of Laius about his murderer. Tiresias ends the act with these words (401–402):

> Dum nos profundae claustra laxamus Stygis,
> populare Bacchi laudibus carmen sonet.

The command to the chorus has no Sophoclean counterpart, and indeed such commands are uncommon in Greek tragedy as a whole.[68] The closest parallels come from Aeschylus and early Euripides. In the *Supplices*, Pelasgus leads Danaus off to address the Argives and directs the chorus to remain and pray to the gods of the place;[69] in the *Persae*, the Queen commands the chorus to accompany with its prayers the offerings she will make to invoke the ghost of Darius;[70] in the *Alcestis*, Admetus asks the chorus to remain on stage and sing a lament for Alcestis while he brings her body inside to be prepared for burial.[71] These passages, the last of them in particular, would seem to be sufficient classical precedent for *Oed.* 401f, although none of them is a likely direct source. Comparison of the way in which Aeschylus and Euripides handle this device, however, makes the ἐμβόλιμον-like character of the ode in *Oedipus* more apparent. In the *Supplices*, *Persae*, and *Alcestis*, the stasimon which the chorus is invited to sing is directly relevant to the action taking place at the time; in the *Persae* it is also an important adjunct to that action.[72] The ode in the *Oedipus*, on the other

---

complete absence in *Thyestes;* or the vagueness with which the secondary chorus of *Agamemnon* is handled after its ode and dialogue with Cassandra.

[68] Invitations to join an actor's lament are a separate category; cf. Eur. *Tro.* 143ff, *Hel.* 167ff, and compare Sen. *Tro.* 63ff. In Eur. *El.* 694f, ὑμεῖς δέ μοι, γυναῖκες, εὖ πυρσεύετε / κραυγὴν ἀγῶνος τοῦδε refers not to the stasimon immediately following (699ff), but to the alarm which the chorus raises at 747ff.

[69] *Suppl.* 517ff, especially 520f, πρὸς ταῦτα μίμνε καὶ θεοὺς ἐγχωρίους / λιταῖς παραιτοῦ τῶν σ' ἔρως ἔχει τυχεῖν. A similar command to the chorus appears to have been present later in the play at 772ff, but its precise form is obscured by the lacuna following 773.

[70] *Pers.* 619ff, ἀλλ' ὦ φίλοι, χοαῖσι ταῖσδε νερτέρων / ὕμνους ἐπευφημεῖτε, τόν τε δαίμονα / Δαρεῖον ἀνακαλεῖσθε. The short choral passage in *Cho.* 152–163 is similarly invited (150, ὑμᾶς δὲ κωκυτοῖς ἐπανθίζειν νόμος), and the first song of the Eumenides (*Eum.* 143ff) is in a sense a response to Clytaemestra's commands (133ff, τί δρᾷς; ἀνίστω κτλ).

[71] *Alc.* 422ff, ἀλλ', ἐκφορὰν γὰρ τοῦδε θήσομαι νεκροῦ, / πάρεστε καὶ μένοντες ἀντηχήσατε / παιᾶνα τῷ κάτωθεν ἀσπόνδῳ θεῷ.

[72] While the Queen has called for the chorus to accompany her own libations, in dramatic terms the chorus's invocations appear as the decisive cause of Darius' ascent.

hand, is an extended specimen of a ὕμνος κλητικός, a recital of the
laudes Bacchi in which only three rather colorless lines refer to the
present situation of Thebes (410ff, *uultu sidereo discute nubila / et tristes
Erebi minas / auidumque fatum*). The ode makes no allusion to the
descent of Creon and Tiresias in search of Laius;[73] it is not introduced
to support that enterprise, but to supply a colorful poetic interlude
before the action resumes in the next act.[74] The passage is a useful
example of the way in which elements of classical dramatic technique
may be made to serve postclassical dramatic ends.[75]

INDEPENDENCE OF INDIVIDUAL SCENES

A more general characteristic of Senecan drama whose origins may
lie in the postclassical period is its lack of organic coherence as defined
by fifth-century standards.[76] Acute critical studies of Seneca have called
attention to inconsistencies of various kinds: later scenes contradict
earlier ones,[77] scenes are juxtaposed without connecting material,[78] and
even within a scene transitions may be sudden and unresolved.[79] The
description of the result as a "dissolution of the dramatic structure"[80]
is now generally accepted, although conflicting views of the pheno-

[73] The words *Erebi minas* (411) have no real relation to Tiresias' description
of the mission to the lower world in 393f, *ipse euocandus noctis aeternae plagis /
emissus Erebo ut caedis auctorem indicet;* in the context of the choral ode they
mean only "threats of death." Albert Henrichs refers me to Soph. *Ant.* 1115ff
for a hymn to Dionysus containing a brief reference to pestilence at Thebes
(1140ff). Besides the difference of function between the two odes (Sophocles'
ὑπόρχημα is designed to bring temporary relaxation of tension) one should note
that the Sophoclean chorus makes its appeal for aid in present distress near the
climax of the hymn (1140, καὶ νῦν), while in Seneca lines 410ff precede the body
of the ode, which makes no further reference to the troubles of Thebes.

[74] In *HO* 581f (*uos, quas paternis extuli comites focis, / Calydoniae, lugete
deflendam uicem.*) the function of the ode as an interlude is even more obvious.

[75] Postclassical drama in its eclectic use of earlier material seems often to have
deliberately adopted "archaic" features; note the freedom of place found in
Ezechiel's *Exagoge* (below, p. 230), the meter and diction of the Gyges fragment
(P. Maas, *Gnomon* 22 [1950] 142), and several aspects of the *Rhesus*.

[76] Or as defined by Aristotle, *Poetics* 1451a30ff (ch. 8).

[77] W.-H. Friedrich (above, n.6) 74ff, O. Zwierlein (above, n.6) 38ff, 107 n.40
(on the two halves of *Phoenissae*).

[78] For example, *Tro.* 164–202 and 203–370, *Med.* 380–430 and 431–578,
879–890 and 891–977 and 978–1027, *Thy.* 404–490 and 491–545, *Agam.* 108–
225 and 226–309.

[79] *Pha.* 358–430, 580ff, *Agam.* 775ff; Zwierlein (above, n.6) 29ff discusses
instances of severe compression of time within a scene.

[80] Regenbogen (above, n.3) 430f.

menon's cause and meaning are offered.[81] Here it may be useful to consider whether Seneca's interest in the single scene or speech is not at least in part an inheritance from postclassical tragedy.

The *Phoenissae* displays Seneca's emancipation from classical tragic form at its most extreme. The work consists of 664 iambics which fall into five scenes:[82] (1) 1–319, Oedipus, Antigone; (2) 320–362, Oedipus, Antigone, and a messenger; (3) 363–402, Jocasta and a servant;[83] (4) 403–442, Antigone, Jocasta, and the servant; (5) 443–664, Jocasta, Eteocles, and Polynices. At least two changes of setting are required, one between scenes 2 and 3, the other between 4 and 5. The scenes are simply juxtaposed, with one exception; the last two scenes are linked by a remarkable speech (427–442) in which the servant describes Jocasta's sudden flight from the palace and her arrival on the battlefield just in time to avert the mutual slaughter of her sons.[84]

Because of its length and unique structure, the play has often been considered incomplete.[85] The individual scenes, however, do not give the impression of being unfinished;[86] the opening dialogue in particular

---

[81] For Zwierlein (above, n.6, 88ff and *passim*) the lack of organic structure is evidence of a lack of interest in stage drama; for C. Zintzen (*Senecas Tragödien* [above, n.5] 175 n.84) Seneca's structural looseness is a result of his lack of theatrical experience, not a sign that he had no desire to write for the stage; for W. Schetter (*RFIC* 93 [1965] 396ff) and others the absence of classical unity is a by-product of Seneca's attempt to achieve unity by different means, through recurrent themes and motifs. The first and last of these views should perhaps be more clearly combined: Seneca neglected traditional dramatic form in favor of unifying motifs and images because his conception (and experience) of tragedy was more literary than theatrical.

[82] This scene division (which is also that adopted by the most recent editor, G. C. Giardina) best reflects the stages of the action. The *inscriptiones scaenae* of the manuscripts are discordant and incomplete: E makes only one division (1–362, 363–664), while A (= P CS) omits the essential division after 362.

[83] So E; the character is a Nuntius in A. The status of this character is not easily fixed, since his function has no parallel elsewhere in Seneca.

[84] See below, p. 252. For change of setting in postclassical tragedy see also Taplin (above, n.45).

[85] Most recently by W. M. Calder III, *CP* 70 (1975) 33. The latest critical study, by I. Opelt in *Senecas Tragödien* (above, n.5) 272–285, treats the work as a thematic unity and offers no discussion of structural oddities.

[86] The half-line at 319 (*iubente te uel uiuet*) is not a sign of incompleteness; compare *Thy.* 100 (*sequor*), *Tro.* 1103 (*in media Priami regna*), perhaps *Pha.* 605 (*me nolle*), cf. W. Woesler, *Senecas Tragödien: Die Überlieferung der a-Klasse am Beispiel der Phaedra dargestellt* (1965) 183. Seneca often allows a major speech to end on a half-line, which is then completed by the other speaker; cf. (e.g.) *Oed.* 81, *Thy.* 204, 286, 1021, 1068.

has only one near-equal for length in all of the genuine plays,[87] and the closing scene between Jocasta and her sons could hardly be spun out to greater length without losing its effectiveness.[88] Furthermore, the mere insertion of choral interludes and the expansion of the middle scenes, while it might bring the play up to normal Senecan length, would not affect the unconventional structure of its episodes.

It seems best to regard *Phoenissae* as an essay in a distinct subgenre of tragedy. The only other possible specimen of this form in ancient literature is Ezechiel's *Exagoge*, which happens as well to be the only extensive piece of Hellenistic tragic writing to survive. The *Exagoge's* 269 iambics (written in obvious emulation of Euripidean style)[89] also divide into five episodes: (1) 1–58, Moses alone: (2) 59–90, Moses with Sepphora and Raquel; (3) 91–192, Moses and the burning bush on Mt. Horeb; (4) 193–242, messenger report of the drowning of the Egyptians (5) 243–269, Moses with the Israelites in the desert. The freedom in the handling of time and place is as great as or greater than that of the *Phoenissae;* here, too, at least two changes of setting are required, before and after scene 3. Both plays illustrate the extent to which "dissolution of the dramatic structure" might proceed once the post-classical tragic theater abandoned the unifying chorus of fifth-century drama.

Indirect evidence confirms the impression that postclassical drama sacrificed structural coherence to the emotional or rhetorical effect of a single scene. Aristotle records the damaging effects of the actor's supremacy on fourth-century tragedy: the highly developed rhetorical and pathetic skills of the performers encouraged writers of tragedy to emphasize histrionically effective solo writing at the expense of a coherent whole.[90] These pressures could only have grown stronger in the Hellenistic period, when evidence for the performance of selections from classical tragedy is most abundant.[91] Seneca's neglect of classical

---

[87] *Tro.* 524–813.

[88] The unresolved situation at the end of the final scene is characteristically Senecan; compare the final scenes of *Medea, Agamemnon,* and *Thyestes.*

[89] J. Strugnell, *HTR* 60 (1967) 449–457.

[90] *Rhet.* 3.1.4 1403b32ff; *Poetics* 1450b7.

[91] S. Eitrem and L. Amundsen, *Symbolae Osloenses* 31 (1955) 25ff, T. B. L. Webster, "Alexandrian Epigrams and the Theatre," *Miscellanea Rostagni* (1963) 531–543, Sifakis (above, n.44) 77f, 96f. E. G. Turner has suggested (*Actes Xe Congrès International de Papyrologues* [1964] 51–58) that *P Oxy* 2458 is an acting text of selected scenes from Euripides' *Cresphontes;* some of the difficul-ties that have been raised (cf. H. Lloyd-Jones, *Gnomon* 35 [1963] 444ff, C. Austin, *Noua Fragmenta Euripidea* [1968] 56f) could be resolved by supposing

norms of coherence may thus be the natural outcome of a long evolution in dramatic history.

SUSPENSION OF DRAMATIC TIME

Under this heading are grouped two conventions of Senecan drama, the entrance monologue and the aside. Each creates a temporary suspension of time within a scene and permits a character to express thoughts not heard by others on stage. Indeed, entrance monologues of this kind might almost be regarded as asides distinguished from the others by their position. Both conventions are foreshadowed in classical tragedy, but their full development is a postclassical phenomenon.

