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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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PREFACE

Brecht hätte sich viel Mühe ersparen können, wenn er seinem Publikum obligatorische Seneca-lectüre verordnet hätte.

Brecht could have saved himself much trouble if he had
required of his audience a mandatory reading of Seneca.
—G. A. Seeck, "Senecas Tragödien"

Octavia, a play in the Senecan corpus that dramatizes Nero’s rejection of his wife Octavia and the coming to power of Poppaea, is undoubtedly spurious, the work of an imitator. But Seneca’s own appearance in act 2 (377ff.) as an unsuccessful adviser to the tyrant is of considerable interest. He starts out by addressing Fate, reproaching her for exalting him only to cause him to fall the more abruptly and to be paralyzed with fear. He then remembers his exile under the emperor Claudius. There, in his isolation in Corsica, he could be a savant, studying the sky, the celestial motions, the alternations of day and night, and the brilliant aether, which are destined ultimately to decline into blind chaos. Now, he concludes, the time has come for such a collapse, preparatory to a distant renewal of life and manners, like the Golden Age of long ago. In what follows, the bulk of his harangue, Seneca presents his version of the Hesiodic scheme of the Five Ages, down to the departure of Justice and the lapse into greed, luxury, and bloodiness, with vice feeding upon vice. Seneca closes his condemnation of the Iron Age with a dense sketch of the operations of lust and rapine:

— x —

- x -

At that point Nero enters, "of stricken tread and churlish brow."

A number of the themes touched upon in this speech will occupy our attention. For now, let us note the revealing duplicity of Seneca's concern with the larger cosmos. Ostensibly, as Seneca launches into the recollection of his time of trouble, the study of the constellations is called up as a source of comfort, a means for the agitated mind to find assurance in the external bastions of regularity. But before long the scanning of the night sky has changed into the contemplation of temporal waywardness, which leaves the student with nothing but an enlarged consciousness of his own distress. The grave rotations of the astral bodies have insensibly turned into the turba rerum, the material jumble, within which, Seneca says elsewhere (Ep. 37.5), the interior life is bound up.

The disciplines of astronomy and of meteorology, like the study of statecraft and of the life of the soul, are part of the extended curriculum we associate with Stoic science, especially in its Posidonian phase, but also among the founders of the school. This book aims to show that Seneca, a self-acknowledged champion of Stoicism in his dialogues and epistles, was pursuing a Stoic goal also in his drama, and that Stoic natural science is at the very heart of Seneca's tragic enterprise. I shall begin by asking certain traditional questions about the meaning and function of Seneca's dramatic procedure, with major emphasis on the ethical and psychological issues that have loomed large in earlier attempts to prove or disprove the Stoic character of Senecan playwriting. I shall try to show that the focus on ethics and psychology is incomplete. Other aspects of the Stoic heritage, and especially latent implications of Stoicism as much as the overt teachings, have to be brought in before an adequate answer can be given.

Does a dramatist, or any poet, confess a position or propose a doctrine? There is enough modern criticism, from Croce to Eliot to Susanne Langer, not to mention more recent agnostics, to warn us that doctrinally perspicuous poetry is a historical rarity. But certain poetic traditions demand the kind of fixing that most practicing poets would disavow. The history of imaginative writing is full of works that mean, or authors who mean, to teach, and who regard themselves as apostles of this or that school of thought. Dante's Commedia is merely the most compelling example. Interpretation has the task of recovering the intention, though it may of course also wish to go further and argue that the relation between performance and intention is flawed, or that the stipulated intention is either irrevocable or irrelevant to an appreciation of the text. The case of Seneca is unusually intriguing. We know from his prose writings that, to put it carefully, he desires to create the impression that the
voice sounded in them variously acknowledges either its solidarity or its unhappiness with the historical record of philosophical beliefs and pronouncements. For the dramas no such guidance is available. The critic who believes that the plays that have come down to us under Seneca's name are indeed his will wish to assume that the same concerns inform them also. But the burden of proof is upon him just as much as it is upon the skeptics.

I shall try to let Seneca speak as much as possible. But for the demonstration of my case it will be necessary to go to the canonic sources, that is, the fragments of the founders of the Stoa, as well as the essays of Cicero and others, sometimes enemies of Stoicism rather than its friends. As Seneca says in his *Naturales quaestiones* (6.5; see also the remarks at 7.31–32), we stand on the shoulders of our predecessors; the contribution made in any one generation is remarkably small. Occasionally I shall also consult Stoics or enemies of Stoicism who came after Seneca, notably Plutarch, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius, and the Renaissance scholars who grappled with the Stoic teachings or assimilated them as part of their education. But the bulk of the evidence supporting the Stoic nature of Senecan drama comes from the congruity of Seneca's own philosophical writings with my reading of the plays.

It may be asked why such an inquiry is necessary, and what it has to do with an assessment of the poetic and the dramatic virtues of the plays. My answer is that it will help to measure the great distance of Senecan drama from that of his Greek models. It will help also to explain the extraordinary power of the language and of the dramanurgy, both of Seneca's own plays and, to a degree, of some of the later European drama created in conscious emulation of his example. I do not pretend to be the first to have become aware of the importance of Stoic cosmology to the full understanding of Senecan drama. My debt to my predecessors in this undertaking, especially to O. Regenbogen, J. Herington, and R. J. Kaufmann, is enormous. I would like my discussion to be received as an extended footnote to their findings.

For two reasons I have decided to take up the cause once again where my admired predecessors left it. For one thing, their arguments on behalf of a Stoic drama have not, on the whole, had the success they deserved to have. The majority of readers have continued to feel that the Stoic strain in Senecan drama has not been demonstrated, a feeling that, on the basis of the proposals usually advanced, is largely justified. Many readers would also maintain that Senecan drama can hardly be said to count among the more compelling documents of our literary and theatrical past. For another, efforts to show that some of the great Tudor and Jacobean playwrights drew on Seneca have recently run into powerful headwinds, again for failure to address the appropriate questions. I hope to be able to reopen the issue, and confirm the cause of a Senecan influence (or confluence, as some would prefer), by pointing to the Stoic dimension, that is, the Stoic language about the world and about man's position in the world that persists in a vast repertory of Renaissance and post-Renaissance plays.

My working assumption that the Renaissance Senecans, and many other dramatists whose inspiration flows from that source, are in effect legatees of a Stoic tradition is not easily confirmed. "How shall we separate medieval Stoicism from Renaissance Senecanism?" asks Madeleine Doran. Indeed, beginning early in its career, Stoicism joined with a number of other philosophical movements in creating a popular philosophical lingua franca that dominated cultural discourse for almost two millennia. Nevertheless, in the respects that matter in this enterprise, the Stoic coloration and its survival refuse to stay hidden. The "total imaginative assimilation of a basically Stoic cosmos and Stoic ethics" of which Herington speaks is alive not only in the work of Seneca but also, with unabated force, in that of his successors on the Renaissance stage.

A dramatist is not necessarily a philosopher. It will be enough to show that Senecan drama answers to crucial, and sometimes unique, elements in Stoic thinking about the workings of the universe, and that to this extent Seneca is carrying out a Stoic design. This does not, as such, mean that Seneca is, for that reason, a better dramatist than he might otherwise have been. Conversely, I should vigorously contest the view that tracing Stoic qualities in Seneca makes him less interesting as a dramatist. It is too commonly thought unless a writer advocates a consistent and easily identifiable philosophical position, his work cannot be said to be marked significantly by that philosophy. But a Stoic document does not have to be a Stoic manual; a Christian drama does not necessarily preach the Virgin Birth or
the Resurrection. Further, any attempt to identify Senecan drama as Stoic is often said to
founder on the shoals of the drama's unrelieved gloom, its sense of evil. Stoicism, it is held, is
an explicitly optimistic philosophy, holding out the rule of the universal *logos* and the wise
man's ability to conform to nature as adequate assurances of salvation.

