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VERBA ALITER INSTRVCTA: SENECAN POETICS

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> ubi accessere numeri et egregium sensum adstrinxere certi pedes, eadem illa sententia uelut lacerto excussiore torquetur.
>
> (Sen. *Ep*. 108.10)

> When metrical form has been added and when fixed measures tighten an excellent thought, then that very notion is flung, as though by a more violent arm.

> Seneca is wholly himself; what he attempted he executed, he created his own genre.
>
> T.S. Eliot, 'Seneca in Elizabethan Translation'

Seneca recognizes the power of poetry. In his prose works, he discusses how poetry adds punch to moral *sententiae*, and he peppers his letters and dialogues with lines from Virgil, Ovid, and others. Seneca is there typically concerned with ethical matters and so seldom has much to say about poetics specifically. But, in a fragment preserved by Gellius (12.2.2-13), he faults Ennius as old-fashioned,[1] and elsewhere writes that it is best to be alive and writing now (i.e. the first century CE) because of the many great works of literature one can draw upon: 'one discovers words already prepared, which, when positioned differently, create a new form.'[2] The predilection for novelty is not blind to tradition, though poetry is a resource that requires careful handling: poets compose lines worthy of philosophers (*Ep*. 8.8, *Nat.* 4a.pr.19), but sometimes their words can be dangerous, arousing our passions (*Ep*. 115.12), our fears (*Dial.* 6.19.4), or even propagating misinformation (*Dial.* 7.26.6).

Seneca employs poetry to persuade and encapsulate the ethical message present in these works, even though he realizes that there are alternative ways for poetry to be understood.[3] When he discusses poetry, and tragedy in particular, he stresses that it is ultimately the message that matters.[4] Consider how he imagines Lucilius faulting Fabianus' style:

1. See *Ep*. 58.1-6, Quint. *I.O.* 8.3.31.

2. *Ep*. 79.6: *praeterea condicio optima est ultimi; parata uerba inuenit, quae aliter instructa nouam faciem habent*. This letter and *Ep.* 84 provide the best overview of Seneca's method of composition and indicate his positive assessments of issues such as *aemulatio, imitatio,* and, broadly speaking, *contaminatio.*

3. See the competing interpretations of individual poetic passages offered by *philologus*, *grammaticus*, and *philosophus*, respectively (*Ep.* 108.24-37).

4. At *Ep.* 115.14 he provides a bouquet of tragic lines dealing with greed, and the audience's reaction to one of these speeches. Mazzoli (1970) provides the best overview of Seneca's discussion of poetry in his prose works.

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> uolo luxuriam obiurgari, libidinem traduci, inpotentiam frangi. sit aliquid oratorie acre, tragice grande, comice exile.
>
> (Sen. *Ep*. 100.10)

> I want luxury to be reproached, desire to be reduced, and ferocity to be broken. Let him display the sharp edge of oratory, the grandeur of tragedy, and the subtlety of comedy.

Seneca responds by arguing that what makes Fabianus worthy of emulation is that his words lead to moral actions, through the betterment of the mind, instead of merely seeking applause.[5] Tragedy's 'grandeur' (*grande*) or 'loftiness' can aid in argumentation, but it is not necessary for philosophical progress and thus is largely passed over in the moral epistles. The papers that make up this collection often consider the aesthetic 'loftiness' or sublimity to which Seneca's dramatic poetry aspires (and which it often complicates) and, likewise, they investigate the relationship between the characters' language and their actions, a frequent concern in Seneca's ethical writings. If his prose writings intimate various perspectives on poetics, the dramatic poetry of his tragedies provides the most promising and fruitful material for studying his complex and erudite poetics.

This volume aims to investigate the breadth and creative quality of Senecan poetics. Seneca is that rare figure in antiquity, like Horace, who has left us not only a large corpus of poetic texts, but also his thoughts on poetry. His tragedies have often struck readers as being 'tone poems' (Mendell [1941], 67) or 'verbal paintings' (Mastronarde [1970], 291), and it is the literary texture of these dramas that the authors in this volume investigate and elucidate. Inasmuch as tragedy is both informed by multiple genres and performed in a variety of meters, it naturally employs diverse forms of poetic expression. The cross-fertilization of different poetic registers is essential to the pleonastic, panoptic sequences which are characteristic of Senecan dramaturgy and which allow him to express consensus or dissenting opinions on the events. Whether across individual episodes, or, as Sampson describes, specifically within the prologues, such counterpoint and contrast propel the tragic action. For example, Oedipus' prologue speech and the opening chorus of *Oedipus* elaborate on the ravages of the plague from sundry points of view, whereas the initial chorus of the *Medea* invokes the joyous gods of marriage to counter those of Medea's initial curse. The freedom with which tragedy is permitted to manipulate meter and structure facilitates the articulation of alternate views. Seneca's chorus is not simply another *dramatis persona*, but also expresses itself differently, a distancing that would be reinforced by any musical accompaniment for its odes. But change of meter (e.g. to anapaests,

5. *Ep*. 100.11: *ad profectum omnia tendunt, ad bonam mentem, non quaeritur plausus* ('Everything aims at progress and a good mind, applause is not sought'). *Ep*. 108.7-9 discusses how poetry may lead to applause (*plaudit*, 108.9), but without the proper understanding of the underlying philosophical message.