Entrance monologues. In several plays of Seneca a character enters while an act is in progress and takes no notice of those already present. Instead, the new arrival delivers what is in effect a soliloquy during which the stage action is suspended; after this *de facto* monologue, the character takes notice of the person or persons present and makes an approach to them. The second act of *Hercules Furens* furnishes the clearest example.[92] Megara and Amphitryon have taken sanctuary at an altar and are awaiting the return of Hercules to rescue them. Megara announces the approach of the tyrant Lycus (329ff, *sed ecce saeuus ac minas uultu gerens | et qualis animo est talis incessu uenit | aliena dextra sceptra concutiens Lycus*), and Lycus then delivers a soliloquy in which he reveals his plan to marry Megara as a way of strengthening his hold on power in Thebes (332–353). At this point Lycus seems to become aware of Megara and Amphitryon for the first time, and says (354–357):

> temptemus igitur, fors dedit nobis locum.
> namque ipsa, tristi uestis obtentu caput
> uelata, iuxta praesides adstat deos
> laterique adhaeret uerus Alcidae sator.

The most remarkable aspect of this passage is the total isolation of

---

that the leading actor of the troupe played the leading role in each scene, and so appeared as Cresphontes in the prologue (?) and as Merope in the recognition scene. In the performance of Euripides' *Bacchae* given at the Parthian court in 53 B.C. by the actor Jason (Plut. *Vit. Crass.* 33.3f), it would appear that Jason took several parts with the support of a group of choreutes. Such performances of selected scenes at royal courts by famous actors might go back to the fourth century, cf. Zwierlein (above, n.6) 137 n.14.

[92] The scene is discussed by Zwierlein (above, n.6) 67ff as evidence of Seneca's lack of concern for theatrical realities.

Lycus' speech from the preceding and subsequent action. His words are not meant to be heard by Megara, and her next lines show that she has in fact not heard them (358f): *Quidnam iste, nostri generis exitium ac lues, / noui parat? quid temptat?* Dramatic time has been suspended since her announcement of Lycus, and his speech has been delivered in a vacuum; dialogue begins only with Lycus' formal address *O clarum trahens / a stirpe nomen regia* ... (359ff).

The essential characteristics of Lycus' monologue can be found in at least four other passages: *Tro.* 861ff (Helen), *Med.* 177ff (Creon), 431ff (Jason), and *Thy.* 491ff (Atreus). In each of these the temporary isolation of the speaker from his surroundings is shown by references to the other characters on stage in the third person: *Tro.* 866ff, *arte capietur mea / meaque fraude concidet Paridis soror. / fallatur; ipsi leuius hoc equidem reor; Med.* 177ff, *Medea* ... / *nondum meis exportat e pedibus pedem? eqs; Med.* 441ff, *quin ipsam quoque, / etsi ferox est corde nec patiens iugi / consulere natis malle quam thalamis reor. / constituit animus precibus iratam aggredi eqs; Thy.* 491ff, *plagis tenetur clausa dispositis fera: / et ipsum et una generis inuisi indolem / iunctam parenti cerno eqs.* The content of the lines quoted also makes it clear that they are not intended to be heard by the persons being spoken about, and in each case the ensuing dialogue reveals that the monologue did in fact remain unheard. Two more specimens of this type of entrance monologue are probably to be recognized in the second act of *Agamemnon.* Clytemestra begins the act with a speech addressed to herself (108–124; note the vocative *anime* in 108) in which she tries to overcome the last traces of her reluctance to kill Agamemnon. The speech is apparently not heard by the nurse, who speaks next (125ff; note *licet ipsa sileas* in 127).[93] At the end of the scene between Clytemestra and her nurse, Aegisthus appears and in a similar, though shorter, soliloquy attempts to quell his own fears about the approaching murder. This speech is also marked as self-address by the use of *anime* (228); it is surely not intended to be heard by Clytemestra, to whom Aegisthus would hardly confess his cowardly doubts. The end of his isolated monologue is marked by the formal address *tu nos pericli socia, tu, Leda sata* in 233; compare *HF* 359f, *Tro.* 871f. The placing of the monologues at the beginning of each scene is presumably deliberate, and may be intended to make explicit the rather different premises from which each scene sets out.[94]

[93] For discussion see *Seneca: Agamemnon* (1976) ad loc.

[94] In the course of the first scene Clytemestra conquers her last vestiges of *pudor* and rouses herself to kill Agamemnon; the second scene begins with

Greek tragedy offers no precise parallels for entrance speeches of this sort; the closest analogues come from the latest surviving tragedies of Euripides.[95] It is not rare for the first lines of an entering character to be directed neither to the chorus nor to another character. This is particularly so when the lines contain an invocation, such as that of the herald in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (503ff): ἰὼ πατρῷον οὖδας Ἀργείας χθονός. Even after the invocation proper has been concluded, the herald continues to address his surroundings generally rather than any of those present, and apparently comes to the end of his opening statement (537) without having once addressed the chorus directly.[96] The impression given is that of a person thinking out loud; this self-absorption is justified by the strong emotions to which the speaker gives voice. The same pattern is evident in the opening speech of Aegisthus in the play. Aegisthus begins with a cry of joy and relief (1577, ὦ φέγγος εὖφρον ἡμέρας δικηφόρου) and then narrates at length the reasons for which he rejoices at Agamemnon's death. The text gives no indication of an address to the chorus.[97] While these speeches display prolonged self-absorption, neither shows any sign of the isolation or suspension of dramatic continuity visible in Seneca. The chorus of the *Agamemnon* is aware of what the herald and Aegisthus have said and this knowledge provides the basis for the ensuing dialogue.

In a larger group of Euripidean passages[98] a related convention can be observed. A new arrival, whose entrance is generally unannounced,[99] muses on his feelings or announces his reason for having come, then reacts strongly (often with ἔα or a similar word) to the sight of the person or persons already on stage. The earliest example of this technique appears in the *Hecuba*; Agamemnon enters, explaining that he has

Aegisthus wavering in his resolve, turning to Clytemestra for support, and finding her determined to seek a reconciliation with Agamemnon.

[95] The fullest treatment of monologues in classical tragedy from the technical standpoint has long been F. Leo's *Der Monolog im Drama* (above, n.6); useful comments on a number of single passages can be found in W. Schadewaldt, *Monolog und Selbstgespräch* (*Neue philologische Untersuchungen* 2 [1926]); see now David Bain, *Actors and Audience: A Study of Asides and Related Conventions in Greek Drama* (1977) 61ff.

[96] So Denniston-Page ad loc.; Fraenkel has the herald turn to the chorus at 524, ἀλλ' εὖ νιν ἀσπάσασθε. The point made above is valid whether the herald speaks to the chorus at 524 or is spoken to by it in 538.

[97] Leo, *Monolog* (above, n.6) 30 n.4, regarded the entire speech as addressed to the chorus; Fraenkel has Aegisthus turn to the chorus at 1583 (appealing to his interpretation of the herald's speech).

[98] Leo, *Monolog* (above, n.6) 30.

[99] Exceptions: *Or.* 356, 1554, *Suppl.* 1034, *Phoen.* 1310 (if genuine).

heard noises and has come to investigate (1109–1113); he is then hailed
by the blinded Polymestor (1114–1115) and exclaims ἔα. The postpone-
ment of the "recognition" until Agamemnon has been addressed by
Polymestor lends greater force to Agamemnon's sudden reaction. This
way of building tension is even more fully exploited in *Troades* 86off,
where Menelaus enters, announces his intention to have Helen brought
back to Greece and executed, and orders his servants to lead Helen out
of her tent (to 883). The speech is a self-contained whole which shows
no awareness of the Trojan chorus or of the recumbent Hecuba;
Menelaus' self-absorption thus gives even greater power to Hecuba's
sudden intervention (884–888, ὦ γῆς ὄχημα κἀπὶ γῆς ἔχων ἕδραν κτλ.)
and heightens Menelaus' surprise (889, τί δ᾽ἔστιν; κτλ.).

The entrance of Iphis in *Supplices* (1034ff) uses comparable means
and produces a similar effect. Iphis is announced by the chorus (1032–
1033) but does not at first address it directly. Instead he laments his
double misfortunes, the death of Eteocles and the disappearance of
Evadne, and only at the end of his speech turns to the chorus to ask
φράζετ᾽ εἰ κατείδετε (1044). Before the question can be answered
Evadne breaks in and reveals herself sitting on a high rock (1045ff, τί
τάσδ᾽ ἐρωτᾷς; ἥδ᾽ ἐγὼ πέτρας ἔπι κτλ.; Iphis' reaction in 1047f, τέκνον,
τίς αὔρα; τίς στόλος; κτλ.).

The two entrances of Menelaus in *Orestes* merit attention in this
context. The first (356ff) is comparable to *Suppl.* 1034ff in technique.
Menelaus greets his homeland and tells how he learned of the deaths of
Agamemnon and Clytemestra. Then he turns to the chorus to ask
where Orestes can be found (375ff, καὶ νῦν ὅπου ᾽στὶν εἴπατ᾽ κτλ.). The
answer to his question is forestalled when Orestes, who has been
present but not noticed by Menelaus, steps forward and reveals himself
(38off, ὅδ᾽ εἴμ᾽ Ὀρέστης, κτλ.; 385 contains Menelaus' thunderstruck
reaction, ὦ θεοί, τί λεύσσω;). The same pattern is followed at Menelaus'
second and final entrance (1554ff). After seven lines explaining his
reasons for coming, Menelaus turns to a servant and orders the house
door opened (1561). The completion of the order is forestalled by the
appearance of Orestes on the roof with the captive Hermione (1567ff,
οὗτος σύ, κλήθρων τῶνδε μὴ ψαύσῃς χερί· κτλ.). The similarity in
technique between the two scenes is surely deliberate and may be
designed to emphasize the shift of control from Menelaus to Orestes
which has taken place in the interim.[100]

More often in Euripides this surprised reaction to someone or some-

[100] Such "paired" scenes were used in discussing *Philoctetes* and the *Oresteia*
by O. P. Taplin, *GRBS* 12 (1971) 25ff.

thing on stage is part of the new arrival's first speech. Of this kind are the entrance speeches of Heracles in *Her.* 523ff (ὦ χαῖρε, μέλαθρον πρόπυλά θ' ἑστίας ἐμῆς — 525, ἔα· τί χρῆμα); Theseus in *Suppl.* 87ff (τίνων γόων ἤκουσα καὶ στέρνων κτύπον . . . — *e.m.* ἔα. 92, τί χρῆμα; κτλ.); the old man in *El.* 487ff (ποῦ ποῦ νεᾶνις πότνι' ἐμὴ δέσποινά τε κτλ. — 493, ὦ θύγατερ);[101] perhaps Perseus in *Andromeda* (cf. Arist. *Thesm.* 1098ff and 1105, ἔα τιν' ὄχθον τόνδ ὁρῶ κτλ.); Teucer, Helen, and Theoclymenus in *Hel.* 68ff, 528ff,[102] and 1165ff respectively; and finally, the speech which Pentheus delivers at his first appearance (*Ba.* 215ff). Though often treated as a new departure in dramatic technique,[103] this last is perhaps better regarded as another example of this type of entrance speech, in which temporary self-absorption is broken by a violent reaction to the situation on stage. In Pentheus' speech this moment is unusually long in coming (248, ἀτὰρ τόδ' ἄλλο θαῦμα marks his reaction to Tiresias and Cadmus in Bacchic clothing); the length of the monologue is a result of its dramatic function, since it offers a full exposition of Pentheus' attitudes as a basis for the following action. (A comparable function may be suggested for some other speeches of this type, for example, *Tro.* 860ff, *Or.* 356ff, and *Hel.* 528ff).[104] This speech as well, though not addressed to those on stage, is clearly heard by them, since Tiresias later in the scene (286ff) attempts to refute part of Pentheus' opening remarks (242ff).

None of the Euripidean passages considered so far provides any precedent for the isolation and suspension of time observed in Senecan entrance monologues. The entrance of Polynices in *Phoenissae* (261–277), however, marks an important step in the direction of Senecan

[101] This scene is slightly different from the others, in that the old man's opening question, ποῦ ποῦ νεᾶνις πότνι' ἐμὴ δέσποινά τε . . . ; could be addressed to the chorus; since, however, he does not wait for an answer, it seems more natural to take his "question" as addressed to no one in particular. His self-absorption is interrupted by Electra's entrance; compare *IA* 1098ff, although the language there is quite different (1103f, μνήμην δ'ἄρ' εἶχον πλησίον βεβηκότος / Ἀγαμέμνονος τοῦδ').

[102] These lines were regarded as an address to the audience by Leo, *Monolog* (above, n.6) 30f, and A. M. Dale on the perhaps excessively literal ground that Helen cannot tell the chorus what they have just heard for themselves. Kannicht (in his note on 528–540) correctly says that, while in content the lines might appear to foreshadow the *Auftrittsmonolog* of New Comedy, Euripides' emphasis is on what they reveal of Helen's feelings.