Here I propose to apply a vigorous corrective. I argue that in the dramas Seneca's
Stoicism is of a special kind, in some ways the flip side

of what the textbooks tell us, but nevertheless a powerful and determinative component
of his thinking and writing. Seneca's art of tragedy is one whose secrets can also be traced in
the analyses of and prescriptions for the conduct of the soul in his prose writings and, even
more tellingly, in his pronouncements about the environment and the physical constitution of
man. The perceived asymmetry between the prose works—"frozen conversations," Herington
calls them[11]—and the plays must be chalked up to Seneca's sensitivity to the needs of the
genre, rather than to any outright cancellation of the demands of the one in the other.

The prose writings will be cited variously to reinforce a number of considerations: to
illustrate the gap, where it exists, between what Seneca is doing in the dialogues and letters
and the *Naturales quaestiones*, on the one hand, and what interests him in the dramas; or;
conversely, to highlight coincidences between the two bodies of work; and, finally, to show
that even the differences are not easily resolved into antagonism or irrelevance. I shall move
back and forth between the two, without letting the bifocal procedure dictate a set order or
itinerary. A like informality will be observed in my access to the Stoic materials. It might be
expected that, in conformity with the chronological sequence, pre-Senecan texts. and
especially the fundamental tenets of the early Stoics, be taken up before the Senecan
evidence is introduced. I have found it preferable, however, to weave back and forth between
Chrysippus and Seneca, between the canonical (and the canonized dissident) formulations of
the Stoic creed and the more differentiated material in Seneca's prose and poetry. I have
accepted the risk of thus prejudicing the clarity of the account for fear that a more sequential
exposition might have degenerated into something mechanical. I appeal to the reader to go
along with me as I bring in my materials from a variety of sources, including the plays
themselves, to develop my exposition of Stoic thought and of the challenge it constitutes to a
serious dramatist.

The book is in two parts. The first part, especially chapters 1 and 2, lays the groundwork
for the second by running through some of the topics to which past analyses of Seneca's
Stoicism have returned again and again. It may be felt that yet another *retractatio* of these
well-trodden trails will irk initiates. My purpose in braving their conceivable
disable displeasure is triple. First, I feel strongly that a book about the Stoic dimension of
Senecan drama cannot afford to pass over the principal headings under which past work on
the subject has been done. An extension into the cosmic space needs to proceed from a firm
anchoring in the more mundane arena of ethics, psychology, and politics. Moreover, I shall try
to show that the customary methods of homing in on the question of a philosophical stance,
though dubious in their isolation, have made important contributions to a fuller savoring of
the peculiarities of the texts.

Second, it is my hope that whatever conclusiveness is found in the arguments of the
second half of the book will emerge more palpably against the inconclusiveness diagnosed in
the first. In that second part, the heart of the essay, I backtrack and confront some of the
earlier issues by opening up the grander vistas of Stoic physical science. There will be a
modicum of recurrence and repetition; that repetition will, I trust, be helpful to the cause.
Finally, third, I submit that the *retractatio* of the first part differs from earlier treatments in its
appeal to a larger European compass. As I take up the various rubrics readied by previous
criticism, I seek to broaden the horizon by bringing in relevant and confirmatory analogues
from the later dramatic traditions. Because the pace at which I move through the topics of the
first three chapters is fast, the mix of argumentation, summary, and illustration will now and
then appear to exercise an allusive, rather than demonstrative, force. The plan of the whole,
with the moderate degree of recurrence that is part of its design, should help to convert the
allusiveness into assurance. To have omitted the material of the first three chapters would
have left the discourse of the second half without the foundation, both historical and
conceptual, on which it must rest. To have slowed down the pace of the initial chapters and to
have gone through the non-cosmological materials in greater detail would have meant
distorting the shape of the discussion as I envisaged it.

Past investigations of Senecan dramaturgy have paid much attention to the formal
aspects of Seneca’s art, his language, his figures, the nature of his dialogue, and the like.[12]
Almost all of Seneca’s stylistic and formal stratagems are already available in classical Greek
drama. Euripidean antitheses, Sophoclean stichomythia, and Aeschylean ex-

clamatory rhetoric anticipate much that Seneca does. What distinguishes his art is the
systematic, and in many cases near-obsessive, deployment of these devices. On the front that
interests us more directly, in the matter of mood, of temper, and of ideology, Seneca is often
prefigured by his Roman predecessors, notably Ovid, Horace, Vergil, and Lucretius.[13] If we
had larger pieces of the Roman dramatists, republican as well as imperial, we would probably
be able to trace even more substantive debts. Yet instead of saying that Seneca owes this or
that theme or tactic or formulation to Vergil or Ovid, it may be more profitable to suggest that
Seneca availed himself of materials and idioms that were by his time in the public domain, but
that his application is more concentrated and, because he writes drama, more intense.

Moreover, where Seneca’s dramatic technique or understanding of human behavior recalls a
move in Horace or Vergil or Ovid, the reason is often that all of them are in varying degrees
indebted to Stoic ways of looking at the world. Horace’s Stoicism, and Vergil’s, are of course
different from Seneca’s, if for no other reason than that they are not, as I hope to show
Seneca is, primarily philosophical poets, and their programmatically Stoic declarations are
brief and incidental. Nevertheless it would be a mistake to underestimate the homogenizing
pressure of the public philosophy that for two centuries or more shaped the thinking of
prominent Roman writers of various persuasions.

I draw my material from all the plays in the Senecan corpus, though I am persuaded
that Octavia is not by Seneca, and Hercules Oetaeus and Phoenissae present problems that
cast considerable doubt on their integrity.[14] But all of the plays, including the three problem
plays, exhibit the features in which I am interested, which constitute a significant part of what
counts as the Senecan tradition. Even the “genuine” plays are, of course, not all of the same
kind. Troades is primarily a study in psychology; Agamemnon and Thyestes are idiosyncratic
specimens of intrigue drama; Medea and Oedipus are heavily congested by prophecy and
magic. I turn most particularly to the plays—notably Hercules Furens, Hercules Oetaeus,
Thyestes, Oedipus, Medea, and Phaedra —that a grateful Renaissance embraced for its own
purposes. My quarry, the specifically Stoic component of Seneca’s
dramatic achievement, does not render itself up with equal ease or in the same manner
in all the plays of the canon, or in those plays that stimulated the Tudor Senecans or Garnier
and Racine or the authors of the seventeenth-century German Trauerspiel . My approach,
which is to cut a swath across the plays instead of training my sights on each play by itself,
may be thought to imperil any possible gains by the disadvantages an across-the-board
treatment necessarily brings with it. But the gains cannot, I think, be achieved by any other
means. And excellent and exhaustive monographs on, and editions of, individual plays are
now being produced.[15]

This is a circumscribed study of Seneca and Senecanism. Only certain, albeit important,
aspects of his dramaturgy will be considered. Some readers will be disappointed not to find
their favorite passages or issues taken up. I propose to say little or nothing on the order in
the which the plays were written,[16] on style, on versification, on details of performance, and
on the possible contribution of music to the drama. This is not intended to be an exhaustive
commentary on the totality of Senecan playwriting. But let me, for what it is worth, in the
face of a lack of conclusive evidence, confess my strong belief that those who favor the
probability of some kind of performance, rather than relegating the corpus to the status of
Rezitationsdrama, are likely to be right.[17]

For information about early Stoicism, I rely on von Arnim’s standard edition of the
fragments, in the face of a growing number of demands that the collection be revised from
the ground up.[18] Such a fun-
damental reworking I must leave to the experts. Meanwhile, for the purposes of my
discussion (as, I suspect, for many other purposes), von Arnim's work remains an adequate
and indeed indispensable compilation. His confessed focus on Chrysippus, though arguably
problematic, does not embarrass the particular needs of this essay. In translating the many
passages I quote I have aimed at a degree of literalness. Along the way I have, on occasion,
been unscrupulous in pillaging the work of other translators, notably F. J. Miller and, for the
Epistles, E. Ph. Barker. [19] Senecan drama is written in a taut, compressed Latin whose effect
it is virtually impossible to render in English. I do not propose to reproduce the remarkable
poetic power Seneca manages to achieve. Tirades, with their intentional monotonity of long
stretches of replicated syntax, constitute a special problem. Once again my lack of translator's
ambition permits me to sidestep the need to capture the effect in some equivalent, but
idiomatic, fashion.