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monadic lyric in the Horatian mode, or polymetric cantica) is more than simply structural: musical form represents anew the interplay between the characters and ideas onstage.

Seneca's poetic creativity takes other forms. His trimeters, for one, improve upon the Republican *senarius* and produce subtle effects through elision, enjambment, alliteration, and assonance. Thus, near the close of his great storm narrative in the *Agamemnon*, Eurybates remarks on the ships destroying one another:

> hanc alia retro spatia relegentem ferit
> et fracta frangit
>
> (Sen. *Ag*. 574f.)

> One strikes another rowing backward and broken, it breaks.

The alliteration of *f* sounds as well as the *figura etymologica* illustrate how the ships retreat against one another and the temporal shifts between *fracta* and *frangit* place before our eyes the before-and-after effects of the horrific storm.[6] Seneca is also keen to exploit the metrical and poetic potential of the tragic genre: Creon delivers the words of the Delphic oracle in dactylic hexameters (*Oed.* 233-38), the accustomed meter of oracular pronouncements.[7] Other choices are inspired: Medea's polymetric incantation (*Med.* 740-848) exploits the resources of song (*carmen*) for her spell (*carmen*), while Andromache's anapaestic monody (*Tro.* 705-35) conveys her heightened emotion at the prospect of losing her son.[8] Throughout the tragedies, additionally, one finds the heightened register of Latin poetic language, with certain innovative poetic coinages such as the description of Crete as *uasti Creta dominatrix freti* ('tyrant over the vast sea', *Pha*. 85).[9] Mythological erudition, dense imagery, florid descriptions and wordplay demand an attentive audience that grasps and appreciates the penchant for Latin poetry to be self-referential and obsessed with its status as poetry.

As tragedies, the plays were written for performance, whether real or imagined in the mind of the reader. A poetics of performance may appear oxymoronic when applied to Seneca, who has been vilified for tragedies 'for the arm-chair, not the stage',[10] but recent works emphasize how Seneca takes into consideration the

6. See Gunderson in this volume for more on the effects of repetition on this passage.

7. Seneca tellingly mentions Phoebus (*Phoebo*) in the center of the decree, and features language (e.g. *profugus, nocens, notus*) that binds the oracle into the play's message.

8. Euripides' play has Andromache respond in trimeters (Eur. *Tr.* 740-79). A better parallel is her lament in aeolics in *Andromache,* when another son is being taken away by yet another Greek antagonist (Eur. *And.* 501-44).

9. So also *ensis* is preferred to *gladius*, and compounds in *-fer* abound.

10. Tyrrell (1895), 6. The question of performance is still open; cf. Heil (2013), Kugelmeier (2007), and Harrison (2000) for a survey of opinions. Hine (2000), 42, puts it nicely: 'In the debate about staging neither side can deliver a knock-out blow to the other.'

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conventions and tastes of his time.[11] The theater of Horace's day had slid into spectacle laden with special effects, but Seneca refocuses his tragedies on the language itself.[12] Tellingly, his dramatic poetry is consciously post-classical and informed by the rhetorical trends of his day. Declamatory rhetoric infuses his speeches and character development, as the characters attempt to control both the language of the play and its interpretation: from slave to king, child to *senex*, all are well-trained in the thrust and parry of rhetorical combat! The declamations of Seneca's day were performances in their own right,[13] and one observes their verbal features—*sententiae*, epigram, apostrophe, and intertextual play—on every page of Seneca's dramatic poetry.[14]

Among the features of poetics that are so common as to be conventional in Seneca's age, intertextuality is especially prominent. DeBrohun in this volume examines how connections with fifth-century Athenian tragedy still reward study, even if scholars no longer think Seneca is actively trying to rewrite Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* or Euripides' *Phoenissae* in his homonymous plays. The same is doubtless true of Republican tragedy, as well,[15] but non-dramatic poetic traditions also figure prominently. As Cowan perceptively identifies in this volume, satire and the satiric idea of tragedy also influence Seneca's poetics, but in unexpected ways; Seneca appropriates satiric *topoi* and attitudes, bringing the two genres into an uncomfortable alignment. It also thoroughly befits tragedy, whose polymetric form and potential for *uariatio* make it a particularly pliable genre, that the influence of epic and lyric poetry—of Virgil, Ovid, and Horace—can be felt throughout.[16] Seneca's relationship to the poetic tradition is discernible in its reception, that is, in his own reading(s) of his predecessors. As both Trinacty and Ginsberg in this volume demonstrate, these readings often come from a tragic perspective and are historicized to his contemporary world.