[103] Schadewaldt (above, n.95) 241f, Friedrich (above, n.6) 2 n.1, Dodds on 215–247 (comparing *Hel.* 386ff, *Or.* 356ff). The position of the speech in the middle of a scene is perhaps its most novel formal aspect.

[104] For Senecan examples of this type of entrance speech cf. *HF* 592ff, *Agam.* 782ff, 918ff, *Pha.* 835ff.

technique. The passage contains a number of novel features, such as the reference to looking around in 265–266[105] and the sudden fright in 269ff, not caused by any action or event on stage. Most remarkable, however, is Polynices' announcement of his intention to question the chorus (277); this is apparently a new development in tragic technique and a clear anticipation of the complete detachment of Lycus and other characters in Seneca.[106] The chorus for its part seems either not to have heard Polynices' speech or else not to have understood it completely, since in spite of his references to the truce arranged by his mother (272–273), the chorus needs to ask who he is (286–287).

This scene from the *Phoenissae* is significant evidence of the direction in which the technique of tragedy was developing at the end of the fifth century. The speech of Polynices differs from that of Lycus in Seneca's *HF* primarily in that Polynices enters just after the *parodos*, with only the chorus on stage; his neglect of them and gradual approach to them are somewhat less remarkable than Lycus' treatment of Megara and Amphitryon, who have been speaking before he enters and who in fact are aware of his arrival (cf. 329ff).[107]

The entrance speech of Polynices looks forward to the entrance monologues of Seneca in its content and dramatic function as well as in its form. The isolated entrance speech is reserved by Seneca for characters who have reason to conceal their thoughts from those already present, whether because they are planning deception (Lycus, Helen, Atreus) or because they are apprehensive and do not wish the other characters on stage to know their state of mind (Creon, Jason, Clytemestra, Aegisthus); hence the functional similarity of these speeches to asides. This use of a detached entrance speech to explore the *affectus* of a character and to bring onto the stage thoughts or plans which must remain hidden if the subsequent action is to take place is prefigured by Euripides' depiction of the nervous reflections of Polynices.

Although the latest surviving plays of Euripides, *Phoenissae* in particular, show a development of technique regarding entrance speeches which looks forward to that found in Seneca, it is highly unlikely that Seneca's handling of such scenes is directly patterned on Euripidean models. The Euripidean examples suggest a gradual loosening of previously established conventions in the service of

---

[105] Below, p. 248.

[106] The subordinate position of this announcement, and the absence of any sign of surprise in Polynices' reference to the chorus, offer further points of similarity to the entrance speech of Lycus.

[107] In this respect *Ba.* 215ff is perhaps the closest fifth-century parallel.

specific dramatic ends; the Senecan passages resemble each other so closely in essentials that one may justly speak of a new convention. The establishment of the isolated entrance speech as a conventional form is a postclassical development which may be illustrated from New Comedy.

An early specimen of the isolated entrance speech can be seen in Aristophanes *Plutus* 335ff. Blepsidemus enters marveling at the behavior of Chremylus in sharing his good fortune with his friends; although Chremylus is present Blepsidemus speaks of him in the third person throughout. At the end of Blepsidemus' speech (342) he is addressed by Chremylus and a dialogue ensues. Blepsidemus' opening words appear to have no effect on the development of the scene;[108] they only serve to establish his skeptical attitude at the outset in the most economical way possible.

In comparison a Menandrean entrance speech like that of Cnemon at his first appearance (*Dysc.* 153ff) is rather closer to Euripides in form and feeling. Before Cnemon enters the remarks of Sostratus and Pyrrhias elaborately prepare the audience for his μισανθρωπία (142ff), which is then amply displayed in his opening remarks. Cnemon's isolation from Sostratus is plausibly grounded, since Sostratus has apprehensively shrunk back out of sight (148f). When Cnemon sees Sostratus his temporary isolation ends abruptly with an anguished οἴμοι (167); the moment of violent surprise is very much in Euripides' manner (and is notably absent in the *Plutus* scene). Cnemon's outburst prompts Sostratus' frightened question ἆρα τυπτήσει γέ με; (168), after which dialogue begins, so that it is impossible to say whether or not Sostratus has heard lines 153–166. Cnemon's self-revelation, however, has greater interest for the audience than it appears to have for Sostratus, who continues to behave as he had done before Cnemon's arrival; indeed, his attempt to placate Cnemon by feigning a rendezvous on his doorstep (171f) shows by its ineptness that he has completely missed the point of the old man's monologue.

This scene of the *Dyscolus* shows such theatrical and psychological skill that the bare bones of convention in it almost escape detection. The freestanding entrance speech is more easily recognized in Plautus, for example the entrance of Tyndarus in *Captiui* 997ff:

> —sed eccum incedit huc ornatus haud ex suis uirtutibus.
> —Vidi ego multa saepe picta, quae Accherunti fierent
> cruciamenta, uerum enim uero nulla adaeque est Accheruns

---

[108] Chremylus' first words (343ff) are not a reply to 335–342, but follow directly upon Chremylus' announcement of Blepsidemus in 332–334. (In 343 it is perhaps better to punctuate ἐρῶ. μὰ τοὺς θεούς.)

atque ubi ego fui, in lapicidinis. illic ibi demumst locus
ubi labore lassitudost exigunda ex corpore.
nam ubi illo adueni, quasi patriciis pueris aut monerulae
aut anites aut coturnices dantur, quicum lusitent,
itidem haec mihi aduenienti upupa qui me delectem datast.
sed erus eccum ante ostium. -et erus alter eccum ex Alide
rediit.

The lines clearly suspend the action, not in order to provide material for its further development, but to give Tyndarus a chance to expatiate on his woes.[109] Here the short suspension of action has a dramatic function, that of increasing the joyfulness of Tyndarus' reunion with his father, but this is not the case with all such conventional entrance speeches in Plautus.[110]

Plautus also provides examples of more extended monologues delivered in isolation from the other characters present. In *Trin.* 843ff the monologue of the Sycophanta is observed by Charmides (note 839ff, especially 841f, *opperiar | quam hic rem agat animum aduortam*) but is not overheard, as is customary in such scenes;[111] nor is any explanation given for Charmides' failure to hear the monologue, as is done in, for example, *Men* 478f, *Merc.* 364f.[112] In the second scene of the *Stichus* the action shifts from a monologue of Antipho (58–67, formally an address to servants within) to a conversation between his daughters Panegyris and Pamphila (68–74) to a further monologue by Antipho (75–87). During this time Antipho and his daughters remain unaware of each other, as is shown by references in the third person in 68ff, 75ff. The multiple suspension in this passage is given a physical explanation in the text (87f; the sisters and Antipho are in some way hidden from each other until he approaches the door to their house and is heard by them),[113]

[109] Men. *Dysc.* 522ff contain a similar lament, but in that passage Sostratus enters with the stage empty and so delivers a true monologue. On Plautine monologues see in general E. Fraenkel (above, n.24), ch. 6.

[110] See, for example, *Aul.* 178ff, 608ff.

[111] E.g., *Amph.* 153ff, *Cas.* 443ff (note 575ff), *Most.* 429ff; G. E. Duckworth, *The Nature of Roman Comedy* (1952) 110.

[112] Duckworth (above, n.111) 123.

[113] The details of staging have been variously interpreted; most recently, H. Petersmann (*Plautus: Stichus* [1973] 40f) has argued that the sisters are outside the door of their house during the entire scene. The opening scene of *Octauia* offers a noteworthy (and apparently unnoticed) parallel. The play begins with a monody by Octavia (1–33), followed by a speech by her nurse; it seems likely that the nurse enters after Octavia's monody and describes the condition of her offstage protégée, as in the *prologos* of Euripides' *Medea* (note 46ff). Then Octavia cries out again from within (57–71), provoking this response from the nurse: *uox en nostras perculit aures | tristis alumnae; cesset thalamis | inferre*

but the scene remains an instructive example of the freedom with which time and space could be treated in New Comedy.[114] Later in the *Stichus* (150ff) the maid Crocotium is ordered by Panegyris to go and find the parasite Gelasimus. In the very next lines Gelasimus himself arrives and delivers a long monologue (155–195); then Crocotium speaks, and her words make it clear that she has not heard the preceding speech (196f, *hic illest parasitus quem arcessitum missa sum. / quae loquitur auscultabo prius quam conloquar;* compare her later asides 217, 235f). Crocotium could leave at 154 and return at 196, and the only hints for stage action in the text perhaps point in this direction (150, *i;* 154, *propera atque actutum redi*), [115] but it may also be possible that the isolation of an opening monologue was a sufficiently well-established convention to make any efforts at verisimilitude unnecessary.[116]

Even more interesting is the return of Amphitryon in *Amph.* 551ff. Having heard from Sosia that another Sosia (that is, the disguised Mercury) is waiting for him at home, Amphitryon resolves to puzzle out the mystery (628, 632): *sequere hac igitur me, nam mi istuc primum exquisito est opus. / utinam di faxint infecta dicta re eueniant tua.*[117] These lines hint at a withdrawal to the side of the house. Alcmena now comes out of the house and delivers a *canticum* (633–653) lamenting the sudden departure of her husband (that is, Jupiter disguised as Amphitryon); her appearance and *canticum* are not noticed by Amphitryon and Sosia, who resume their conversation in 654. Alcmena sees her husband in 660 (*meus uir hicquidem est*) and Amphitryon is aware of her by 665, but each continues to speak of the other in the third person until 675, after which dialogue begins with Amphitryon's formal salutation *Amphitruo*

---

gradus tarda senectus? (72–74). The similarity to *Stich.* 87f, *certo enim mihi paternae uocis sonitus auris accidit. / — is est ecastor. Ferre aduorsum homini occupemus osculum,* suggests that the scene in Plautus as well as that in pseudo-Seneca is to be imagined as taking place "indoors;" for the language of *Oct.* 72f cf. also Pl. *Merc.* 864, *nescioquoia uox ad auris mi aduolauit, Rud.* 233, *certo uox muliebris auris tetigit meas.*

[114] Compare Pl. *Pers.* 1ff for alternating entrance speeches at first unheard by either party.

[115] Petersmann (above, n.113) suggests that Crocotium is not visible until 196, that Panegyris speaks 150ff into the house, and that Crocotium leaves the house by the back door. This seems excessively cumbersome, and the same end (avoiding Crocotium's silent presence on stage until 150) could be met by supposing that 150ff summon her out of the house and send her off on her mission.

[116] Leo, *Monolog* (above, n.6) 56, Duckworth (above, n.111) 123.

[117] Lines 629–631 are incompatible with the action of the scene and were rightly deleted by Ussing.

uxorem salutat laetus speratam suam (676). The isolation of Alcmena's *canticum* and the delay in the start of dialogue find a remarkable parallel in Seneca's *Hercules Furens*. Hercules enters from the Underworld and greets Phoebus, recounting his triumphs and taunting Juno with his completion of all her trials (592–615). He then breaks off to notice the armed guards whom Lycus has stationed around the sanctuary (616f, *sed templa quare miles infestus tenet / limenque sacrum terror armorum obsidet?*),[118] but does not mention Amphitryon and Megara. Amphitryon, who announced Hercules' impending arrival some time before (520ff), does not immediately address him but instead expresses his joy and amazement at his son's return in terms similar to those of Alcmena in Plautus (618–621; compare *HF* 621, *estne ille natus? membra laetitia stupent*, with *Amph.* 660, *nam quid ille reuortitur ... ?* 663, *ecastor med haud inuita se domum recipit suam*); dialogue then begins with a formal salutation (622, *o nate, certa at sera Thebarum salus*). The scenes are undeniably similar in technique, and Plautus is if anything more artificial in his use of convention than Seneca (perhaps because Plautine exuberance has swollen the scene's original dimensions). There is also a similarity of function, since in both cases the disruption of continuity establishes the *affectus* of one of the actors in a more direct way than was possible within the conventions of classical tragedy.

The prominence of monologues in New Comedy has in part a purely technical explanation. The disappearance of the chorus means that a single character entering when the stage is empty or remaining on stage when others leave delivers a monologue in the strict sense. The writers of New Comedy made extensive use of such true monologues as structural devices marking the start and conclusion of important phases in the action.[119] The absence of a choral, and therefore public, background is probably also a factor in the further development of entrance speeches which make no immediate reference to the on-stage action or characters. Persons in Euripides who deliver self-absorbed entrance speeches generally reflect on the immediate situation or its background; they may not explicitly address the chorus, but their words can in most cases be taken as a public statement.[120] In many of these speeches the

---

[118] To this point the technique of the scene is essentially Euripidean, with expansion of the entrance speech.