The text of the plays is still uncertain in a number of places. But the editions of I. C.
Giardina and O. Zwierlein [20] constitute a remarkable advance over earlier versions. In my
quoted excerpts from the dramas I generally follow the text of Zwierlein. Where my reading
of a line differs from his, I shall say so. References to titles without an author are normally to
the corpus of Seneca's writings, both prose and dramatic. Abbreviations for Seneca's writings
follow.

The Senecan Corpus: Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aga</td>
<td>Agamemnon</td>
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<tr>
<td>HF</td>
<td>Hercules Furens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HO</td>
<td>Hercules Oetaeus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Med</td>
<td>Medea</td>
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<td>Oct</td>
<td>Octavia</td>
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<td>Oed</td>
<td>Oedipus</td>
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<td>Phae</td>
<td>Phaedra</td>
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<td>Phoe</td>
<td>Phoenissae</td>
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<td>Thy</td>
<td>Thyestes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tro</td>
<td>Troades</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ben.</td>
<td>De beneficiis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BV</td>
<td>De brevitate vitae</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clem.</td>
<td>De clementia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS</td>
<td>De constantia sapientis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ep.</td>
<td>Epistulae morales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helv.</td>
<td>Ad Helviam de consolationie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ira</td>
<td>De ianor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marc.</td>
<td>Ad Marciam de consolationie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NQ</td>
<td>Naturales quaestiones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ot.</td>
<td>De otio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pol.</td>
<td>Ad Polybium de consolationie</td>
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PART ONE
THE CANON AT RISK

Chapter One
Paradigm, Precept, and Message

In the last lines of the preface to his translation of Thyestes (1560), Jasper Heywood reports his feelings after waking up from a dream meeting with Seneca:

This said, I felt the Fury's force enflame me more and more,
And ten times more now chaf'd I was than ever yet before,
My hair stood up, I waxed wood, my sinews all did shake,
And as the Fury had me vex'd my teeth began to ache.
And thus enflam'd with force of her, I said it should be done,
And down I sat with pen in hand, and thus my verse begun.
(J. Daalder, ed., 1982, p. 21)

The fury is Megaera, who with some justice could be called Seneca's tragic muse.

Some sixty years ago Otto Regenbogen, in a remarkable essay published by the Warburg Institute, declared that Seneca was the first to write what is today understood by the term "tragedy."[1] The Greeks of the fifth century B.C. wrote tragoidiai that continue to serve as models of significance and power. But their plays do not invariably exhibit the peculiar combination of elements that since the earliest Renaissance, and in the wake of Seneca, has embodied the tragic vision: an unhappy and mournfully moving end supervening upon an abrupt fall; the centrality of the hero and his failure; the prominence of nefas, iniquity;[2] grandiloquence, ghosts, and magic; an appeal to learning; a measure of didacticism; and all the qualities summed up under the triad atroctas, maiestas, and gravitas: vehemence, grandeur, and high seriousness.[3] This is not to say that the Greek repertory does not also, within its varied compass, exhibit these qualities. But Aeschylus's Eumenides, Sophocles' Philoctetes, and a majority of Euripides' extant plays are living proof that a Greek tragoidos could perform his task without many of the ingredients that the later European tradition considered essential in a tragedy. A play like Sophocles' Oedipus Rex may at first blush be thought to answer to the Renaissance demands, but it does not. The grandeur is not sufficiently selfconscious or spectacular, the vehemence sufficiently sensational or internalized, to authenticate the play as a paradigm of what the Renaissance critics, from Julius Caesar Scaliger to Johann Christoph Gottsched, required in high tragedy.[4]

Friedrich Leo thought that by the first century of our era serious drama had shifted from the exploration of ethos, character, to the treatment of pathos, passion.[5] The formulation is only partly apt. Hellenistic criticism used the two terms to designate a range of emotion from gentleness to fury. But even if we understand the terms in their pre-Hellenistic sense, the precise function of "character" in Greek tragedy has been questioned,[6] and it is doubtful that any tragedy can do its work without passion playing its part. Yet of the enormous difference between the two kinds of drama, the classical Greek and the Senecan, there can be no doubt. Of all the plays in the Greek corpus, the one that comes closest to the Senecan type in its emphasis on the lability of characters and the frivolity of the gods, and in its admixture of the
macabre, is Euripides' *Rhesus*, hardly a cherished jewel in the classical crown, and a play whose marginal standing has driven scholarship to extreme positions about its date and its authenticity.\(^2\)

The distance that separates Seneca from his Greek predecessors has been obscured by attempts to discover what unites the Roman versions with the Greek treatments of the myths on which they are based. Apart from *Octavia*, which is neither mythological nor Senecan, all the extant tragedies of Seneca have their analogues in the Greek repertory (though we have little more than the titles of some of the plays involved). Comparisons, though initially intriguing, tend to create the impression that Seneca meant to emulate or compete with his Greek forerunners. That, as an educated Roman with a documented interest in Greek letters, he knew the work of the ancient tragedians is certain. It is less certain whether as a dramatic poet he was more stimulated by the Greeks or by republican dramatists, such as Ennius and Accius, of whose writing we possess only unenlightening portions or fragments. The consensus is that Seneca probably owes most to his immediate predecessors, and especially to the dramatist Varius, who also wrote a *Thyestes*.\(^6\) Seneca's debt to the republican dramatists, and also his desire to rival the ancient Greeks, may currently be underestimated. Quotations from and references to tragedy are so rare in his prose work that no comparative inferences can be drawn with assurance.\(^6\) For our needs it will be best to leave aside questions of literary debt and comparison and to concentrate on what makes Senecan drama the peculiar phenomenon it is.

To see the issue in the proper light, we must devote some attention to Seneca's total literary output. In his prose writings Seneca considers himself a Stoic. He is, to be sure, an eclectic philosopher. Like bees, he says (*Ep. 84.5*), we must gather our readings from various sources and use our intelligence to make them over into one authentic essence. There are those who are reluctant to regard him as a systematic philosopher at all. In many of the *Dialogi* and *Epistles*, he cites Epicurus with great veneration. But he explains (*Ep. 8.8*) that the opinions cited are in the public domain, and that he could equally well have gone to the poets. Occasionally he questions or even pokes fun at the Stoics and their tenets (*Ep. 83; NQ 4.6.1, 7.22.1*). His opinion of Chrysippus or Zeno is not always positive, but it is clear from his criticisms (e.g., *Ben. 3.8*) that he read them in the original. What matters is that the Stoics are *nostri*; they are the community of speculative thinkers in which he is confessedly at home (*NQ 7.22.1; CS init.; Ot. 3.1*). The chief desiderata listed in the preface of book 3 of the *Naturales quaestiones*—control of vices, disregard of fortune, cheerful endurance of pain, authority over one's own life, purity, concentration on essentials—have an unmistakably Stoic look about them. Seneca's pronounced admiration for Cato, the saint of the imperial Stoicizers, confirms the impression.