Seneca's notion of tragedy is influenced by more than his reception of a profound literary tradition: not only was he the pre-eminent orator and poet of his

11. See Zanobi (2014) for the influence of pantomime. Kohn (2013), 141, points out that 'dramaturgy is not an isolated element of Senecan drama but rather a key ingredient, contributing to the themes of the individual plays'.

12. So Goldberg (1995), 276: 'We might productively argue that rhetoric—in particular declamation—was a positive influence on Roman tragedy because it asserted the primacy of language over spectacle.' See Horace, *Ep.* 2.1.194-207 for the grandeur of late Republican tragedy. Seneca critically responds to Horace's *Ars* as well; cf. Trinacty (2014), 11-13, 193-214 *passim*.

13. See Bloomer (1997), 110-53, for more on the social make-up of the performance of declamations as depicted by Seneca the Elder.

14. Canter (1925) still offers the most thorough catalogue of rhetorical features from *adfictio* to word-order.

15. Harrison (2015) and Filippi (2015) stress the active reception of Republican tragedy in this period.

16. Seneca responds to Horace's injunction about poetic subject-matter (*publica materies*, *AP* 131) when discussing his own authorial position at *Ep.* 79.6. Seneca's view, much like Horace's own, is that the later author should not feel an 'anxiety of influence' provided he render such material with his own original blend of *ars* and *ingenium*.

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day, but he was also a prominent Stoic philosopher. Stoic ideas abound in the dramas, even though they are no more *exempla* of Stoicism gone wrong than their *personae* are veiled Stoic sages.[17] Stoic language and concepts, rather, imbue the plays with the seriousness that Seneca considers germane to tragedy. Thus, the analysis of emotions such as anger (*ira*, *furor*), the vagaries of duty and of self-construction, and even Stoic views of tragedy are reflected, refracted, and focused in the verses of Seneca's tragedies.[18] Fate and fortune are major concerns, especially of the chorus, and it is easy to see Stoicism's long shadow in lines such as *fatis agimur: cedite fatis* ('we are driven by fate; yield to fate', *Oed*. 980). But in a play like the *Oedipus*, in which a multiplicity of attitudes about fate are articulated, it is hard to believe this one *sententia* should be taken as the final word.[19] Stoic ideas are present, but the plays do not privilege or spoon-feed the audience a particular interpretation.

Seneca's poetics, therefore, unite the forces that permeated his life. Tragedy provides the setting for the articulation and examination of his concerns, and he exploits the resources of dramatic poetry to question and investigate issues of power, language, performance, and the vital experiences of the individual.

Poetics in Play

In the following two examples, one from a character's speech and another from a choral passage, we illustrate characteristics of Senecan poetics from the overview above in order to show how his poetics informs the structure, themes, and meaning of the passage and, at times, the play itself.

Seneca is interested in the psychological foundations of his characters' behavior, and many scenes provide the platform for them to elucidate their innermost feelings and desires.[20] In the *Phaedra*, the titular character responds to the Nurse's attempt to turn her away from her passion for Hippolytus:

17. See Star (2015), 246-56, for a recent consideration of the way Seneca's tragedies relate to Stoicism.

18. See Schiesaro (2003), McElduff and Fitch (2002), and Staley (2010) respectively on these issues.

19. Note the previous chorus' own claim about fate (Sen. *Oed.* 882-91), Jocasta's appeal, *nemo fit fato nocens* ('no one is guilty because of fate', 1019), and the words of Oedipus, *fata superaui impia* ('I have surpassed my wicked fate', 1046). See Boyle (2012), *ad* 980-97, and Sklenár (2007/8) for more on the final choral ode.

20. Wilson (2010), 428, comments on a similar passion-restraint scene in the *Agamemnon*: 'Seneca has employed a device that externalizes into a dialogue the internal conflict within the queen's soul. It is a Roman dramatic convention that brings what is inside and normally invisible to the audience out into public view…for Seneca what needed to be revealed was not physical but psychological.'

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quae memoras scio
uera esse, nutrix, sed furor cogit sequi
peiora. uadit animus in praeceps sciens
remeatque frustra sana consilia appetens.
sic, cum grauatam nauita aduersa ratem
propellit unda, cedit in uanum labor
et uicta prono puppis aufertur uado.
quid ratio possit? uicit ac regnat furor,
potensque tota mente dominatur deus.
hic uolucer omni pollet in terra impotens
laesumque flammis torret indomitis Iouem;
Gradiuus istas belliger sensit faces,
opifex trisulci fulminis sensit deus,
et qui furentes semper Aetnaeis iugis
uersat caminos igne tam paruo calet;
ipsumque Phoebum, tela qui neruo regit,
figit sagitta certior missa puer
uolitatque caelo pariter et terris grauis.