[119] This function is already present in Arist. *Eccl.* 311ff. The point was made by Leo, *Monolog* (above, n.6) 49ff, but his attempt to show that such monologues always coincided with the beginning or end of an *actus* (and in particular to read this principle back into Euripidean tragedy) is excessive.

[120] The clearest exception is the entrance speech of Polynices in *Phoenissae* (above, p. 235f).

depiction of character is subordinate to the conveying of necessary information.[121] Comedy, on the other hand, contains as well as this kind of public entrance speech many others in which the emphasis is on the private thoughts or feelings of characters. Quasi-monologues like that of Cnemon in *Dysc.* 153ff do little to advance the action but much to advance the audience's understanding of the speaker. Entrance speeches of this kind, together with the usually longer true monologues, are one of comedy's chief ways of giving more rounded portrayals of individual personalities than was possible in the formal situations of fifth-century tragedy. This concern to explore the detailed workings of character is also evident in Seneca's monologues, several of thich could fairly be described as extended self-portraits.[122] Comedy, to be sure, pursues this end with a more secure grasp of theatrical realities than does Seneca. In comedy, for example, most of the longest and most revealing monologues are true soliloquies, delivered when no other person is present (or at least visible); in Seneca, on the other hand, monologues in this strict sense are virtually absent except in prologues,[123] and self-revelation most often takes place in the presence of others. The evidence does not make it clear whether Seneca's procedure is his own or an inheritance from lost tragic models; it does, however, show that Seneca is far closer in this aspect of technique to the writers of comedy than to fifth-century tragedy. Seneca's apparent impatience with the constraints of theatrical conditions may have led him to push the convention to an extreme of implausibility, but the basic shape and function of his entrance monologues conform to the practices of postclassical drama.[124]

---

[121] Although Euripides was, of course, often able to combine these functions; in some of the later examples (*Hel.* 528ff, *Ba.* 215ff) character portrayal begins to outweigh exposition.

[122] *HF* 332ff, *Tro.* 861ff, *Agam.* 108ff, 226ff.

[123] Leo, *Monolog* (above, n.6) 91.

[124] Two other aspects of Seneca's technique merit brief mention: (1) in *HF* 205–278 and 279–308 Amphitryon and Megara have successive speeches neither of which seems to take any notice of the other — in effect, therefore, two successive monologues (note the formal address in 309, *O socia nostri sanguinis casta fide*, marking the beginning of dialogue). A parallel can be found in such set-piece scenes as the opening of the *Persa*, in which each of two characters makes an opening speech and only then becomes aware of the other. (2) In *Med.* 560ff Medea appears to be left alone on stage when Jason leaves, and she reflects on her next course of action; the structure of the scene has many parallels in New Comedy, cf. (e.g.) Pl. *Ba.* 349ff, *Ps.* 395ff, *Trin.* 199ff, 591ff, 717ff (*abiit ille quidem;* compare *Med.* 560, *discessit*), 998ff, Ter. *And.* 206ff, *HT* 502ff, *Eun.* 197ff, *Hec.* 274ff, 510 (*abiit*), 566ff, 793ff. In the *Medea* scene,

Asides.[125] An aside is a remark or speech, usually short, spoken in the presence of one or more other characters but not intended to be heard by them. Suspension of *dramatic* time is involved whenever the aside is not noticed by the other person(s) present, although a very brief aside may be inserted into dialogue with almost no disruption of *real* time.[126] Here the difference in technique between Seneca and fifth-century tragedy is even clearer than in the case of entrance monologues: Seneca has several instances of asides in the strictest sense, while classical tragedy has none.

An aside is most easily identified when it refers to the other person or persons on stage in a way that would make a reaction inevitable if the remark had been heard. Scenes in which deception is planned or executed offer the clearest occasion for such an aside; a good example may be seen in Seneca's *Medea* 547ff, when Jason professes that his children mean more than life to him and Medea remarks (549f) *sic natos amat? | bene est, tenetur, uulneri patuit locus* before begging Jason for permission to embrace the children for one last time. Asides are used for a similar purpose by Ulysses in *Tro.* 625f (*intremuit: hac, hac parte quaerenda est mihi; | matrem timor detexit; iterabo metum*) and, at much greater length, by Atreus in *Thyestes* 491ff (*plagis tenetur clausa dispositis fera* to 507, *praestetur fides*). Seneca's characters also use asides to exhort themselves to action (*Pha.* 592ff, *aude, anime, tempta . . . 599, en, incipe, anime*) or, in the remarkable central scene between Ulysses and Andromache in *Troades*, to debate courses of action within themselves (607–618, 642–662, 686–691). The dramatic function of asides thus closely resembles that of the monologue; it depicts either deception or inner turmoil and permits these thoughts or feelings to bypass classical theatrical restraints and to be presented in the most direct and explicit possible form. All but one of the Senecan passages mentioned are asides in pure form, with no sign that the other person on stage is aware of the words spoken; the apparent exception is *Tro.*

Medea's apparent soliloquy gives way at 568 to a command to the nurse; cp. Pl. *Most.* 408ff (419, *sed quid tu egredere, Sphaerio*, etc.).

[125] The aside in Greek drama is now thoroughly and admirably discussed by David Bain (above, n.95). His study confirms in general the conclusions I had reached (from a much less systematic survey of the material) before his monograph appeared; as a result the text of this section remains essentially unchanged.

[126] This would be particularly true if some asides were spoken simultaneously with lines delivered by other characters (note Pl. *Ps.* 208, *male facis mihi quom sermone huic obsonas*). Instead of "suspension of time" Bain (above, n.95) 70 speaks of "freezing of the action," perhaps a clearer term.

607ff, in which Ulysses seems to describe Andromache as trying to catch the words he is speaking.[127]

No scene of fifth-century tragedy has been shown to contain an aside in pure form, but several passages deserve mention as coming near to the conventional aside and as possible precursors of it. The most often cited passage in this connection is from Euripides' *Hecuba* (726ff). Agamemnon enters and asks Hecuba why she is delaying to bury Polyxena; then, coming on the body of Polydorus, he asks who this dead Trojan may be. Hecuba, turned away from Agamemnon, does not answer him and instead debates with herself whether or not to appeal to his mercy to obtain burial for Polydorus. Her first line makes it clear that her words are meant for herself (736, δύστην' ἐμαυτὴν γὰρ λέγω λέγουσα σέ)[128] and it is equally clear that Agamemnon cannot hear her deliberations, since he reacts three times as though Hecuba were refusing to answer his questions (739f; 743f, note μὴ κλύων; 747f). The scene thus lacks the suspension of dramatic time characteristic of asides in Seneca and New Comedy; Agamemnon is aware of what he thinks is Hecuba's silence, and so dramatic and real time coincide. This scene in the *Hecuba* may be compared to the much more sophisticated use of a similar technique in the merchant scene of *Philoctetes*. The false merchant (a crony of Odysseus in disguise) arrives to assist Neoptolemus in persuading Philoctetes to leave Lemnos with him. Part of the dialogue between Neoptolemus and the merchant is as follows (572ff):

> Νε. πρὸς ποῖον αὖ τόνδ' αὐτὸς οὑδυσσεὺς ἔπλει;
> Εμ. ἦν δή τις—ἀλλὰ τόνδε μοι πρῶτον φράσον
>   τίς ἐστίν· ἂν λέγῃς δὲ μὴ φώνει μέγα.
> 575 Νε. ὅδ' ἔσθ' ὁ κλεινός σοι Φιλοκτήτης, ξένε.
> Εμ. μή νύν μ' ἔρῃ τὰ πλείον', ἀλλ' ὅσον τάχος
>   ἔκπλει σεαυτὸν ξυλλαβὼν ἐκ τῆσδε γῆς.
> Φι. τί φησιν, ὦ παῖ; τί με κατὰ σκότον ποτὲ
>   διεμπολᾷ λόγοισι πρός σ' ὁ ναυβάτης;

---

[127] This would seem the most natural interpretation of *Tro.* 616f *sed huc et illuc anxios gressus refert / missaque uoces aure sollicita excipit*, unless the lines refer to Andromache's behavior during the entire scene to this point. For description during an aside of the behavior of another character cp. Pl. *Amph.* 441ff.

[128] Schadewaldt (above, n.95) 30f plausibly suggests that the explicitness of Hecuba's language is a sign of the novelty of this form of self-address in the presence of another. The scene is well analyzed by Bain (above, n.95) 13–15 ("Admittedly Hecuba's remarks do not constitute what might be considered the purest form of aside," 15), but his later suggestion (56) that the "naturalistic" character of the scene could be the result of Euripides' wish "to treat in a new way a convention that was already familiar to the audiences of tragedy"

The "aside" is not meant to escape Philoctetes' notice, but to attract it and so to prepare him for the merchant's lying narrative. Philoctetes' awareness that he is being talked about by the other two characters on stage preserves dramatic time intact.[129]

The third passage is from Euripides' *Orestes*, and comes during the appeal for help which Orestes makes to Menelaus (669ff):

> φιλεῖν δάμαρτα πᾶσιν ῞Ελλησιν δοκεῖς·
> κοὐχ ὑποτρέχων σε τοῦτο θωπείᾳ λέγω·
> ταύτης ἱκνοῦμαί σ᾽—ὦ μέλεος ἐμῶν κακῶν,
> ἐς οἷον ἥκω. τί δέ; ταλαιπωρεῖν με δεῖ·
> ὑπὲρ γὰρ οἴκου παντὸς ἱκετεύω τάδε.

Orestes' outburst is not directed to those present and expresses a private thought of overwhelming intensity. But it is not necessary to suppose that the words were meant not to be heard except by the audience; the language used is general enough to prevent Menelaus from taking in its full significance. The lines may thus be interpreted as a "turning-away" of particular boldness, rather than as an aside.[130]

Each of the passages discussed displays an adaptation to specific dramatic circumstances; together they offer no evidence for a fully-developed convention of asides. It is worth noting that in the Euripidean scenes the disruption of continuous speech or dialogue results from an emotional dilemma which makes it temporarily impossible for a

---

seems implausible since Bain himself admits only one aside prior to the *Hecuba* passage, *Med.* 277–280 (21–23), and he is properly tentative about calling that an aside.

[129] Bain (above, n.95) 81–85 interprets the scene differently, as a *genuine* attempt to converse aside (thus adopting a "Tychoist" approach to the problems of Neoptolemus' role). This controverted point cannot be taken up here, but a comment is in order on Bain's remark (83 n.1) "it is interesting that Sophocles does not use the device which would have removed any ambiguity. He does not allow the dissembler or alleged dissembler to explain his conduct to the audience aside." It would be astonishing if Sophocles *had* done so, since Bain's careful survey shows that the kind of aside in which an actor takes the audience into his confidence is entirely alien to fifth-century tragic technique.

[130] Compare Eur. *Med.* 277–280, also from the middle of a speech rather than in dialogue. Most, if not all, of the Euripidean passages which Bain (above, n.95) 13–55 accepts as genuine asides share this characteristic: the short outburst is rarely so unambiguous as to make it incredible for the other actor(s) on stage to proceed without remarking on it. It is, of course, proper to recognize in these passages the forerunners of the fully-developed aside, as long as this essential difference between the procedure of Euripides and that of New Comedy (and Seneca) is kept in mind.

character to proceed. There is thus a similarity of dramatic purpose between these passages and several of Seneca's asides, but the form used by Seneca is clearly a postclassical creation.

The presence of pure asides in New Comedy is too obvious to require extensive demonstration.[131] As with entrance monologues, the earliest clear examples of a comic aside come from Aristophanes. When in *Thesmophoriazusae* Cleisthenes warns the women that a man in disguise has infiltrated their meeting, the relative of Euripides utters several desperate asides before being singled out for questioning (603, ποῖ τις τρέψεται; 604, κακοδαίμων ἐγώ. 609, διοίχομαι). In form this passage resembles others in Aristophanes in which a third party comments sardonically on a dialogue between two other characters,[132] but it differs from them in that these words must not be overheard by the others on stage. In *Plutus* 365ff Blepsidemus comments on Chremylus' behavior in the third person when no other character is present. His first remark is apparently not noticed (364 and 366 make the same point), but his second (367f) draws the reply σὺ μὲν οἶδ' ὅ κρώζεις; the aside is thus "caught," as often in later comedy.[133] Comic asides are used, as in Seneca, both in scenes of deception (cf. Pl. *Cas.* 685ff, *ludo ego huc facete; | nam quae facta dixi omnia huic falsa dixi*, *Poen.* 647ff, 653ff, Ter. *Ad.* 548) and when characters are temporarily at a loss (cf. Pl. *Most.* 662ff, Th. *age comminiscere ergo.* TR. *quid ego agam | nisi*, etc., Ter. *And.* 746, *quid dicam aliud nescio*). In contrast to Seneca, comedy often gives its asides a physical basis by stage directions in the text;[134] in other passages the aside is noticed and the convention thereby punctured for humorous effect.[135] There are, however, more than enough specimens of the pure aside in dialogue scenes to show that the

[131] See now Bain (above, n.95) 105–184 with full bibliography. Bain shows that asides tend to be longer and more artificial in Roman comedy (especially Plautus) than in the surviving parts of Menander; this development goes a step further in Seneca.