Both in his letters and in his treatises, Seneca demonstrates again and again that his knowledge of the history of thought is extensive, that he is familiar with the rules of logic and argumentation, and that he has been relatively successful at carving out his own decently consistent position from among the conflicting views available to him. He is not an original thinker in the strictest sense of that idea. But like Lucretius and Cicero, the only Roman writers with whom he deserves to be compared, he has made the thinking of his sources and his teachers his own. He convinces us with the earnestness of his inquiry and the firmness of his choices, and he advances his arguments with an engagement of self, and with a sense of drama, that are often exhilarating. Between Chrysippus, the third head and dominant intellect of the Stoa in the third century B.C.E., and Seneca, in the first century of our era, a number of forceful and relatively independent Stoic thinkers enriched the ideological storehouse of the school. "Among the Stoics, from the founders till today, opinions differ," was the view of Numenius, a scholar who lived a century after Seneca (Hans von Arnim, *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta* [henceforth *SVF*] 2.20). Stoicism was the only branch of Hellenistic philosophy that did not sanctify or try to congeal the founder's positions. Still, by comparison with the achievement of Chrysippus, in the area of thought with which we are going to be concerned, the innovations and adjustments introduced by his successors relate to details rather than substance. On points of ethics and of psychology, Seneca can be shown to have adopted or modified the teachings of
Posidonius and of Panaetius where those differ from the pronouncements of the Old Stoa. But Chrysippus remains the principal inspirer of the aspects of Stoicism crucial to our understanding of Senecan drama. Seneca introduces the name Chrysippus again and again. And though his own flexible and humane genius does not, at first, appear to have much in common with the tough intellectualism ascribed to Chrysippus, I shall have occasion to argue that the difference between the two, and especially the so-called intellectualism of Chrysippus, must not be magnified.\footnote{15}

As with Marlowe, or Chapman, critics have responded to the power of Senecan drama with a sense that it harbors a striking measure of

authorial self-revelation. If we had the theoretical writings on the stage with which the tradition credits Sophocles, or if Aeschylus and Euripides had left us such inquiries, it is unlikely that those documents would make it easy for us to connect the preoccupations, much less the speech, of their plays with the private passions of the writers. In Seneca's plays, on the other hand, every character is felt to offer a bit of the author himself as he stands revealed, or wishes to have himself thought of, in his prose writings.\footnote{11} And that exposure of personality stands in the closest relation to the characteristic ways of analyzing conduct that Zeno and Chrysippus had made available.

At one level, the Stoic nature of the concerns is obvious. Amphitryon in Hercules Furens tries to console his son by calling his crime a mistake:

\begin{quote}
Quis nomen usquam sceleris errori addidit? \\
Who is so bold to call an error "crime"?
\end{quote}

(HF 1237)

Hercules replies that, generally speaking, there is no difference:

\begin{quote}
Saepe error ingens sceleris obtinuit locum. \\
A major error usually ranks as crime.
\end{quote}

(HF 1238)

This is orthodox, mainstream Stoicism, though qualified by temporal modifiers—\textit{usquam}, \textit{saepe}—that might not have satisfied the more doctrinaire members of the school. With one stroke the old Aristotelian conundrum of whether \textit{hamartia} is an error or a vice becomes irrelevant: under the exacting rules of Stoic ethics, the two are indistinguishable. Another line in the same play, the last line of the first chorus (201), provides a near-emblematic instance of the Stoic reinterpretation of an old Greek moral: \textit{alte virtus animosa cadit}. Various translations are possible. We should probably put considerable emphasis on the force of the adjective: "Heroic manhood plummets deep." It is difficult to imagine a more pregnant formulation of the need for the traditional hero, with his great soul and his exalted virtue, but also with his aggressiveness and his passion to lord it over others, to fall. These chiselled phrases are easy to fit into the Stoic canons of moral and social conduct. That they bespeak a larger and more intimate engagement will, I hope, become clear in the course of this essay.

Nonetheless, critics have always been reader to acknowledge the Stoicism of Seneca's essays and letters than to recognize the same principles at work in the dramatic corpus. Superficially, to compare Seneca's prose with his drama might seem like comparing the writings of the Reverend Norman Vincent Peale with the Grand Guignol of \textit{Titus Andronicus} and similar dramatic documents of terror. Indeed, soon after Seneca's lifetime some readers decided that the two bodies of work were so different in their ideological orientation that they could not be the work of the same man.\footnote{12} One scholar who argued this position was the fifth-century churchman and public verse orator Sidonius Apollinaris, who wrote (9.229), in one of his many praises of unworthy emperors, that there were two or even three Senecas, one of whom was the philosopher, and another the dramatist. Similar statements are found among the Renaissance humanists, including Erasmus. Justus Lipsius, one of the key figures in late Renaissance neo-Stoicism, thinks that only one or two of the plays are by the philosopher, and that the rest are by various other Senecas. Lessing, also, in the youthful work entitled \textit{Von den lateinischen Trauerspielen welche unter dem Namen des Seneca bekannt sind}, engages in similar speculations, as did Diderot before him.\footnote{13}

The cutting in two of Lucius Annaeus Seneca is the most radical step taken by those who are embarrassed and irritated by their own failure to find anything essentially Stoic or philosophical in Senecan drama. One of the latest critics to come to this conclusion—though he does not go all the way but keeps the man Seneca unsplit—is F. H. Sandbach, the author
of an authoritative handbook on Stoicism. Sandbach has a brief section on Senecan drama, in which he refuses to see any appreciable trace of Stoicism, except for *Hercules Oetaeus*, which, he thinks, exhibits a Stoic saint in action. The antinomies Sandbach establishes will continue to occupy our attention. The plays, he says, are concerned with the effects of the passions and the blows of Fortune. For the Stoic, Fortune was to be identified with Fate and Providence, for the dramatist it is a blind and hostile power; for the Stoic the passions are sequels of faulty judgment, for the dramatist they are independent forces that fight with reason and pervert it for their own ends. Seneca's characters are not so much human beings as simplified exponents of anger, jealousy, cruelty . . . and the no less dangerous love, passions which brush aside the arguments of those who speak for reason and morality. The burden of this contrastive analysis is, it seems, the following: if the drama were truly Stoic in complexion and intent, it would feature believable human beings in action, and reason would win out; that is to say, it could not be tragic, and would have considerable difficulty being drama. Similar objections have been raised by others. Joachim Dingel, the author of a searching analysis of this question, finds that the plays do not conform to Seneca's thinking as it emerges from the philosopher's remarks about aesthetics and education: "Der Dichter Seneca ignoriert die Kritik des Philosophen Seneca." Senecan drama realizes all the horrors the philosophical writings repudiate: scenes of hell, the *topos* of the double night, Jupiter's adulteries, and much more. His conclusion is that the plays show us the real Seneca, while the philosophical writings give us a mask, an official pose, feeding copiously and facilely upon the ready-made materials of the philosophers. His hesitant suggestion that the dramas document a "negative Stoicism," dwelling on what we do not understand about the gods and Fate, seems to leave the door open for the conclusion that they involve some kind of Stoicism after all. Yet that insight is not developed.

Today, Sandbach and Dingel represent, each in his own way, a minority position. The majority of readers and interpreters (not to mention producers), though equally unwilling to look at the plays as Stoic documents, are not troubled by the scruples that worry them. But the difficulties they have spelled out remain, and one is bound to admire the courage with which the modern questioners have turned against the received opinion, particularly where the received opinion is based on a sense, found even among critics who ought to know better, that Stoicism cannot really be taken seriously as philosophy (for example, see R. A. Brower 1971, p. 143). As I have indicated, I have consider-

able sympathy with the view that we must be on our guard against a criticism that insists that a literary text conform to a specific philosophical thesis. But the case of Seneca is a special one. The writer whose name is attached to the dramas in the manuscript tradition is a self-confessed Stoic. What is more, the point is to show, not that Seneca was trying to be a Stoic in his dramas, but that the dramas make better sense, or come across more powerfully, if understood as emanating from a Stoically trained perception.