(Sen. *Pha.* 177-94)

I know what you say
Is true, Nurse, but passion compels me to follow
The worse. My knowing mind advances headlong
And vainly turns back to seek wise advice.
Just as when a sailor drives his weighted ship against
The waves, his labor all for naught and the craft,
Defeated, is borne away by the rip current.
What can reason do? Passion has won and rules,
A powerful god and ruler of my whole heart.
This winged violent god holds sway over the entire world
And scorches Jove, wounded by his almighty flames;
War-bringing Mars has felt that one's torches,
The craftsman god of the forked lightning has felt it,
The one who always stokes the raging forge on Etna's slopes,
He grows hot from this god's small fire.
Phoebus himself, who marshals arrows with his bow,
This boy more accurately fixed with a flying arrow
And he flies about, a grievous force for both heaven and earth.

Seneca begins the speech with a nod to the Roman poetic tradition, engaging in a *contaminatio* of source material from Ovid and Virgil. Ovid's Medea likewise figures her dilemma as a choice between reason and passion, and Phaedra's self-characterization takes up Medea's language in order to emphasize their correspondence (Ov. *Met.* 7.20f.: *uideo meliora proboque, / deteriora sequor* 'I see

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the better and approve it, / I follow the worse; cf. Eur. *Med*. 1078-80).[21] The 'headlong' (*in praeceps*) advancement of her 'knowing mind' also prepares the reader for the exploitation of a famous moment from Virgil's *Georgics*, when the poet muses on the propensity for entropy and destruction:

> sic omnia fatis
> in peius ruere ac retro sublapsa referri,
> non aliter quam qui aduerso uix flumine lembum
> remigiis subigit, si bracchia forte remisit,
> atque illum in praeceps prono rapit alueus amni.
> (Virg. *Georg*. 1.199-203)

> Thus everything is fated
> To rush toward the worse and, taken up, to be carried back again,
> Not other than he who scarcely maintains his skiff
> Against the current with his oars, so if by chance he dropped
> His arms, the river snatches him up headlong in its quick current.

Seneca's simile responds to Virgil's, but with a different valence. Virgil pessimistically and programmatically describes how *labor* is ultimately destined to be unsuccessful,[22] which Seneca supplements by picturing the futile application of *ratio* in the tempest of *furor*. The Virgilian river current becomes a storm at sea, overwhelming even this princess of Crete, since the god of love is yet more powerful (*potensque tota mente dominatur deus,* 185).[23] Seneca's own invocation of *labor* (182), not to mention the similarities in language and imagery, signposts the Virgilian intertext,[24] but where Virgilian fate causes all things to move towards the worse (*in peius*), Seneca fixates on the personal level and the tragic actions of Phaedra, who follows the worse (*sequi / peiora*) because of her passion. The character's application of an epic simile to herself moves from personal affront to macroscopic, universal consequences,[25] a poetic sleight of hand that is part and parcel with Senecan protagonists' self-importance and grandeur.

21. Phaedra's knowledge (*scio, sciens*) runs parallel to that of the 'full-knowing reader' (Pucci [1998]) who knows the sources invoked by these allusions. Medea becomes a haunting paradigm for the play; see McAuley (2012). Boyle (1987), *ad loc.,* remarks on these intertexts.

22. Thomas (1988), *ad loc*., calls this section 'the very heart of the poem'.

23. Note how Seneca uses this language when describing Crete (*uasti Creta dominatrix freti*, 85), the sea-monster (*dominator,* 1039) and Phaedra's own desire for punishment (*me me, profundi saeue dominator freti, / inuade…* 'Destroy me! Me! Savage god of the sea…,' 1159f.). Doing so actively unites these sections of the play and highlights how the Virgilian intertext is redefined and particularized within the context of Seneca's tragedy.

24. In addition, the formulation *cedit in uanum labor* may recall Manilius 4.435, which posits the poet's predicament in trying to create poetry out of a difficult subject matter.

25. For more on the Stoic underpinnings of such *sympatheia*, see Rosenmeyer (1989), 107f.

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The passage's closely-knit verbal matrix, which links themes, characters, and actions, further reveals Seneca's poetic artistry.[26] For instance, the 'weighted' (*grauatam*) ship befits one afflicted by a god who is also 'grievous' (*grauis*), but the same adjective subsequently features in the description of the monster from the sea (1020) as well as the final curse of Theseus: *grauisque tellus impio capiti incubet* ('may the earth lie heavy on her impious head', 1280). The weight (*grauis*) of the god of love also speaks ironically to the generic dissonance between Amor's typical elegiac lightness and his position in the 'heavy' world of tragedy. The chiastic arrangement of adjectives and nouns of *laesumque flammis torret indomitis Iouem* (187) approximates, in a trimeter, the so-called 'golden line' of epic hexameter,[27] an archness which is reinforced by the subsequent couplet's heightened poetic vocabulary (*belliger*, *opifex*). Purposeful diction provides structural glue: as Gunderson discusses in this volume, Seneca exploits repetition throughout his tragedies with a variety of effects. Even a common verb such as *sentire* can take on further meaning if, as here, it describes Cupid's power over Mars and Vulcan in adjacent lines (188f.) before reappearing in a further description of love's power over natural elements—the Nereids in the depths of the sea (335f.), for example, and the creatures of the sky (338).[28] Similarly, the idea that Phaedra's passion compels her to 'follow the worse' (178f.) recurs not only when the chorus sings of Fortuna's profligacy (980), but also in the verb *sequor*, which appears in the grisly account of Hippolytus' death (1034, 1077), Phaedra's death-wish (1180), and Theseus' guilty self-reproach (1240). Metrical effects reinforce his point: the metrical shortening in the final syllable of *ratio* implies the weakness of *ratio* in the face of *furor* (*quid ratio possit?*). Although *ratio* is the foundation of Stoic ethics, Phaedra's desperate question indicates that the tenets of Stoicism hold little sway in the face of such passion.[29] The god of love, by contrast, is both powerful (*potens*, 185) and wild (*impotens*, 186), a paradox further highlighted by his influence on both Phaedra (*tota mente*) and on the world at large (*omni…terra*).[30] It is no