[132] For example, *Thesm.* 200f, *Ran.* 108, 115, 159f, 552, 554, *Plut.* 99, 106, 111, 147f. These "bomolochic" remarks are well handled by Bain (above, n.95) 87–90. Bain also makes the important point that eavesdropping asides and asides commenting on the deception of another character first appear in Aristophanes (90–93); his suggestion that the asides of *Thesm.* 603ff are a comic adaptation of Eur. *Hel.* 133a, 139b is attractive.

[133] Could κρώζεις mean that Blepsidemus has been using a "stage whisper"? The use of the verb in *Lys.* 506 is insulting, since it attributes to Cleonice the croaking voice of a crone.

[134] E.g., Pl. *Ps.* 1157ff, *Mil.* 20ff, 1020ff, *Trin.* 562.

[135] E.g., Pl. *Aul.* 549, *Ps.* 613ff, *Merc.* 377, *Most.* 512, *Trin.* 567. Both procedures are abundantly illustrated by Bain (above, n.95) 156–158, 162–171.

aside as it appears in Seneca was an accepted convention of post-classical comedy.

<div align="center">DETAILS OF STAGE BUSINESS</div>

Creaking doors. In Seneca's *Medea* a dialogue between Medea and her nurse is cut short when Medea hears the creaking pivot of an opening door (177f): *sed cuius ictu regius cardo strepit? | ipse est Pelasgo tumidus imperio Creo.* Noise from an opening door also announces two entrances in *Oedipus* (911ff, *sed quid hoc? postes sonant, | maestus et famulus manu | regius quassat caput;* 995ff, *sonuere fores atque ipse suum | duce non ullo luminis orbus | molitur iter*), and the device was used once by the author of *Hercules Oetaeus* (254f, *sonuere postes: ecce praecipiti gradu | secreta mentis ore confuso exerit*). This means of announcing an entrance appears only three times in fifth-century tragedy, in late plays of Euripides (*Ion* 515f, *Helen* 858ff, *Orestes* 1366ff[136]), twice in Aristophanes (*Eq.* 1326, *Ran.* 604), and becomes conventional in postclassical drama; in this case there is direct evidence for both tragedy and comedy.[137] The appearances of the convention in Seneca, particularly that in *Med.* 177f, resemble the postclassical rather than the Euripidean form in both function and language. In none of the three Euripidean passages just cited does the noise of the opening door interrupt or prematurely terminate a dialogue; *Ion* 515f and *Or.* 1366ff come after a stasimon and introduce a new episode, and *Hel.* 858ff comes at the end of a long dialogue between Helen and Menelaus (761–854; note the choral tag 855f, which marks the end of the foregoing section as does 758ff). In Seneca's *Medea*, however, Medea and her nurse have been speaking for only a short time when Creon's arrival is heard;[138] for this arrangement compare (for example) Men. *Peric.* 316, Ter. *Ad.* 264, Pl. *Amph.* 496, *Cas.* 163f, *Curc.* 92ff. In referring to the noise of the door

---

[136] The authenticity of *Or.* 1366ff has often been questioned; most recently cf. M. D. Reeve, *GRBS* 13 (1972) 263f. The suggestion of di Benedetto that the door which opens is a side door to the *gynaeceum* has nothing to commend it.

[137] Duckworth (above, n.111) 116f; B. Bader, *Antichthon* 5 (1971) 35–48; C. Dedoussi, *Hellenika* 18 (1964) 6ff; H. Petersmann, *WS* n.s. 5 (1971) 91ff. In Republican tragedy note Pac. 214, 133, Acc. 29, 470 R²; in comedy (e.g.) Pl. *Amph.* 496f, 955, *Aul.* 665, *Bacch.* 234, *Mil.* 410, 1198, 1377, Ter. *Phorm.* 840, *Ad.* 264.

[138] To describe any conversation in a play as "prematurely terminated" is, of course, only a *façon de parler;* the impression created by the dramatist, however, may be that of a new entrance coinciding with the natural end of a phase of the action or else of an entrance which is unexpected and prevents further development of the existing situation.

pivot (*cardo Med.* 177; cf. Pl. *Curc.* 94, 158) or of the door generally (*postes Oed.* 911, *fores Oed.* 995; cf. Pl. *Aul.* 665, *Cas.* 163, *Mil.* 1377, Men. *Sam.* 532[139]), Seneca is closer to postclassical writers than to Euripides, two of whose passages mention the noise of the door bolts (κλῆθρα).[140] In this case Seneca's choice of words permits a narrower definition of "postclassical" than is usually possible. The combination *cardo strepit* used in *Med.* 177 cannot be duplicated in comedy or in Republican tragedy,[141] and the closest parallel appears to be in Ovid *Met.* 14.782: *nec strepitum uerso Saturnia cardine fecit.* It may also be worth noting that *cardines*, though uncommon in creaking-door scenes in comedy and Republican tragedy,[142] appear in two of the four surviving fragments of the Augustan tragedian Gracchus (1 R², *o grata cardo, regium egressum indicans!*; 2 R², *sonat impulsu* [*Del Rio:* -a *codd.*] *regia cardo*). The language of *Oed.* 911, *postes sonant*, and 995, *sonuere fores,* is also instructive: the noun *postis* does not appear in this context in Republican drama, and the verb *sono* is only used once;[143] on the other hand, *sonat* is found in the line of Gracchus quoted above, and both *postis* and *sono* (together with *cardo*) appear in Ovid *Am.* 1.6.49: *fallimur, an uerso sonuerunt cardine postes . . . ?* Seneca's creaking doors would be at home in any phase of postclassical drama, but the language with which he describes them seems to point clearly to the Augustan age.[144]

Looking around. In a passage of *Phaedra* to which reference has

[139] In Menander the terms most often used are ἡ θύρα (ψοφεῖ, ἐψόφηκεν) and τὴν θύραν (τις ψοφεῖ, ἐψόφηκεν); Bader (above, n.137) 37.

[140] The exception is *Ion* 515f, τῶνδ' ἀκούομεν πυλῶν / δοῦπον.

[141] In comedy the only uses of *cardines* in this context are Pl. *Curc.* 94, *num cardo muttit,* 158, *crepitum cardinum* (the word also appears in scenes of violent knocking at doors; cf. *As.* 388, *Amph.* 1026). The use of *cardo* in Ennius *Sc.* 82 R² (= 88 J) *saeptum altisono cardine templum* has no connection with doors on the stage.

[142] The tragic fragments listed above (n.137) use the word *ualuae* for the source of the noise, except for Pacuvius 133 R², *quidnam autem hoc soniti est, quod stridunt foris?*

[143] For *postis* in other contexts cf. Pl. *Bacch.* 149, *Most.* 818ff. Instead of *sono* Republican drama uses *sonitus* alone or with *facio;* cf. Pac. 133 R², *quidnam autem hoc soniti est?*, Caec. 21 R², *numquidnam fores fecere soniti?*, Pl. *Curc.* 203; *sono* appears only in Pac. 214 R² (below, p. 256 and n.174).

[144] Similar language is used by Tibullus, cf. Bader (above, n.137) 42. The distinction Bader draws between "tragic palace-gates and comic house-doors" (45) is useful, since it makes Seneca's links with the "comic" usage particularly clear.

already been made,[145] Phaedra asks Hippolytus for a word in private, ordering any of his companions who may still be present to leave them (*si quis est abeat comes*); Hippolytus then surveys the stage and reports that there are no eavesdroppers in sight (*en locus ab omni liber arbitrio uacat*). The writer of the *Hercules Oetaeus* included this piece of stage business in the plotting scene of Deianira and her nurse (482ff):

> (Deian.)   Circumspice agedum, ne quis arcana occupet,
>   partemque in omnen uultus inquirens eat.
> (Nutr.)   En locus ab omni tutus arbitrio uacat.[146]

Once again, parallels from fifth-century tragedy are extremely rare and are found only in late Euripides: in prologues at *IT* 67ff and *Phoen.* 92ff and, more remarkably, in the presence of the chorus at *Phoen.* 265f and *IA* 862f. As in the case of tragic "asides," these passages are not sufficiently numerous or alike in language or dramatic function to justify speaking of a convention; only in the passage from the *IA*, for example, is the assurance of privacy a prerequisite for a secret conversation, and this passage lacks any reference to looking around the stage: *Πρ. ἦ μόνω παρόντε δῆτα ταῖσδ' ἐφέστατον πύλαις; Αχ. ὡς μόνοιν λέγοις ἄν, ἔξω δ' ἐλθὲ βασιλείων δόμων.*[147] (A closer Euripidean parallel to the lines of Seneca's *Phaedra* may have existed in the lost *Archelaus*, written like the *IA* after Euripides had left Athens for Macedon. The version of the story given by Hyginus [*Fab.* 219], generally agreed to reflect the structure of Euripides' play, reads in part: *qui re cognita dicit se cum rege colloqui uelle secreto; arbitris semotis Archelaus regem arreptum in foueam coniecit atque ita eum perdidit.* The similarity of the action to that in Sen. *Pha.* 599ff is striking, but there can be no certainty that Hyginus' account depicts precisely what Euripides presented on stage.) Looking around the stage before a private conversation, however, is clearly a convention in postclassical drama. New Comedy, as often, furnishes the fullest evidence: cf. Pl. *Capt.* 219f, *secede huc nunciam, si uidetur, procul / ne arbitri dicta nostra arbitrari queant, Mil.* 607f, *sed speculabor nequis aut hinc aut ab laeua aut a dextera / nostro consilio uenator adsit cum auritis plagis*; 955ff, 1137f, *sequimini, simul circumspicite ne quis adsit arbiter. / — neminem pol uideo, nisi hunc quem*

---

[145] Above, p. 224.

[146] The language of 483 is perhaps meant to echo phrases like ὁρῶ, σκοποῦμαι δ' ὄμμα πανταχῇ στρέφων (Eur. *IT* 68).

[147] A similar situation (inspecting the stage before a private conversation) is also present in the prologos of *Philoctetes*, but here the elements of the action are even farther removed from stylized convention (cf. 15ff, 30ff, 48f).

uolumus conuentum, Most 472ff, *circumspicedum, numquis est / sermonem nostrum qui aucupet? — tutum probest. / — circumspice etiam. — nemo est, Stichus* 102f, *Trin.* 146f, *circumspicedum te ne quis adsit arbiter / nobis, et quaeso identidem circumspice.*[148] That the convention was not limited to comedy is shown by a fragment of Accius' *Epigoni* (292 R²): *eaque iui hoc causa, ut ne quis nostra uerba cleperet auribus.*[149] Seneca's use of this item of stage business clearly derives in both language[150] and dramatic function from passages like these rather than from the analogous scenes in Euripides.

Withdrawing to plot future action. At the end of the second act of *Agamemnon*, Clytemestra urges Aegisthus to withdraw with her in order to discuss further their plot to kill Agamemnon (308f): *secede mecum potius, ut rerum statum / dubium ac minacem iuncta consilia explicent.* Coming at the end of a long dialogue devoted to precisely this subject, these words can have only a conventional force; they serve as an exit formula which neatly draws the scene to a close.[151] This motive is not found in the exit announcements of fifth-century tragedy, where plotting is usually carried out on stage in the absence of (or with the connivance of) the chorus.[152] In New Comedy, on the other hand, one character not infrequently orders another to go inside with him in order to plan or execute action; cf. Pl. *Aul.* 649f, *I hac intro mecum, gnate mi, ad fratrem meum, / ut istuc quod me oras impetratum ab eo auferas, Most.,* 1036ff.[153] Seneca's language also shows a connection with that of Roman comedy, where *secedere* and *concedere* are used in situations where a private conversation is sought (cf. Pl. *Am.* 771, *As.*

---

[148] In *Trin.* 69f the convention is the basis of a mild joke: — *men? — numquis est hic alius praeter me atque te? — nemo est.*

[149] This fragment may confirm the suggestion made above that the chorus retired during the episodes of this play.