But again, among those who are willing to accept the philosopher as the author of the majority of the plays, and who recognize a moral function in the drama, there is little agreement about the nature of that function. Some believe that Seneca tried to fashion the myths into moral fables—and stumbled. Kurt von Fritz, a subtle critic of the history of dramatic theory and a leading connoisseur of the fragmentary tradition of Stoicism, finds that Seneca's *Oedipus* represents an attempt to construct a moral-exemplary tale, and that it fails. According to another view, everything in the action of a Senecan play tends to confute the claims of Stoics, but the choral sequences show a way out of the impasse. They are the lessons that bring home to us the way of redemption; they may be irrelevant to the immediate aims of the particular plot they embellish, but they furnish the therapy whose need the drama demonstrates. On the face of it, as dramatic criticism, this is a desperate proposal. But it is one that would have been understood by many of Seneca's later imitators, who cared less about drama than about salvation, and it is not so very different from an interpretation of Senecan drama in terms of crime and punishment.

Those who wish to dissociate the philosopher from the dramatist cite the denunciations of poetry in the prose writings. There at one
point or another Seneca berates scenes in hell, legends of the gods misbehaving themselves, the concept of Chance working at random, and other topoi favored by the dramatists and prominent in Senecan tragedy. One might object that Zeus's rape of Io hardly exhausts the full range of significance of Aeschylus's Suppliants, or Apollo's constraint of Cassandra that of his Agamemnon, or even Hercules' raking of Hell that of Seneca's Hercules Furens. But that is too easy an answer. Seneca himself says in one of his Consolations (Pol. 11.5): "There is no book among the writings of the poets that does not furnish you with a great many paradigms of the varied nature of men and of the uncertainty of events and of the many causes that make tears flow." The causes are crucial (as we shall see again later in this essay); the philosopher can extract his evidence from literature, and will find ready-made grounds to fit into his argument. The inherence of causes in the literary complex gives to that body of writing the potential for philosophical development and a philosophical base of its own. In fact, a thorough study of Seneca's pronouncements on the uses and risks of reading shows a variety of often conflicting responses, some of which will be taken up directly. The philosopher cannot think about poetry without a passionate interest in its effects.

It is true that in his treatises and letters, Seneca's thinking about poetry and the liberal arts mostly cleaves to ethical concerns. Seneca rejects disinterested philological or historical inquiry (where did Ulysses go in his travels?) in favor of the sort of questions moral philosophy asks, so we will not stray ourselves (Ep. 88.7). We are all Ulysses, tempted by vicious stimuli to roam and blunder. The writer must teach us how to navigate, especially when we are temporarily shipwrecked, and to love everything that is honestum, respectable and civilized. Reading and listening are legitimate and profitable only if out of the words there come to be works: ut quae fuerint verba sint opera (Ep. 108.35). The paradigms must come to rest in the blood of the listeners. Philosophy is to be tested against the substance of life as recorded in the poems, a life that demands action. The Stoic debate concerning the virtues of quiet wisdom and its realization in the active life can still be heard in Antonio's rejection of Alberto's counsel of patience:

Patience is slave to fools, a chain that's fixed
Only to posts, and senseless log-like dolts.
(John Marston, Antonio's Revenge 1.5.36–37)

In all endeavors to assess the nature of the Stoic share in the plays, the sights are trained on moral doctrines, the values that are most effectively communicated via exempla, the cautionary figures and actions of prominent men and women, and via precepts and sententiae, the often moving, but always safe, generalities offered by the characters and particularly by the chorus. Is this what Seneca has in mind when, in one of his Epistles (20.1), he asks his correspondent to "plunge the philosophy into the bedrock of his heart"—ut philosophiam in praecordia ima demittas —and to test his progress, not through speech or writing, but by the experience of his soul? Stoic choruses, a modern critic says, are "pitched to inflame rather than exorcise," a remark that mirrors Scaliger's (and, before him, Quintilian's) insistence on the emotions, the affectus, of the audience as the target of the dramatist's persuasive power.

Let me anticipate and say that if precepts and paradigms were all that Stoicism had to contribute to the dramatic construct, the conclusion would have to be, not only that Senecan drama is only intermittently Stoic, but that the whole question is skewed, and that the drama as drama, particularly in its tragic aspect, is incompatible with genuine Stoic belief. Diogenes the Cynic, a spiritual ancestor of some of the more radical Stoic moralists, wrote an Oedipus in which he sought to show that it was silly of Oedipus to be exercised over the drama with his mother, on the grounds, presumably, that events beyond our control should not be permitted to disturb us. Diogenes' genial (or brutal?) confection, whether it was a drama or not, is unfortunately lost. But the Stoic potential for serious drama cannot be shrugged off quite so easily. If the Stoic moral is merely a conclusion e contrario, an ethical or religious message suspended, like a Brechtian placard, in the interstices of demonstrations of human misery, we might as well admit that Senecan drama is best defined in the narrow terms heralded by Nietzsche's slogan, at the head of his Streifzüge eines Unzeitgemässen: "Seneca or the Toreador of Virtue." There is some irony in the spectacle of Nietzsche falling a victim to what must be regarded as a Christian narrowing of the Stoic legacy.
The neo-Stoicism of the Renaissance and of the Baroque, of Erasmus and Justus Lipsius, of Monchrestien and J. du Vair and Andreas Gryphius, has usually been studied as a momentous exercise in merging the postulates of Christian morality with those of Stoic ethics, under the guidance of a post-Reformation consciousness of sin. Christianity and Stoicism meet on the plane of stubborn resignation. Papinianus, the hero of Gryphius’s play of the same name, is an avowed Stoic as well as a messenger of unmistakably Christian obligations. Justus Lipsius’s *De constantia*, arguing that all men are guilty in the sight of God (2.16), reinforces the point that the Christianization of Stoicism, or the Stoicizing of the patristic tradition, is most keenly observed where the subject is sin and sinners. The easy acceptance, through the centuries, of a spurious exchange of letters between Seneca and Saint Paul endorses the tradition. But Lipsius himself expounds a body of thought that goes far beyond the tight strictures of a moral code. Wilhelm Dilthey and others have demonstrated that much of the European philosophical and literary tradition, from the late Middle Ages to the nineteenth century and beyond, may be interpreted as the working out of Stoic impulses, and that the Stoic seeds survive in the most varied sectors of human thought. What is more, even if we restricted ourselves to tracing the echoes of Stoic ethics and psychology, it would be a mistake to look only for direct and positive signals. The success of a play, and the identification of the elements that have gone into its creation, are gauged by more encompassing questions than the plotting of an intermediate maxim or a terminal moral openly carried into the field. Here is an excerpt from Lipsius’s *De constantia* (2.13), in the translation of Sir John Stradling.