26. See Mastronarde (1970), 312: 'Groups of words with their associated moods and imagery recur with shifts of meaning which reinforce and illuminate other uses of the same word, mood, or image. Some interconnections are fairly definite, but the independent life assumed by individual words in their interplay may add vague and ominous suggestiveness to a seemingly straightforward passage.'

27. Wilkinson (1963), 216, suggests the name 'silver line' for golden lines with chiastic arrangement of nouns and adjectives, as here.

28. The doubling of *sensit* here may imply that the gods involved (Mars and Vulcan) both loved the same goddess, Venus. The verb *colo* is similarly ubiquitous in *Phaedra*, appearing in a number of contexts with a multiplicity of implications.

29. See *Ep*. 66.39: *'quid est ergo ratio?' naturae imitatio. 'quod est summum hominis bonum?' ex naturae uoluntate se gerere* ('"What, then, is reason?"—the imitation of Nature. "What is the greatest good for man?"—to conduct oneself according to the will of nature'). Stoic language helps to clarify Phaedra's and Hippolytus' competing ideas about nature and reason (cf. *Pha.* 567).

30. The language of potency abounds in the play: Cupid is called *impotens* again (276), and his fires *potens* (330), but *potens* is rich and diverse. Phaedra personally imagines relief from her passion—such as Daedalus provided for Pasiphaë—in such terms (121), scolds Hippolytus for addressing her by the powerful (*potens*) title *mater* (609), and is emphatically not in control of herself (699).

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surprise that these same adjectives materialize in the chorus on the power of love (*impotens*, 276; *potens*, 331).

Phaedra argues that it is impossible for her, a mere mortal, to stand up to the force of Cupid when all the gods of Olympus have fallen under his sway: Jupiter, Mars, Vulcan, and Apollo are 'proof' that Phaedra must succumb as well.[31] Such lists are common in Senecan tragedy, often expanding to unwieldy size and scope, but here the gods mentioned are also pertinent to the play and Phaedra's grandiose conception of her family's mythical history: after all, she is a descendant of both Jove (129) and Phoebus (126f.). She inherits her ancestors' weakness, and the nurse's complaint about the unnatural power of a *Cretan* woman's love (175-77) belies the full story—for Phaedra, such heritage goes back more than a generation or two! Their exchange is a fine example of how Seneca's characters exploit the features of declamatory *suasoria* to persuade their antagonists of their 'correct' point of view. While Phaedra's plea may appear hyperbolic, the epic aggrandizement of her self-characterization also generates the momentum she needs to dare her desperate actions. This is all appropriate to a tragedy: unlike a single declamation, it is agonistic, and offers Seneca a forum both for exploring the polyvalence of myth and for scrutinizing the language that characters use to define themselves, their actions, and their world.

The tragedies' choral lyrics display many of the same features of Senecan poetics. The odes function in myriad manners, but most often provide yet another distinctive view of the action at hand. Their frequently philosophical themes and motifs, as well as Horatian language, create an atmosphere of reflection and poise that can appear incongruent to the episodes' horrific plotting, flaring tempers, and bloody action. Seneca's treatment of the chorus remains controversial, and is one of the features regularly impugned. For instance, the chorus is not as integral to the dramatic action as in Greek tragedy, and can be present or absent depending on the scene.[32] But while certain songs may appear to be detached *embolima*, it is important to keep in mind Mazzoli's words: 'The connections with the dramatic context are certainly semantic rather than mimetic, starting from keywords that form subtle dialectical bridges or, at the least, ideological indicators referring to the immediately surrounding action at the beginning or end of choruses.'[33] The choral songs build on the imagery and key terms of the play from an alternative perspective, which causes the audience to (re)adjust their own perception of the events and the interpretations offered by characters thus far.

Potency could prevent suffering, but is also, in its connection to Cupid—and the affection for kin installed by nature (1114)—bound up with disaster.