[150] The word *arbitrio* in Seneca recalls the comic use of *arbiter* in the sense of "eavesdropper," although the use of *arbitrium* in this sense may have originated with Seneca (cf. *T.L.L.* II.410.12ff, where the earliest appearance is given as *Aetna* 196).

[151] One could argue that the scene to this point has turned on Clytemestra's participation in the murder, and that these lines refer to a more specific discussion of strategy, but this second phase of the conversation hardly requires greater secrecy than the first; the lines therefore have almost purely conventional force.

[152] In his note on Soph. *OT* 859ff Jebb interpreted Jocasta's words ἴωμεν ἐς δόμους as an invitation to further discussion inside; there is no clear sign of this in the text.

[153] Further discussion in *Seneca: Agamemnon* (1976) ad loc.

639, *Capt.* 218, 263, Ter. *HT* 510); neither word is used in comedy to announce a joint exit[154] as in *Agamemnon*, but Pl. *Ps.* 571f, *concedere aliquantisper hinc mi intro lubet, | dum concenturio in corde sycophantias*, comes close to the Senecan passage in dramatic function.[155]

Calling for water. When Seneca's Agamemnon returns home to Argos, his reception is marred by the sight of Cassandra lying in a faint after an exhausting series of prophetic visions (786ff):

> Quid ista uates corpus effusa ac tremens
> dubia labat ceruice? famuli, attollite,
> refouete gelido latice. iam recipit diem
> marcente uisu. suscita sensus tuos:
> optatus ille portus aerumnis adest.

Although several Euripidean characters faint, none is revived with water (cf. *Tro.* 462ff, *Andr.* 1076f, *Hec.* 438ff, *Hcld.* 602ff, the most detailed account: ὦ παῖδες, οἰχόμεσθα. λύεται μέλη | λύπῃ· λάβεσθε κεἰς ἕδραν μ᾽ ἐρείσατε | αὐτοῦ πέπλοισι τοῖσδε κρύψαντες, τέκνα.); other instances of this item of business can only be produced from comedy, cf. Arist. *Vesp.* 995, Men. *Sic.* 364, Pl. *Miles* 1330ff:

opsecro, tene mulierem, male
ne adfligatur. — quid istuc quaesost? — quia aps te abit, animo /
factum est huic repente miserae. — curre intro atque ecferto aquam.
— nil aquam moror, quiescat malo. ne interueneris,
quaeso, dum resipiscit.[156]

---

[154] In Pl. *Men.* 570 *huc concedamus* announces a withdrawal out of sight by two characters in order to spy on a third character.

[155] Friedrich (above, n.6) 132f has suggested a connection between the numerous scenes of overhearing in New Comedy and these lines of *Phoenissae* (359ff): *latebo rupis exesae cauo | aut saepe densa corpus abstrusum tegam. | hinc aucupabor uerba rumoris uagi | et saeua fratrum bella, quod possum, audiam.* The context in Seneca seems very different from the proposed comic situation, but the appearance of the verb *aucupor* is suggestive in view of its frequent use in Plautine overhearing scenes; cf. *As.* 881, *Men.* 570, *Mil.* 995, *Most.* 473, cp. Titin. *Com.* 151 R², also *auceps*, *Mil.* 955, *Stich.* 102, *aucupatio* Caec. *Com.* 62 R². The word, however, also appears in Republican tragedy in this sense; cf. Ennius *Sc.* 218 R² (= 245 J) *fructus (fluctus* Junius) *uerborum aures aucupant*, as well as in later writers; cf. Cic. *Pis.* 57, *ut leuitatis est inanem aucupari rumorem*, Ovid *Her.* 9.41, *aucupor infelix incertae murmura famae.* Seneca's lines seem to owe more of their language and tone to Ovid than to Plautus.

[156] See further *Seneca: Agamemnon* (1976) ad loc. The "theatricality" of Seneca's lines is perhaps made clear by citing the close parallel in the second scene of da Ponte's libretto for *Don Giovanni: OTT. "Ah! soccorrete, amici, il mio tesoro. Cercatemi, recatemi | Qualche odor, qualche spirto . . . Donn' Anna! . . .*

Description of offstage action. One of the most settled conventions of classical Greek tragedy concerns the treatment of action which takes place out of sight of the audience, whether inside the building represented by the σκηνή or at some distance from the scene of the play. Action of this kind is reported, briefly or at length according to its importance, by a participant or a witness who arrives on stage; all reports are, obviously, subsequent to the events described. The dramatists often imparted tension and immediacy to such scenes by allowing those on stage to hear something of the off-stage action before its precise nature is made clear, but this modification leaves the convention wholly intact.[157] In two plays of Seneca, however, this fundamental limitation is overridden; for each passage a striking parallel can be cited from postclassical drama.

In the *Phoenissae*, Jocasta's lament for her sorrows (363–386) is followed by a rebuke from a servant[158] who recalls her to the desperate circumstances of the present, as the forces of Eteocles and Polynices prepare for combat (387ff):

> Regina, dum tu flebiles questus cies
> terisque tempus, saeua nudatis adest
> acies in armis.

The servant's description of the armies continues and grows more detailed, until it becomes clear that he is pointing out to Josasta what both of them can see from the palace (394ff):

> uiden?[159] atra nubes puluere abscondit diem
> fumoque similes campus in caelum erigit
> nebulas, equestri fracta quas tellus pede
> submittit et, si uera metuentes uident,
> infesta fulgent signa, subrectis adest
> frons prima telis, aurea clarum nota
> nomen ducum uexilla praescriptum ferunt.

sposa! . . . amica! . . . il duolo estremo | La meschinella uccide!" ANNA *"Ahi!"* OTT. *"Già rinviene. | Datele nuovi aiuti."* etc.

ˈOliver Taplin refers me to the Charioteer in *Rhesus*, who claims to be fainting from his wound (799) and whom Hector orders to be taken to his house for medical attention. The charioteer, however, does not actually faint on stage, and Hector's language maintains a dignified vagueness (872, οἶκος . . . ἐξιάσεται; 878, πορσύνετε).

[157] E.g., Aesch. *Ag.* 1343ff, Soph. *El.* 1404ff, Eur. *Hipp.* 565ff, *El.* 747ff, *Or.* 1347ff.

[158] Above, n.83.

[159] *Viden* is Lachmann's emendation (*ad* Lucr. 3.941); E has *uiden ut*, P CS *uide ut* (for which *Tro.* 945 may be cited as a parallel).

Shortly thereafter Antigone joins in this direct account of the offstage action (414ff): *signa collatis micant | uicina signis, clamor hostilis fremit; | . . . | et ecce motos fletibus credas meis, | sic agmen armis segne compositis uenit.* When Jocasta finally leaves for the battlefield to separate the brothers (after 426[160]), the servant proceeds to describe her offstage actions (427–442):

> Vadit furenti similis aut etiam furit . . .
> attonita cursu fugit et binas statim
> diduxit acies. uicta materna prece
> haesere bella, iamque in alternam necem
> illinc et hinc miscere cupientes manus
> librata dextra tela suspensa tenent . . .
> laniata canas mater ostendit comas,
> rogat abnuentes, irrigat fletu genas.
> negare matri qui diu dubitat, potest.

These lines not only bypass the conventional restriction on the handling of offstage action; even more remarkable, they accomplish a change of scene, so that the setting described in them becomes the actual setting of the scene which immediately follows. In this respect Seneca's dramatic technique seems unparalleled: no other "redefinition" of the scene in ancient drama, including early tragedy and Old Comedy, is quite so bold. The physical limitations of the ancient theater seem completely left behind,[161] and the properties of narrative and dramatic poetry uniquely juxtaposed.[162] While this use of described offstage action to effect a change of setting appears without parallel, the accounts of action offstage earlier in the scene (394ff, 414ff, quoted above) are remarkably similar to a scene in Plautus' *Rudens* in which Sceparnio excitedly describes the stormy landing of Palaestra and Ampelisca (160ff):

> sed O Palaemo[n], sancte Neptuni comes,
> qui Herculi †socius† esse diceris,

[160] Not after 414a, as in F. J. Miller's Loeb translation; note the tenses in 421, *aget;* 423, *feret;* 424, *rapiet;* 426, *proiciet* (cp. *Thy.* 623ff), and the servant's *uadit* in 427.

[161] The scene would not pose insuperable difficulties in a modern production (although a revival of *Phoenissae* is an unlikely eventuality), given the possibilities of selective lighting and of filmed projections of Jocasta's offstage movements. The result might bear some slight resemblance to the scenes of transformation in *Das Rheingold* or *Parsifal*, with the servant's description fulfilling the function of Wagner's musical connecting passages.

[162] *Pha.* 580–588 and *Agam.* 775–781 are other instances in which Seneca seems to resort to a "narrative" transition between scenes.

> quod facinus uideo! DA. quid uides? SC. mulierculas
> uideo sedentis in scapha solas duas.
> ut adflictantur miserae! eugae eugae, perbene!
> ab saxo auortit fluctus ad litus scapham
> neque gubernator umquam potuit tam bene.
> non uidere undas me maiores censeo.
> saluae sunt si illos fluctus deuitauerint.
> nunc, nunc periclumst. ⟨unda⟩ eiecit alteram.
> at in uadost, iam facile enabit. eugepae!
> uiden alteram illam ut fluctus eiecit foras?
> surrexit, horsum se capessit. salua res.
> desiluit haec autem altera in terram e scapha.
> ut prae timore in genua in undas concidit!
> saluast, euasit ex aqua. iam in litore est.
> sed dextrouorsum auorsa it in malam crucem.
> hem! errabit illaec hodie.

The scene presumably goes back to Diphilus, and could represent a comic adaptation of a *coup de théâtre* from fourth-century tragedy.[163] The closest fifth-century analogies are the *teichoskopia* of Eur. *Phoen.* 101ff and Danaus' report of the Egyptian landing in Aesch. *Suppl.* 713ff. Perhaps in this, as in other respects, the last plays of the fifth century reintroduced for a special effect what had been part of early tragedy's natural freedom of movement. (In both these passages, as well as in the brief description of action inside the οἶκος at Eur. *Her.* 867ff, a physical basis for the speaker's ability to see offstage is clearly established. This is not done in Plautus or Seneca.)

In his *Agamemnon*, Seneca makes use of Cassandra's prophetic gifts to relate the murder of Agamemnon in an unusual way. Left alone on stage when Agamemnon enters the palace, Cassandra experiences a clairvoyant vision of the fatal banquet taking place inside, and so describes the offstage events as they unfold (867ff):

> Res agitur intus magna, par annis decem.
> eheu quid hoc est? anime, consurge et cape
> pretium furoris: uicimus uicti Phryges . . .
> tam clara numquam prouidae mentis furor

---

[163] Marx notes that *quod facinus uideo* is probably paratragic, and compares Aesch. *Cho.* 10, τί χρῆμα λεύσσω; The language of the passage in general contains much that could have found a place in a tragedy, and a later tragedian at least thought the scene worthy of imitation: Shakespeare's account of Othello's arrival on Cyprus (II.i) seems to owe its general shape to this passage, and in particular the words "I never did like molestation view / on the enchafèd flood" may well be derived from *non uidisse undas me maiores censeo* (167).

> ostendit oculis: uideo et intersum et fruor,
> imago uisus dubia non fallit meos:
> spectemus. epulae regia instructae domo . . . [164]

The simultaneous description of action taking place "inside" is not found in fifth-century tragedy or in what is known to date of New Comedy.[165] A nearly exact parallel, however, has come to light in a recently published papyrus fragment of a postclassical tragedy.[166] The scene is set in Troy, and in the preserved lines Cassandra is giving an account to Priam and the Trojans of the meeting of Hector and Achilles outside the walls. The entrance of Deiphobus from the palace gives Cassandra a violent shock, since she had assumed that Deiphobus (not Athena in his shape) was standing outside with Hector. Not all details of interpretation are clear, but it is likely that Cassandra was giving the Trojans a clairvoyant account of the offstage action, as in Seneca's *Agamemnon*.[167] There is even a similarity of content between what Seneca's Cassandra says about Aegisthus (890f, *haurit trementi semiuir dextra latus* / *—nec penitus egit!— uulnere in medio stupet*) and what the Cassandra of the tragic papyrus says of Achilles (βέβληκε δεινὸν κάμακα . . . ἀλλ' ἠστόχησε⟨ν⟩). The primary interest of the fragment, however, lies in the precedent it offers for Seneca's use of Cassandra's powers to circumvent the restrictions of the classical messenger speech.[168]

III

The previous section has attempted to show not only that the dramatic technique of Seneca differs from that of fifth-century Greek tragedy, but also that in doing so it conforms to post-Euripidean traditions of

[164] See *Seneca: Agamemnon* (1976) ad loc. for discussion.