The speaker is Langius:

Tell me, in beholding a tragedy, will it stomache thee to see Atreus or Thiestes in the first or second acte walking in state and maiestye upon the scene? To see them raigne, threate and command? I thinke not, knowing their prosperitie to be of small continuance; and when thou shalt see them shamefullie come to confusion in the last Acte. Nowe then in this Tragedy of the World, why art thou not so favourable towards God, as to a poore Poet? This wicked man prospereth. That Tyrant liveth. Let be awhiles. Remember it is but the first Acte, and consider aforesaid in thy mind, that sobs and sorrowes will ensue upon their

It is difficult to know what to make of this notion of God as a tragic poet, though there are some Plotinian texts canvassing its implications. It is the converse of the contemporary Platonist elevation of the poet to the rank of divine maker. But the idea that tragedy can have a moral effect only if the viewer can supplement its meaning with his own historical and eschatological imagination is one that runs counter to the demand that Stoic tragedy carry its message upon the sleeve. Marcus Aurelius said (11.6) that tragedy was invented to teach you to regard the untoward events in life with the same unruffled feeling or even pleasure as their imitations on the stage. But Marcus comes to this insight from a direction opposite to that of Lipsius: dramatic performance has its place in a wonderfully contemptuous catalogue of meaningless and frivolous activities (7.3), in the midst of which we are asked to maintain our good humor; a philosopher stands at an enormous distance from those who strut tragically across the stage of life (9.29). Lipsius, on the other hand, is fascinated by tragedy. But the reader senses that Lipsius is impressed with tragedy for reasons that have little to do with an overt ethical didacticism. Whether in his graphic description of what happens on the stage, as on the larger boards of the world, he has in mind Seneca or one of his sixteenth-century imitators is uncertain. What he finds impressive about this kind of drama is difficult to accommodate to a simple calculation of sin and punishment duly apportioned.

The time has come to look more closely at the role of paradigm and precept in Senecan drama, and to show why they are, by themselves,

incapable of explaining the power of the plays, or of vindicating their standing as Stoic documents. Seneca says (Ep. 95.65) that according to Posidonius, paradigms, or exempla, are part of a larger machinery of moving the listener, called *paraenetic* in Greek, which also includes precepts, consolation, persuasion, and exhortation. Zeno stated (SVF 1.84) that a
paradigm is "the recollection of a past action by way of approximation to what is now being sought," a complicated formula designed to cover a wide usage of the term, particularly within the medium of ethics. In the psychology of drama, the effect intended is not so much recollection but the vivid presentation of an act or an agent on the stage. The paradigmatic figure or action may itself be linked with anterior (mythical or philosophical) paradigms. Terpnos, the celebrated actor of Nero's time, "sang" lamentations of Priam, imprecations of Oedipus, the madness of Orestes, the death of Icarus, and much else, and Nero himself delighted audiences with similar evocations of past figures. But the great tragic character does not follow an exemplum so much as create one. If the dramas are, as the moralists believe, suasoriae, moral briefs of a kind, what is the function of the paradigms in them? In what follows, I shall at first present my argument as if it were a foregone conclusion that Senecan drama means to be educational, and that the focus of this educational mission is in the area of moral and political behavior.

To begin with, a paradigm can work either positively or negatively. In the former case, it is intended to produce a fruitful message, a hortatory or suasive signal. The noble hero or the wise king relying upon his healthy understanding and acting sensibly, or suffering without breaking, contributes a model calculated to improve the audience, or at least to sway them from a course of folly. Jupiter as a governor is a paradigm for rulers (NQ 2.43): let them follow his reasonableness and his clemency.

To turn to our domesticke histories, what English blood seeing the person of any bold English man presented and doth not hugge his fame, and hunnye at his valor. . . . so bewitching a thing is lively and well spirited action, that it hath power to new mold the harts of the spectators and fashion them to the shape of any noble and notable attempt.

Thomas Heywood's words (in An Apology for Actors) reflect a long tradition of the dramatic use of paradigms, a tradition in which Seneca, with such figures as Polynxena and Astyanax in Troades, was one of the principal architects. When Oedipus, in his bitterness and despair, marvels at the miracle of a woman as great-hearted as his daughter Antigone

Unde in nefanda specimen egregium domo?
How does a vicious house come by this singular model?

(Phoe 80)

his speech records the impact a public figure, from history or legend, should have upon a miscreant society. This is what Albertino Mussato, the re-founder of Senecanism in the early Renaissance, in his first Epistle hoped for among the projected effects of the tragic models: to produce constancy and assurance in the face of flux and adversity. And this is a tradition that remained powerful into the eighteenth century, at which point the "ironic" cast of enlightenment historiography killed the easy reliance upon the authority of positive paradigms.

With Mussato, we have already lighted upon the other variety of exemplum, the cautionary paradigm. At the conclusion of Seneca's De constantia sapientis the emperor Caligula is brought in, by way of a supplementary playlet, to cement the positive lesson with a demonstration of the inadmissibility of its converse. Many of the old Greek heroes and heroines, with their lives of passion and torment and the disastrous consequences of their choices, were eminently suitable as warning examples. Those who feel that it is the business of the theater to teach, and that includes the vast majority of critics over the past two millennia, advertise a policy of keeping the categories, the suasive and the deterrent, clearly distinct.

In Senecan drama, the cautionary prevails. Atreus in Thyestes and Clytaemestra in Agamemnon teach us, if teaching is the word, how not to live. The tragedy appeals, not to our crudely imitative instincts—

what Freudians call the repetition compulsion—but to a discriminating moral sense that shrinks from the severity of the vices acted out and belabored. Antigone and Polynxena move us less through the manner of their action than through the admiring reports about them. Some profess to see Hercules in Hercules Oetaeus in the same light, as an elaborate instance of the imitabile exemplum, but the difficulties with that proposition are insurmountable. He, like all the central figures of Senecan drama who interest us, illustrates the cautionary, if not the repellant, mode. Generally speaking, positive paradigms are, if cast in major roles, dramatically unpersuasive. In George Chapman's The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois, Bussy's brother Clermont is conceived as a Stoic sage, as is Cato in the same author's Caesar and
Pompey. They are embroiled in the Machiavellian troubles of their times, and go under while maintaining a principled stance. Clermont takes his own life rather than yield to the impulse for revenge. The result is a dramatic letdown and embarrassment.

Most critics would agree that where the suasive paradigm carries the weight of the action, the play's intensity suffers. In several chapters of the third book of his *Manductio ad philosophiam Stoicam* (1604), Justus Lipsius demonstrates, by implication, the uselessness of a Stoic saint on stage. And this is often interpreted to mean that such plays go wrong because they preach a Stoic message—that is, because their hortatory mission is the chief office their commitment to Stoicism is designed to convey. "The failure of Chapman's tragic drama ever to achieve fully the stature of great tragedy is in large measure due to the fact that Stoicism negates the premises from which such tragedy develops. Mere chance did not determine that *Bussy D'Ambois*, Chapman's outstanding success in tragedy both on the stage and in the acclaim of literary history, proves to be the only play on which the ethics of Stoicism exerted so slight an influence," observes J. W. Wieler.

With his "the ethics of Stoicism," the critic is half right. But it is a reasonable assumption that what he means by this phrase is the whole range of what Stoicism could offer to a dramatist; and here I hope to suggest that *Bussy D'Ambois* is a gloriously Stoic drama through and through. Leaving aside this particular play, it is wrong to jump to the conclusion that the suasive paradigm, with all its packed freight of murder and lust, is less indebted to Stoic impulses than the admired image of nobility. Even a casual reading of the canonic Stoic texts reveals a constant preoccupation with the seamy and the sinister, an almost luxuriant dwelling on the vices the Stoic hopes to avoid. Quintilian (10.1.129) calls Seneca an *egregius insectator vitiorum*, a rare compliment that, though meant to characterize his philosophical prose, is equally applicable to the drama. Evil, Chrysippus said (*SVF* 2.1175), is an instrument whereby God educates men.