31. Coffey and Mayer (1990), *ad* 187-94, note the gender dynamics of her argument.

32. See Calder (1975); Stroh (2008), 212f., discusses a modern staging of the chorus in *Troades*.

33. Mazzoli (2014), 573.

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As a representative example, consider the way Seneca highlights the semantic ties between the third choral ode of the *Thyestes* and the language of the play as a whole:

> nulla sors longa est. dolor ac uoluptas
> inuicem cedunt; breuior uoluptas.
> ima permutat leuis hora summis.
> illa qui donat diadema fronti,
> quem genu nixae tremuere gentes,
> cuius ad nutum posuere bella
> Medus et Phoebi propioris Indus
> et Dahae Parthis equitem minati,
> anxius sceptrum tenet et mouentes
> cuncta diuinat metuitque casus
> mobiles rerum dubiumque tempus.
>
> uos quibus rector maris atque terrae
> ius dedit magnum necis atque uitae,
> ponite inflatos tumidosque uultus.
> quidquid a uobis minor expauescit,
> maior hoc uobis dominus minatur;
> omne sub regno grauiore regnum est.
> quem dies uidit ueniens superbum,
> hunc dies uidit fugiens iacentem.
>
> (Sen. *Thy*. 596-614)

> No state endures, the pain and pleasure one
> To other yields, and joys be soonest passed.
> One hour sets up the things that lowest be;
> He that the crowns to princes doth divide,
> Whom people please with bending of the knee,
> And at whose beck their battles lay aside
> The Medes, and Indians eke to Phoebus nigh,
> And Dakes that Parthians do with horsemen threat,
> Himself yet holds his sceptres doubtfully,
> And men of might he fears and chances great
> (That each estate may turn) and doubtful hour.
>
> O ye, whom lord of land and waters wide,
> Of life and death grants here to have the power,
> Lay ye your proud and lofty looks aside.
> What your inferior fears of you amiss,
> That your superior threats to you again.
> To greater king, each king a subject is.

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> Whom dawn of day hath seen in pride to reign,
> Him overthrown hath seen the evening late.
>
> (tr. Jasper Heywood)

We have printed Jasper Heywood's translation of this ode to indicate that translation itself is a form of reception, a topic explored by Braund in this volume.[34] Heywood translated the chorus thus in 1560 and his translations of *Thyestes, Troas* (1559) and *Hercules Furens* (1561) jumpstarted the massive influence Seneca would come to have on Elizabethan and Renaissance drama.[35] In addition, Heywood's poetry admirably adapts Seneca's literary and philosophical concerns into English verse: Heywood privileges alliteration ('pain and pleasure'; 'lord of land and waters wide'), employs a heavily rhymed pentameter for Seneca's varied lyric meters, and hints at contemporary political concerns (note the mention of 'princes' and a 'king'). If translation underscores reception, Heywood certainly displays poetic license in his works, often adding choral passages, entire scenes and prefaces, while on the line-by-line level exercising a very Senecan amplification or compression of language and imagery.[36]

The ode's mannered and sententious statements celebrate the pervasive influence of declamation. Seneca's chorus strives for point and pithy formulations of their world-view,[37] but it is a view more emblematic of Seneca's contemporary political frame than the mythological world of Mycenae.[38] Tribes of Medes, Parthians, and Dahae featured in the previous ode and its discussion of kingship (*Thy*. 369-84), and Seneca repeats them to recall that song's ideal of regal tranquility, in contrast to the anxiety (*anxius*) and fear (*metuit*) that burden this king. Repetition of language, often at the same point in the line (*uoluptas*, 596, 597; *uobis,* 610, 611; *dies uidit*, 613, 614), and the regularity of the hendecasyllabic meter reflect the chorus' hope for peace and order after the fraternal civil war.[39] End-rhyme bridges the transition between the two sections (*casus/ tempus; terrae/uitae*) and deep parallelism—of meter, of metrical position, of syllable, and of syntax (*maris atque terrae / necis atque uitae*)—reinforces the comparison of the god of sea and land with the king who has power over life and

34. Translation taken from Ker and Winston (2012), 180.

35. See Ker and Winston (2012) and Slaney (2016), 72-77, for more information and bibliography on Heywood's translations.

36. Such additions correspond to Seneca's own *aemulatio* of his source material, as Pincombe (2012), 540, postulates, '[Heywood] does show himself to be greedily aware of the emulative spirit which motivates him in the additional scene he added at the very end of the play, which acts as an extraordinary reversal of the final scene of Seneca's original.'

37. E.g. *breuior uoluptas* (597); *omne sub regno grauiore regnum est* (612).

38. See Tarrant (1985), *ad loc.*, on the 'thoroughly Roman and imperial' frame of reference.

39. See *Thy*. 562: *arma ciuilis…belli*. Germane intertexts with Virgil's *Ecl*. 1.6 (*Thy*. 561f.) and Horace *Carm*. 2.1.17f. (*Thy*. 574f.) emphasize that the civil war of Mycenae can be seen through the lens of Roman civil war poetry. This hope for order can be seen to disintegrate at the conclusion of the choral song when its final adonius *(turbine uersat*, 622) is echoed in the messenger's first words (623) with a distinct change of meaning, cf. Tarrant (1985), *ad loc*.