[165] The closest approach to a description of indoor action by looking through the stage door may be in Pl. *Bacch.* 833ff, *forem hanc pauxillulum aperi; placide, ne crepa;* / *sat est. accede huc tu. uiden conuiuium?*

[166] *P Oxy* 2746; cf. R. A. Coles in *Oxyrhynchus Papyri* 36 (1970) 7–12; *B.I.C.S.* 15 (1968) 111–118.

[167] A prophetic account may be ruled out, since the entrance of Deiphobus, which is clearly the high point of excitement in the scene, is only disturbing if Cassandra thought he was with Hector *at that moment*; an eyewitness account (with Cassandra on the walls reporting to Priam and the Trojans below) is possible but unlikely, since there would be no point in using Cassandra to report what anyone could see.

[168] As usual the process may be seen starting in the latest plays of the fifth century: *Orestes*, *Philoctetes*, and *IA* show various attempts to enliven the messenger speech, or even (in *IA* 855ff) to dissolve it into dialogue. On this subject, and with reference to Aeschylus as well, see Taplin (above, n.24) 82.

dramatic form.[169] It remains to see whether the source of these post-classical usages in Seneca can be more precisely determined. That Seneca did in fact inherit the practices in question from earlier writers of tragedy, rather than himself imposing techniques of New Comedy directly onto fifth-century models, is virtually certain. Comic evidence has dominated the discussion simply because the tragedy of the period has left almost no traces, but there is every reason to believe that fourth-century tragedy advanced further in the directions which can already be seen in the latest plays of Sophocles and Euripides. If complete texts or even more substantial fragments of fourth-century Greek tragedy or of Republican Roman tragedy were available, a large area of common ground in the structure and technique of tragedy and comedy would probably emerge.

Although Greek tragedy of the fourth century and the Hellenistic age must be passed over for lack of evidence,[170] it is in any case highly unlikely that Seneca had direct knowledge of Greek drama of these periods. The fragments of Republican Roman tragedy, on the other hand, do support to an extent the suggestion of a convergence of post-classical tragic and comic technique. First, a line from Accius' *Epigoni* (302 R²), *sed quid cesso ire ad eam? Em praesto est*, is indistinguishable in language and stage technique from several comic parallels; cf. Pl. *Trin.* 1135, *quid ego cesso hos conloqui?*, Ter. *HT* 410, *cesso pultare ostium | uicini . . . ?*, 757, *cesso hunc adoriri?* Alcmaeon in the *Epigoni* has apparently been soliloquizing or speaking aside and now prepares to approach Eriphyle; the stage direction addressed to oneself (in the absence of a classical chorus) is typical of postclassical drama.[171] Second,

---

[169] Because of this aim, those differences from classical technique which cannot be plausibly related to postclassical practice have either been ignored or mentioned briefly in notes. A further example may be touched on here. In two passages of stichomythia (*Med.* 170f, *Thy.* 257), Seneca divides a trimeter into four parts, thus doubling the normal division into two (*antilabe*). The division into four has only one precedent in extant classical tragedy (Soph. *Phil.* 753, an extraordinary passage in several respects), but is not uncommon in the looser dialogue of New Comedy (cf. Menander *Dysc.* 85; *Epitr.* 249, 391; *Sam.* 409; Pl. *Merc.* 324, 730, 749; *Most.* 638, 641, 1000; Ter. *Andr.* 384, 449, 462, 765; etc.). Neither in Sophocles nor in comedy, however, does the division into quarter-verses serve the dramatic purpose for which Seneca uses it, that of mirroring the emotional excitement of the protagonist (Medea, Atreus; compare also the feeble imitation in *HO* 438). It is therefore impossible to say whether Seneca's use of this technique is an innovation of his own or an inheritance from earlier dramatists. (For further discussion see Seidensticker [above, n.21] 86ff.)

[170] A partial exception can be made for Ezechiel's *Exagoge;* above, pp. 220, 230, and cf. Zwierlein (above, n.6) 138ff.

[171] The situation in Accius offers a useful parallel to the monologue of Lycus

the exit formula *ibo atque* in a fragment of Pacuvius' *Hermiona* (187 R²),
ibo atque edicam frequentes ut eant gratatum hospiti, may be compared
with Terence's use of the same formula in *Hec.* 565, *ibo intro atque
edicam seruis ne quoquam ecferri sinant.*[172] Third, another fragment of
Pacuvius, probably from *Iliona* (214 R²), reads as follows: *ibo ad eam ut
sciscam quid uelint. ualuae sonunt.*[173] The speaker announces an exit
(for the purpose of having an offstage conversation; cf. p. 249 above)
but is forestalled by a noise from the doors signaling the entrance of
another character;[174] compare Pl. *Poen.* 741f, *ibo et pultabo ianuam. —
ita quippini? | — tacendi tempus est, nam crepuerunt fores,* Ter. *HT* 173,
ibo adeo hinc intro. sed crepuerunt fores? Fourth, a fragment of Ennius'
Medea (218 R² = 245 J) reads *fructus uerborum aures aucupant.* Jocelyn
comments, "if this were a comic fragment one would most naturally
interpret it as spoken by an eavesdropper standing on stage. In a
tragedy it is likely to have been spoken by the chorus hearing something
offstage or by a character who has just entered";[175] in the context of the
present discussion this argument against taking the line to refer to
eavesdropping no longer seems conclusive.[176]

Even the few surviving fragments of Republican Roman tragedy

---

in *HF* 332ff (above, p. 231); Seneca's blander language (*namque ipsa* . . . , 355,
compared to *em praesto est*) reflects a difference of stylistic assumptions, not of
dramatic technique. In fifth-century tragedy μέλλεις; (or τί μέλλεις;) is used by
one character of actions to be performed by another; cf. Aesch. *Ag.* 908f, *PV*
627, Eur. *Hec.* 726, *El.* 576, *Pho.* 299, but μέλλω; (or τί μέλλω;) does not appear
to be so used. Seneca's genuine plays contain no instance of this use of *cesso* . . .?
but note *Octauia* 644, *quid tegere cesso Tartaro uultus meos?* (and *Oct.* 73f [above,
n.113]).

[172] Seneca has only one example of *ibo* used by a character leaving the stage:
Jocasta in *Phoenissae* (407), *ibo, ibo et armis obuium opponam caput.* Its language
at least distinguishes this line from those cited in the text.

[173] The line is so transmitted by Nonius (p. 812 Lindsay; *ualuae* is an editorial
correction of *balue*); *eum* and *uelit* have been suggested as emendations, but
neither would affect the point of dramatic technique.

[174] Warmington (fr. 222) proposes a different staging: after the words *ibo* . . .
uelint the speaker goes to the door and knocks; *ualuae sonunt* are then spoken by
someone inside ("there's a knock at the door"). This seems more cumbersome
and is less easily paralleled; *ualuas sonere* announcing an entrance appears twice
in Accius, 29 and 470 R².

[175] *The Tragedies of Ennius* (1967) 382.

[176] In this case, however, eavesdropping is no more likely than a character
(not necessarily the chorus) hearing words spoken indoors, as in Eur. *Hipp.*
565ff. Jocelyn rightly points out that *fructus* makes a connection with Eur. *Med.*
67ff or 131f unlikely; Junius' conjecture *fluctus*, however, which Jocelyn does
not mention but which was accepted by Ribbeck, would appropriately denote
"a turbulent outpouring of words" (cf. Lucr. 6.34, *uoluere curarum tristis in*

show significant resemblances of language and dramatic technique to New Comedy, perhaps the result of the Roman dramatists' adaptation of fourth-century Greek tragedies as well as the works of fifth-century writers.[177] Seneca therefore could, at least in theory, have absorbed many or even all of the postclassical aspects of his technique from Republican tragedy. This possibility might seem to receive confirmation from parallels between plays of Livius Andronicus and Accius and the corresponding Senecan treatments of the myths,[178] and also from the undeniable presence of archaic language in Seneca's tragic style.[179] Other considerations, however, tell against the direct influence of Republican tragedy, primarily Seneca's own strongly expressed scorn for the work of Ennius.[180] If Seneca so little esteemed the greatest of Rome's early poets, he probably shared the contempt of Cicero and Horace for Livius Andronicus, and that of Persius, Martial, and Tacitus for Pacuvius and Accius.[181] Certainly Seneca's prose works display no close knowledge of Republican tragedy, as Cicero's do; almost all Seneca's citations are of well-known *sententiae* (of which *oderint, dum metuant* is the most famous) which might have been derived at second hand, in some instances from Cicero himself.[182] (This

---

pectore fluctus, 3.298, *irarum fluctus*, 6.74), making possible a close link with Eur. *Med.* 131f or (perhaps more likely) 98f.

[177] F. Leo, *Geschichte der römischen Literatur* I (1913) 70f, 189f, 227ff, 396ff; H. J. Mette, *Lustrum* 9 (1964) 50f, 54ff, 78ff; Jocelyn (above, n.175) 7ff, 161ff, 238, *Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique* 17 (1972) 46ff. The activity of early Latin poets like Livius Andronicus and Naevius in both tragedy and comedy might have contributed to a similarity of language and technique between the forms.

[178] The most striking are those connecting Seneca's *Agamemnon* with Livius Andronicus' *Aegisthus* and Accius' *Clytemestra;* cf. *Seneca: Agamemnon* (1976) 13ff.

[179] There is no comprehensive study of Seneca's tragic language. Some material was brought together by B. Schmidt, *Rh. Mus.* 16 (1861) 589 n.; see also my notes on *Agam.* 137, *pessumdatus;* 301, *aerumna;* 300, *facesse propere;* 582, *altisonus;* 636, *subdolus.*

[180] Quoted in Aul. Gell. 12.2; cf. also *De Ira* 3.37.5.

[181] F. Strauss, *De ratione inter Senecam et ueteres Romanas fabulas intercedente* (1887) 5ff; H. D. Jocelyn, *Antichthon* 1 (1967) 61f; *Seneca: Agamemnon* (1976) 12ff.

[182] G. Mazzoli, *Seneca e la poesia* (1970) 188–198 (though Mazzoli believes that Seneca read the Republican dramatists himself). The single exception to the statement in the text is the unplaced line *quod nisi quieris, Menelae, hac dextra occidis* (cited in *Epist.* 80.7), which may have had an intermediary source now lost. The more famous lines *en impero Argis, sceptra mihi liquit Pelops, | qua ponto ab Helles atque ab Ionio mari | urguetur Isthmus* (*Epist.* 80.7) are generally thought to derive from an Augustan *Thyestes;* cf. Strauss (above, n.181) 17f,

argument from silence, however, cannot be pressed too hard, since Seneca's prose works reveal virtually nothing about his activity as a poet.) Seneca might have been compelled to use the work of the Republican dramatists as a point of departure by the absence of any more palatable examples of Latin tragedy, but this was not the case: the works of the Augustans in this genre were available, providing specimens of Latin tragedy closer to Seneca both in time and in literary taste. The existence of this body of Latin tragic poetry is not in doubt; the scope and nature of its influence on Seneca must now be considered.

IV

Any description of Augustan tragedy must of necessity be built up from indirect evidence, since the surviving fragments are pitifully few. Fortunately, the period is in other respects the best preserved and best documented in Roman literary history, and provides a basis for several inferences about the development of tragedy after Accius.

Meter. The most obvious formal difference between Seneca and his Republican predecessors is Seneca's use of the iambic trimeter rather than the senarius in dialogue scenes; the refinement had apparently been adopted by the Augustans, and may indeed be due to them.[183] The suggestion that Asinius Pollio introduced the practice, which was then refined by Varius and perfected by Ovid, is only a guess, but a plausible one. Pollio in his youth was close to Cinna and Catullus, in whose works appear early specimens of Latin iambic trimeters.[184] (Seneca's experiments in polymetric *cantica* in *Oedipus* and *Agamemnon* also deserve mention; their point of departure is the adaptation of Greek lyric meters to Latin accomplished by Horace.[185])

Choice of subjects. All the titles of Augustan tragedies which have been preserved refer to tragic plots for which there was fifth-century

---

B. Bilinski, *Tragica* I (1952) 101ff, L. Strzelecki, *Eos* 53 (1963) 163 n.30. For the circulation of isolated *sententiae* from Republican drama note (perhaps) Phaedrus 3 *Epil.* 33f, *ego, quondam legi quam puer sententiam | 'palam muttire plebeio piaculum est'* (= Ennius *Sc.* 286 R²); cf. Sen. *Epist.* 58.5, 108.30ff.

[183] Leo (above, n.14) 166, 174; L. Strzelecki, *Eos* 53 (1962) 153ff.