For obvious psychological reasons, the dividing line between the suasive and the cautionary is, in practice, not as neat as the classification tends to promise. From the point of view of his father, Amphitryon, the infant Hercules, remembered in a wistful speech, is an accomplished Stoic, facing the fiery snakes with a calm countenance (*HF* 215ff.; cf. also 1200–1201). Ideally, as a vanquisher of monsters, the Hercules of myth should have an easy enough time making himself over into a Stoic saint, and indeed, many Stoics, like the Cynics before them, adopted him as their patron hero. But in the dramas—both *Hercules Furens* and *Hercules Oetaeus* —the auspicious features are blotted out by the recognition that the monsters the hero is fated to overcome are largely in his own breast, and that they vanquish him more devastatingly than his legendary self ever defeated them. The *dusdaimon* of Euripides, the hero brought low by divine forces beyond his control, turns into a *nocens*, an authoritative destroyer of what is good. Lower down on the scale of significance, Agamemnon, in the second act of *Troades* (250ff.), counsels Stoic moderation. But as his opponent, Pyrrhus, gathers the character evidence against him, and casts in his teeth his fickleness, his fear, his weakness for women, and his greed, Agamemnon's credibility as a Stoic sage, never very compelling, is demolished, and the suasive and the cautionary are once again brought into collision, or better, into fateful convergence.

Taking another look at Chapman, even the noble Clermont is an equivocal symbol of Stoic virtue. The challenges of blood, of personal loyalty, and of the cosmic catastrophe invoked by the ghost of his brother Bussy speak to him so urgently that his Stoic orations, largely Epictetan rather than Senecan, appear destined not so much to voice his nobility as to help him find his balance and hold his crumbling world together. It must be said that without a large amount of adulteration, so that the saintly nobility comes to be marbled with streaks of fretfulness or distemper, if not downright madness, the virtuous hero leaves us cold. The Renaissance martyr play, such as Gryphius's *Katharina von Georgien* (1647), in which the heroine is put through a series of murderous and revolting tests, demonstrates that our interest in the saint is pleasingly fanned by his palpable torments. But pure suffering linked with shining virtue is not a promising foundation for tragic empathy. The conflation of the saintly with the questionable is imperative, far beyond Zeno's delicate limits quoted in Seneca's *Ira*: "In the mind of the sage also, even after the wound is healed, a scar remains, and so he will
experience certain suspicions and dark hints of passions, though of the passions themselves he will be free."[40] The hortatory and the deterrent must enter into a potent fusion. As it has been put recently with regard to the titular hero of Seneca's Oedipus, hardly a paragon of Stoic virtue, but not for that another Atreus: if Seneca was interested in providing a lesson, he did so by hinting at the possibility of salvation even for Oedipus, and not by insisting that Oedipus, in falling short of that salvation, automatically assumed the character of a villain.[41]

But does this glancing away from the mutual exclusiveness of the negative and the positive not put the whole idea of an educative Stoicism in doubt? Doesn't Seneca's dramaturgy prove that the cautionary paradigm reigns supreme, and that the lesson conveyed by it is easily discernible? As Atreus, near the end of Thyestes, rings down the curtain on his pleasure in the crime, only to turn around and prick the bubble of that very pleasure:

bene est, abunde est, iam sat est etiam mihi.

sed cur satis sit? pergam . . .

It is enough, more than enough, and I

Am satisfied. Or am I? No, I will go on . . .

(Thy 889–90)

the warning about ravenousness, the major theme of the play, is obvious enough. Atreus resembles Hannibal, who, when he saw a ditch full of human blood, exclaimed over the beauty of the sight; or Volesus, who went into similar raptures as he walked among the corpses of three hundred victims of execution (Ira 2.5.4–5). A staging of such ferocity, such amoral indulgence, portending the loss of all civilized control, cannot but turn the audience in a salutory direction. The severity of the vices makes us shrink and think again. The later branches of the Senecan tradition, both the gory Italian and the slightly less sanguinary French, draw their satisfactions and their social legitimacy at least in part from their adherence to the Stoic view transmitted by Horace: tragedy, in featuring an exemplary deterrence, educates. If in Marlowe the moral lesson is undermined by the hero not coming a cropper as the moral would demand it, but crashing in unexpected circumstances, the reason lies with the greater complexity of the dramatic issues. But the audience is likely to disregard the aesthetic and psychological dislocations and take the warning straight.

Yet the example of Marlowe raises a principal question. If theusive or the subtly mimetic is dovetailed with the cautionary, can we be certain of the appropriate response? Compare Corneille's Auguste:

Ces exemples récents suffroient pour m'instruire,
Si par l'exemple seul on se doit conduire:
L'un m'invite à le suivre, et l'autre me fait peur;
Mais l'exemple souvent n'est qu'un miroir trompeur;
Et l'ordre du destin qui gêne nos pensées
N'est pas toujours écrit dans les choses passées.

(Cinna 2.1.31–36)

Seneca tells a fascinating anecdote about the performance of a play by Euripides, Bellerophon, now lost, in the course of which much was said on behalf of the possession of wealth, to the apparent detriment of the standing of innocence, fair health, and good reputation (Ep. 115.14ff.). To what extent the arguments pro and con were conveyed by the lives of exemplary characters or were developed through more or less detached maxims (for this topic, see below), is now impossible to say.[43] At a certain point in the performance, Seneca tells us, the spectators rose in disgust and chided Euripides for what they conceived to
elements are not expertly handled, the consequences for the drama can be disastrous. What if Euripides had not risen to reassure the fans, and the misleading inchoate signals of the exempla had so taken root in their tempers that the final reversal had no chance to rally them?

Though Seneca says that "nothing is as useful as first to look upon deformity, and then upon the danger" (Ira 2.35.3), he is himself alive to the risk inherent in conflicting signals and their combination, whether arranged in sequence or not. Stoicism is keenly aware of the precariousness of a morality that is preached or implied e contrario. "Evils sometimes offer the aspect of the good... vices border upon virtues; the incorrigible and the sinful have the likeness of the righteous" (Ep. 120.8). Seneca warns that we must watch closely to make the necessary distinctions, not only between virtue and vice, but also between the agent and his quality or, to put it more pertinently, between the choices made and the issues made to triumph. Two similar lines of conduct can be morally at odds. The ingredients of action are so finely calibrated in their nexus that, in a forceful stage presentation as in life, it is usually hard to separate what is imitable from what is to be avoided. And perhaps, from the point of view of the intel-

ligent playgoer who prefers moral opacities, radical separation is counterproductive.

The poets, conjuring up Jupiter's amorous exploits, could be thought to be excusing human errors; lustful characters certainly avail themselves of the precedent. It is said that hellfire and brimstone preachers are depressingly familiar with the experience of building up the challenge of the demon rum, only to have the parishioners, overwhelmed by the attractions of the build-up, storm out to the nearest bar. The danger is greater in the literary artifact, and especially in drama, because the supposedly cautionary tale is invested with formal and psychological allurements that get in the way of the moral. The theatricality, the sparkling rhetoric, and the proud vitality of the Senecan villain stand ready to transform the cautionary, if not into a positive model, into a new compound whose educative dimension is inscrutable. Lessing's early essay on Senecan drama makes much of this difficulty, an interesting by-product of Lessing's enlightenment attempt to strip away the didactic incrustations upon Aristotelian theory.

In philosophical Stoicism, in the treatises and letters aimed at unencumbered reflection and persuasion, the purity of virtue and the interdependence of virtues is taken for granted, and virtue is allied with reason. "Virtue is according to nature; the vices are contrary and inimical [sc. to nature]" (Ep. 50.8), a remark that does not stop Seneca from pointing out the rampant currency of vices. Virtue is coupled with fortitude, justice, prudence, temperance, all of them issuing from, and ultimately identifiable with, the rational principle in man, which Seneca calls ratio. A man or woman truly possessing one virtue is, by associative implication, endowed with all of them. Like stones in a vault, they support one another. On rare occasions, at brief moments of a delusory reflectiveness, drama subscribes to the same postulate. In Hercules Furens (737–47) Theseus distinguishes between sinners and saints, and terminates his account with an address to kings squarely based on the premise that the Stoic king is an achievable reality. Theseus's philosophical reductionism is short-lived; the premise is undone by the tragedy that passes him by.