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death. The chorus' language will recur later in the play: at his cannibalistic feast, for example, Thyestes wonders, *dolor an metus est? an habet lacrimas / magna uoluptas?* ('Is this anguish or fear? Or does great pleasure involve tears?', *Thy.* 968f.). Similarly, the sun's horrified withdrawal (*dies recessit*, 892)—accompanied by the gods, as well (*fugientes deos*, 893)—recalls the flight of day (*dies… fugiens*) in the ode's final couplet, though in a way that complicates its logic. For, at the tragedy's conclusion, the audience retrospectively might wonder who, exactly, is the chorus' proud man (*superbum*) brought low. How should one interpret Atreus' 'victory'?

Intratexts such as these stitch the play's disparate odes and episodes together more tightly into a poetic unity. But as Seneca's plays tend to do, the ode also looks beyond the play: an intertext to Horace at the opening of this section, for example, stresses that Fortune needs to be seen behind the fluctuations of power and position:[40] the chorus' *ima permutat leuis hora summis* reworks Horace's observation *ualet ima summis / mutare et insignem attenuat deus* ('the god can exchange the positions of the lowest and highest and diminish the noble', Hor. *Carm.* 1.34.12f.).[41] The poetic force of Seneca's ode is multivalent: thematically and lexically integrated within the drama of which it constitutes a part and which, accordingly, informs its interpretation, its reach also extends beyond the individual play to larger traditions both philosophical and literary. Much as Littlewood's analysis of the Senecan sublime in this volume considers not simply the juxtaposition of peace and violence in *Hercules Furens*, but also reflects on Lucretian and Virgilian poetry of nature and the sublime, interpreting this passage of *Thyestes* prompts a reading of the entire Horatian ode. It reveals, like a commentary, Seneca's critical reception of Horace.[42] For while Seneca shares a fixation on personified Fortuna and the divine impact on human lives, the agency of Atreus undermines the notion that one's fortune is imposed, impersonally, by divine forces. The play's final act repeatedly invokes the gods' withdrawal and flight from the scene (1035f., 1068-71), and Thyestes' appeals for divine vengeance (1077-90, 1110f.) go unanswered. An Ovidian echo complicates the line's Horatian foundation: the chorus speaks of *leuis hora*, a tag found in Pythagoras' philosophical speech about transformation, *neque enim consistere flumen / nec leuis hora potest,* ('neither the river nor the swift hour can stand still', Ov. *Met.* 15.180f.). The Ovidian reference only furthers the idea

40. Following Boethius' observation, *quid tragoediarum clamor aliud deflet nisi indiscreto ictu fortunam felicia regna uertentem?* ('What else is the business of tragedies than to weep at fortune overturning happy rules with her arbitrary blow', Boeth. *C.* 2.2.39f.), the fickleness of Fortune was one of the primary tragic themes picked up from Seneca by writers of the trecento and quattrocento as well as his early translators: see Grund (2011), vii-xx.

41. Both odes similarly focus on Fortune at their conclusions.

42. Horace's own recognition of the power of the gods was due to a meteorological event much like the eclipse that affects Mycenae. In addition, the following ode of Horace is a hymn to *Fortuna* — would a reader who acknowledges the intertext to 1.34 think about the larger Horatian book?

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that change is inevitable (and even natural), although Seneca's cynicism and bleakness are his own.

While the rhetorical nature of Seneca's plays can discourage certain readers and critics, there is no reason to believe that the force of his language is diminished in performance: in fact, performance might emphasize certain features.[43] In the previous scene, Thyestes knelt before Atreus, who attempted to give him the regal crown and scepter (520-32) before the two discussed rule (*regnum*, 534) and the gifts of fortune (536). Inasmuch as it mimics the recent actions onstage and reaffirms shared thematic concepts, the chorus' song enhances the topicality of its pronouncements. The payoff of such a performance is the audience's recognition, in this case, of the chorus' misreading of the situation: Atreus is not the sort of figure who seems anxious or fearful; rather, he dismisses the concept of a greater power (*regno grauiore*, 612).[44] Seneca's attention to performance features is not restricted to such large-scale, structural concerns: in addition, frequent use of dramaturgical vocabulary indicates a taste for metatheatrical overtones. Thus the chorus' command *ponite…tumidos uultus* ('put aside your haughty looks', *Thy.* 609) may evoke the theatrical mask. As Tarrant hints at in his commentary, it is 'an interesting metaphor, which treats the *uultus* as an artificial covering (like a mask) that can be removed at will.'[45] In a play like the *Thyestes*, in which Atreus aims to deceive Thyestes by playing different roles, and in which Thyestes himself takes on different appearances in the course of the play (*uultus…maestos*, 506; *uultus…boni*, 936) such metatheatrical connotations are pertinent and meaningful.[46]

Poetics in Praxis

The essays in this volume provide original views of Seneca's poetics with an eye to stressing the creativity of Seneca's dramatic poetry. Sampson begins, appropriately, with first acts, and argues that they discomfit in subtle ways even as they lay the foundation for the drama to come. DeBrohun reinvigorates the investigation of Greek *contaminatio* by tracing the nuances of Seneca's relationship to Attic tragedy. She demonstrates how Seneca's *Oedipus* draws on a

43. Kohn (2013) offers dramaturgical possibilities for the plays. Note British playwright Caryl Churchill's enjoyment of translating Seneca's *Thyestes* for the stage (1995), vii: 'I began to feel he was far blunter, faster and subtler than I'd thought, and I began for my own pleasure to puzzle out what was there.'