[184] H. A. J. Munro, *JPhil* 6 (1876) 75. For Pollio's connections with Cinna and Catullus see Fordyce on Cat. 10.29, introduction to Cat. 12. Iambic trimeters may be implied by Horace in *S.* 1.10.42f, *Pollio regum | facta canit pede ter percusso* (cp. Quint. *Inst.* 9.4.75, Caesius Bassus *GLK* 6.554.22ff).

[185] B. Bussfeld. *Die polymetrischen Chorlieder in Senecas Oedipus und Agamemnon* (1935); *Seneca: Agamemnon* (1976) 372ff.

precedent: *Thyestes, Medea, Atalanta, Peliades.* Although caution is needed in interpreting such slender evidence, it would appear that the Augustans reversed the trend toward post-Euripidean plots which can be observed in Pacuvius and Accius. A similar restriction of subject matter is true for Seneca.[186]

"Classical" refinement. The restrictions of meter and subject just mentioned contributed to a feeling that Latin tragedy had at last attained an appropriately "classical" stature. While for Cicero the Latin equivalents of the Attic triad were Ennius, Pacuvius, and Accius,[187] both Horace and Virgil spoke of the tragedies of Asinius Pollio in words which imply or state a connection with the work of fifth-century Athens: *grande munus | Cecropio repetes coturno (C.* 2.1.11f), *sola Sophocleo tua carmina digna coturno (Ecl.* 8; 10).[188] In tragedy, as in several other genres of poetry, the Augustans felt that Romans had at last produced work that was worthy to stand comparison with the best of Greece. In according a superior standing to the work of their con-tempories the Augustans were hardly unique in Roman literary history. Their self-evaluation, however, is particularly relevant for Seneca's own outlook, both because it was the view prevailing during his youth and literary education, and also because it continued to hold sway during and even after his maturity: when Quintilian surveyed Roman attainments in the field of tragedy, he accorded honorable mention to Pacuvius and Accius as leading figures in a formative stage of Roman tragedy, but singled out Varius' *Thyestes* and Ovid's *Medea* as the highest achievements by Romans in the genre.[189]

Archaism. While the Augustans may have avoided the robustness and occasional crudity of Republican tragedy, they were (unlike Seneca) neither so distant from nor so hostile to earlier Latin poetry as not to be influenced by its language and form. The openness of the major Augustan poets, Virgil and Ovid in particular, to earlier Latin poetry is well established; it suffices to recall Virgil's borrowings from Repub-lican drama[190] and Ovid's use of material from Ennius, Pacuvius, and

---

[186] The translations of Greek tragedy by such as Surdinus (praised by Seneca Rhetor *Suas.* 7.12) might have given Augustan and later writers easier access to fifth-century plots for which there was no Republican version (e.g., *Phaedra* and *Oedipus*).

[187] *Acad.* 1.10, *De Or.* 3.27 (*Or.* 36).

[188] For the addressee of the eighth eclogue see my note above, pp. 197ff.

[189] *Inst.* 10.1.97 f; cf. Tac. *Dial.* 12.6.

[190] M. Wigodsky, *Vergil and Early Latin Poetry (Hermes* Einzelschriften 24, 1972), with the comments of H. D. Jocelyn, *JRS* 64 (1974) 272f.

Accius in the *Metamorphoses*.[191] For Asinius Pollio there is explicit evidence of a sympathetic attitude to archaism in the criticism which Tacitus in the *Dialogus* puts into the mouth of Marcus Aper, that Pollio imitated Pacuvius and Accius in his speeches as well as in his tragedies.[192] This charge, at first difficult to reconcile with Pollio's links to "modern" poets,[193] must mean that Pollio's attempt to form a suitable Latin style for tragedy included a conscious admixture of archaic language, similar to that found in Seneca.[194]

Recitation drama. Varius' *Thyestes* was given a lavish stage presentation at the games celebrating the victory of Octavian at Actium,[195] but this was clearly an extraordinary event and there is no necessity to believe that Varius and other tragic poets of the time composed only for the public stage. Asinius Pollio is known to have introduced his writings to select audiences in the reciting hall,[196] and this practice probably included his tragedies as well as prose works and occasional verses.[197] In the second book of the *Tristia* Ovid draws a lurid picture of the Roman stage as a preserve of brutish sexual vice,[198] and speaks of his own tragedy *Medea* in language that makes no mention of the theater,[199] but Ovid's apologetic purpose may well have determined his presentation of facts. Perhaps tragic poets at this time made no exclusive choice between the stage and the reciting room, but composed for both as opportunity arose, as Pomponius Secundus may have done even in Seneca's day.[200] In any event, once recitation had been adopted for dramatic poetry, its greater convenience and accessibility would have commended it to writers at every level of ability.[201] As a result con-

---

[191] G. d'Anna, *Atti del Convegno Internazionale Ovidiano* (1958) II 217ff; cf. H. Jacobson, *Phoenix* 22 (1968) 299ff (on Ennian influence in *Heroides* 16 and 17).

[192] *Dial.* 21.7f; cf. also Sen. *Epist.* 100.7, Livy *apud* Sen. *Contr.* 9 *praef.* 26, Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.113, 10.2.17; R. Syme, *Sallust* (1964) 55.

[193] Above, n.184. Pollio himself criticized archaizing affectations in other writers (Suet. *Gramm.* 10).

[194] As recommended by Aristotle, *Poetics* 1458b3ff.

[195] The *didascalia* survives in Paris BN Lat. 7530 f.28 (= *CLA* 5.569), written at Monte Cassino between 779 and 797.

[196] Sen. *Contr.* 4 *praef.* 2.

[197] Horace's words in *C.* 2.1.9f, *paulum seuerae Musa tragoediae | desit theatris*, are no obstacle to this view, since *theatrum* can be as easily applied to a reciting hall as to a theatre; cf. Hor. *Ep.* 1.19.41f, Quint. *Inst.* 1.2.9, Gell. 18.5.2.

[198] *Tristia* 2.497ff.

[199] *Tristia* 2.553f, *et dedimus tragicis scriptum regale coturnis, | quaeque grauis decet uerba coturnus habet.*

[200] Tac. *Ann.* 11.13, Quint. *Inst.* 8.3.31; *Seneca: Agamemnon* (1976) 7f.

[201] Juv. 1.5f.

ventions which had once served a theatrical purpose would linger on as mere formal appendages or would be turned to new, non-theatrical ends; both effects are visible in Seneca.[202]

No subtlety of argument can bring Augustan tragedy back from the obscurity into which it has fallen through the accidents of transmission. All that is known or that can be plausibly conjectured, however, suggests that the tragedy of the Augustans resembled that of Seneca in several important respects, and that the synthesis of fifth-century subject matter, post-Euripidean form and technique, stylistic and metrical refinement, sporadic archaism of language, and abstraction from the physical realities of the stage which is generally associated with Seneca was in fact an Augustan achievement.[203] To suggest that every play of Seneca had an Augustan model would be extreme. His *Medea* and *Thyestes* (which are among his most effective productions), however, were undoubtedly shaped by the corresponding plays by Ovid and Varius; *Agamemnon*, *Troades*, and *Hercules Furens* may well have been based on Augustan versions of material which had been handled by Accius;[204] *Phoenissae* might represent an experiment in a new form of dramatic poetry;[205] about *Phaedra* and *Oedipus* nothing useful can be said. Even if Seneca in some cases returned to Republican or fifth-century texts, his ideas of tragic form and language had been so fixed by Augustan models that he molded his material to their specifications.

V

The dominant influence of Augustan tragedy on Seneca which has been suggested here is fully consistent with the central place of Augustan poetry in general in Seneca's plays. It is a commonplace that Seneca's poetic style is heavily indebted to Virgil, Horace, and above all Ovid.[206]

---

[202] For example, entrance announcements by a chorus with no real connection with the action (above, p. 223), or entrance speeches which are allowed to develop into soliloquies (above, p. 231).

[203] This synthesis is not identical with the *tragoedia rhetorica* spoken of by Leo (above, n.14) 147ff, since Leo's early statements on the subject were dominated by his contempt for the influence of declamatory rhetoric on Latin tragedy.

[204] The action of Accius' *Amphitruo* and *Troades* (cf. in particular 479f) parallels at least in part that of Seneca's *HF* and *Troades*.

[205] Above, p. 230.

[206] J. Charlier, *Ovide et Sénèque. Contribution à l'étude de l'influence d'Ovide sur les tragédies de Sénèque* (1954), H. L. Cleasby, *De Seneca Tragico Ovidii imitatore* (1907).

What needs emphasis is the degree to which these nondramatic sources, and Ovid in particular, provided Seneca with models not only of diction and expression but also of characterization and thematic ideas. Seneca's Clytemestra in *Agamemnon*, for example, is clearly based in part on a passage in the *Ars Amatoria*,[207] and his Phaedra on Ovid's sketch of that character in the *Heroides*.[208] One further instance may be adduced, relevant to arguments advanced above. One of Seneca's most vivid scenes is that in which Atreus plots a hideous revenge on his brother Thyestes (*Thy.* 176–335). Part of the dialogue between Atreus and a servant who vainly attempts to restrain him is as follows (254ff):

SAT.   Quid noui rabidus struis?
ATR.   Nil quod doloris capiat assueti modus;
       nullum relinquam facinus et nullum est satis.
SAT.   Ferrum? ATR. Parum est. SAT. Quid ignis? ATR. Etiam nunc
           parum est.
SAT.   Quonam ergo telo tantus utetur dolor?
ATR.   Ipso Thyeste. SAT. Maius hoc ira est malum.
ATR.   Fateor. tumultus pectora attonitus quatit
       penitusque uoluit; rapior et quo nescio,
       sed rapior ... SAT. Facere quid tandem paras?
ATR.   Nescio quid animus maius et solito amplius
       supraque fines moris humani tumet
       instatque pigris manibus — haud quid sit scio,
       sed grande quiddam est.

These lines display Senecan characterization and rhetoric at their most forceful and influential.[209] Seneca's Atreus, it would seem, has gone far beyond the mere retributive vengeance plotted by his predecessors in Accius (199ff R², *iterum iam adgreditur me et quietum exuscitat: | maior mihi moles, maius miscendumst malum | qui illius acerbum cor contundam et comprimam*) and Varius (1f R², *iam fero infandissima, | iam facere cogor*). The praeternatural rage of this Atreus, however, is not entirely Seneca's own innovation; the lines quoted are clearly influenced by

---

[207] Sen. *Agam.* 162ff; Ov. *Ars* 2.399ff.
[208] *Pha.* 91ff — *Her.* 4.109ff; 97f — 128; 110f — 37ff; 113ff — 53ff; 127f — 61f; 184ff and 218ff — 11ff.
[209] They are the source of Lear's lines (II.iv.277ff) "No, you unnatural hags, / I will have such revenges on you both, / that all the world shall — I will do such things, — / what they are, yet I know not, but they shall be / the terrors of the earth."

Ovid's description of Procne faced with the knowledge that Tereus has raped and mutilated her sister Philomela (*Met.* 6.609ff):

> ardet et iram
> non capit ipsa suam Procne fletumque sororis
> corripiens "non est lacrimis hoc" inquit "agendum,
> sed ferro, sed si quid habes, quod uincere ferrum
> possit. in omne nefas ego me, germana, paraui;
> aut ego, cum facibus regalia tecta cremabo,
> artificem mediis inmittam Terea flammis,
> aut linguam atque oculos et quae tibi membra pudorem
> abstulerunt ferro rapiam, aut per uulnera mille
> sontem animam expellam. magnum quodcumque paraui:
> quid sit, adhuc dubito."[210]

Seneca's lines carry the theme a large step further than Ovid's, but in this case, as in many others, Seneca's originality as a poet and dramatist can only be grasped in an Ovidian context.

Friedrich Leo, with the impetuous frankness of youth, declared that he would willingly sell all of Senecan tragedy to recover Ovid's *Medea*.[211] Although that exchange would now seem somewhat unfair, I could gladly part with the *Hercules Oetaeus* and perhaps the *Phoenissae* in return for Ovid's *Medea* and Varius' *Thyestes*. I would do so in the hope of obtaining not only two works of superior literary merit, but also two documents of central importance for the development of Latin drama in general and of Senecan drama in particular.

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

---

[210] Although both Procne and Atreus claim not to know the exact form their revenge will take, this is true only for Procne, who has not yet seen her child Itys and conceived the plan of serving him to Tereus; Atreus, on the other hand, has earlier named *ipse Thyestes* (259) as the means of his revenge. Atreus also refers explicitly to the story of Procne and Tereus as the inspiration for his revenge on Thyestes (275ff).

[211] Leo (above, n.14) 149.