44. His dismissal features language that resembles this choral song from his *superbo uertice* (886, cf. *superbum* 612) to the attainment of his *summa uotorum* (888, cf. *summis* 598).

45. Tarrant (1985), *ad loc*. Comparanda for the metatheatrical possibility can be found at *Oed.* 1003: *uultus Oedipodam hic decet* (Oedipus commenting on his newly-blinded face/mask); *Pha.* 1168f.: *tales intuor uultus tuos / talesque feci?* (Phaedra seeing the damaged face/mask of Hippolytus); *Ep*. 80.7f.

46. Would the revelation of the children's heads (*capita natorum,* 903) actually be accomplished using their masks in performance?

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variety of Theban plays, particularly *Antigone*, to over-determine Oedipus' guilt. The characters of Teiresias and Creon are shown to be amalgams of certain strands of the Greek tragic tradition and emblematic of Seneca's novel poetics. The contemporary resonance of Theban subject matter is taken up by Ginsberg, who analyzes the incest-motif in *Phoenissae* as a reflection on civil war and the sanctity of mothers' bodies in Roman culture. Motherland and mothers become subject of invasion in Seneca's sexually charged language, showing how the horrors of civil war are appropriately figured intertextually (and intratextually) through Oedipus' monstrous lineage and progeny.

The next two papers are occupied by questions of poetics and technique: Cowan considers how satire aligns itself generically with tragedy (*vis-à-vis* epic), and how Senecan tragedy appropriates that connection. The 'bloated buskins' of the title may seem suitable for the size of this paper, but Cowan's intense exploration of the depiction of tragedy in satire and Seneca's appropriation of this topos rewards the reader. He demonstrates how Seneca embraces satire's comic and critical portrayal of tragedy and emphasizes that tragedy can pertain to the contemporary cultural and social world of Rome in a correlative way to Persius or Juvenal. Gunderson, meanwhile, examines the deployment of repetition (broadly understood) in Seneca's poetic fabric. From verbal *iterum* to the repetition of motifs and ideas as well as revenant characters and crimes, repetition complicates the impetus for novelty in plot, character, and myth. It is a linchpin for the volume as whole, and Gunderson's sophisticated elucidation of Seneca's poetic achievement touches upon the other contributors' arguments in manifold ways.

Reception (a reiteration of a different sort) is the focus of Braund's contribution, which investigates the *Nachleben* of Seneca in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, arguing not only for Seneca's influence on European tragedy, but also how, in both directions, newer and older texts illuminate one another. Braund considers how Garnier's rhetorical penchant for individual scenes is clearly Senecan and uncovers the touches of Senecan spectacle in Dryden and Lee's *Oedipus*. Littlewood focuses on the unresolved tension between the sublime and the poetry of nature in *Hercules Furens*, drawing on Lucretius and Virgil to analyze Hercules' actions. Hercules' own destabilizing trajectory in the play evokes aspects of sublimity as well as poetic *aemulatio*. Littlewood demonstrates that Seneca identifies and critiques such complex features from his poetic predecessors in an effort to elucidate his own poetics of sublimity. The final contribution by Trinacty investigates the concluding lines of Seneca's tragedies. Seneca often features a final intertext that forces the reader to reconsider what has come before and problematizes assumptions that the reader may have formed. Conclusions become marked instances to remember and replay what has happened both in the tragedy and in previous works of literature, thus emphasizing the 'open' nature of both these texts and the stories they tell.

With the exception of Sampson's and Cowan's contributions, the essays in this volume were originally presented during a pair of panels on the poetics of

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Senecan tragedy at the Classical Association of Canada's 2013 annual meeting in Winnipeg. The timing of the panels, and the current venue for publication, both have significance: the panels marked the thirtieth anniversary of the seminal 1983 volume *Seneca Tragicus: Ramus Essays on Senecan Drama*, edited by A.J. Boyle. Given the passage of time, which has shown the wisdom of Mayer's comment in reviewing that volume—'We still cannot decide what Seneca was about'[47]—a reassessment of Senecan poetics, conducted with the input of a new generation of scholars, became a *desideratum*. *Ramus* became the ideal destination for the collection, and we are particularly grateful to Tony Boyle for contributing his reflections ('Senecan Postscript') on scholarly advances in the decades since 1983 and on future directions for Senecan studies.

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47. Mayer (1987), 25.

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