The philosophical texts also know another, quite different, story. Taking his cue from Plato's Timaeus, Chrysippus declares (SVF 2.1170) that in nature's production line, the most valuable commodities are

often also, because of their delicacy, most vulnerable to corruption. In the words of Aulus Gellius, who reports this:

mori quoque et aegritudines partae sunt, dum salus partitur.
sic hercule ... dum virtus hominibus per consilium naturae
ignitur, vita ibidem per adfinitatem contrariam nata sunt.
Disease and illnesses are born as health is being produced.
Indeed, ... while men are endowed with virtue by the design of
nature, vices are generated alongside by an adverse affinity.
(Noct. Att. 7.1)

Another explanation of evil, also associated with Chrysippus, and akin to the one just cited, says that it exists to show off the good. In the world we know, virtue and vice are functions of each other, with the latter encompassing and harrying the former. Now and then, on rare occasions, the confinement of the good works to its advantage. The encirclement by
the forces of evil gives it a strength that allows it to shine forth, in brief flashes, and establish a precarious authority.

Virtue is
Only the irremediable logic of all the anguish
Your cunning could invent or heart devise.

(Edward Fitzgerald, 
*The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*)

Or, as Samuel Butler has it more wittily:
The devil, in fact, when he dresses himself up in angel’s clothes, can only be detected by experts of exceptional skill, and so often does he adopt this disguise that it is hardly safe to be seen talking to an angel at all.

(The Way of All Flesh, chapter 19)

Whatever the various formulations, experience teaches us that an individual life is a paradigm case of the mutual implication of good and evil. The tragic entailment is a position to which Seneca returns again and again in his philosophical writings, and to which I shall return be-

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Drama, with its temporal limitation and its thematic compression, but also with its age-old call for a pity and a fear responding to human ambivalence, does not run counter to the philosophical expectations. It supplies pregnant vignettes in evidence of their truth. A Stoic king on the stage, if there is such a commodity, must have his faults along with his excellences, orthodox Stoic assumptions about the achievability of pure virtue notwithstanding.

Again, philosophical Stoicism cannot sidestep the inevitable tension between the demand for excellence, with its Homeric implications of strenuous living and the exacting needs of the performative self; and the challenge of social awareness, of *humanitas, to philanthropon*, which Seneca discusses in *De clementia*. The debate is continued by the Christian Stoics, who, from Montaigne (*Essays* 1.1) on, worry over the dubious status of compassion, regret, and other humane stirrings in the heart of the man who wants to be at peace with himself and with the world. The canonical intellectualism of Chrysippus, already tempered by some of his successors, is shunted aside to leave room, in Seneca's more tolerant taxonomy of morals, for the saving grace of selected emotions. I cannot, Seneca writes, produce a wise man who, like a rock, has no feelings whatever (*Ep. 71.27–28*). Man consists of two parts, one irrational, the other rational. Seneca's difficulty with this problem shows up in a degree of inconsistency. On other occasions (e.g., *Ep. 116*; also *Ep. 85*), he goes along with Posidonius, and perhaps Chrysippus himself: let us stifle the irrational part as much as is in our power. But the programmatic emphasis on *clementia*, mildness, in the tract devoted to that political and social disposition, marks his reluctance to "suffer the soul's energy to decline and freeze" (*Ep. 16.6*).

And yet, in the prose works, Seneca's view that a good man, even under Stoic auspices, is not devoid of all feeling does not, strangely, extend to *misericordia*, the compassion a human being feels for the sufferings of another. On this score the plays show a much greater openness for the feelings that bind men together. Note the great choral

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Dulce maerenti populos dolentum,
dulce lamentis resonare gentes;
lenius lucus lacrimaeque mordent,
turba quas ietu similis frequentat.
It is sweet for one in grief to know
That he but feels a common woe:
And lighter falls the stroke of care
Which all with equal sorrow bear.

(*Tro* 1009–12)

In effect, the signals built into Senecan drama take us back to an Aristotelian compassion that the early Stoics had rejected as a basis for healthy human intercourse. Seneca also defies Stoic radicalism by coming out for a graduated scale of punishments (*NQ* 2.4). Meanwhile, more simply, Seneca accepts the special contribution of Stoicism to the old tension: a blackening of the Homeric ideal. On the one hand, Stoicism commends heroism, particularly the Odyssean heroism of patient fortitude. On the other hand, Stoicism turns its back on the heroism of bloody exploits celebrated in the *Iliad* and the bulk of Greek mythology. As I have mentioned, both Cynics and Stoics on occasion refashioned the figure of Hercules into a model of patience and self-sufficiency. But the Hercules of serious drama
usually embodies violent aggression and self-centered pride. In his *De tranquillitate animi* (2.12), Seneca deplots the character of Achilles: a maladjusted and changeable delinquent. In *Hercules Furens*, Hercules is the overachiever, the remover of natural restraints (279–93, 95ff.), the destroyer of barriers that guarantee civilized life. To Amphitryon, who tries to make apologies for his son, the tyrant Lycus, a curious choice for the expositor of the Stoic arraignment of heroes, cites as examples of Hercules' "relaxations":

Hoc Euryti fatetur eversi domus
pecorumque ritu virginum oppressi greges;
hoc nulla Iuno, nullus Eurystheus iubet:
ipsius haec sunt opera.

Look at the house of Eurytus uprooted, and flocks
Of innocent girls subdued like helpless sheep.
No Juno gave these orders, or Eurystheus:
These are *his* works alone.

(HF 477–80)

Stoic drama continues to throw the spotlight on those whose greatness spells their doom. Caesar, in *Caesar and Pompey*, and Bussy have persuaded themselves that, in their craving for greatness, they can flout the laws that apply to ordinary men and women. In Seneca's own plays the laws count for less. The polarities that articulate his dramas are dictated by the guiding principles of an individual life, not by the needs of the commonwealth. The human failures are enacted within the area of private contentions. Hippolytus, clearly designed to charm us with his purity and his thoughtfulness, is *not* a sage, or even a *proficiens*, a man attempting to train himself in the good. The corollary of his purity is a loathing of women sealed with a fourfold argument from impossibility:

ignibus Iunges Caquas et Amica ratibus ante promitett vada
incerta Syrtis, ante ab extreto sinu
Hesperia Tethys lucidum attollet diem
et ora dammis blandia praebebunt lupi,
quam victus animum feminæ mitem geram.
And sooner shall you scramble fire and water;
Sooner shall dangerous quicksands offer safe
Anchorage to ships; and sooner yet
Shall Tethys from her utmost western bounds
Bring forth the shining day, and savage wolves
Smile fondly on the timid does, than I,
Subdued, will melt in kindness before women.

(Phae 568–73)

The ineradicability of his hatred of women is endorsed by a reach into unthinkable disruptions of nature. In the same play the nurse, the stock figure designed to frame heroic excess with popular shrewdness or timidity, delivers a Stoic sermon, shot through with aspersions cast on popular mythology, soft living, and indulgence in one's passion (195ff.). But before long the nurse surrenders principle and offers her support to her mistress, out of fear that she might kill herself. Thus

decency tempers her resolution. Fellow feeling issues in corruption and sin just as surely as in that ultimate reductive specimen of philosophical tragedy, Brecht's *The Measures Taken*. In a Stoic drama, the hero and his party owe the darkening of their characters to a variety of sources: the turbulence endemic in the classical models, the corrosive spell of the temptations and the dilemmas a tragedy cannot do without, and last, but not least, the debilitation with which radical Stoicism saddles both political necessities and humane forbearance. In *Oedipus* it is the environment that closes in on the hero and lays him low; in *Troades* it is Andromache's fear for her child and Ulixes' obedience to reasons of state that tilt the complexion of heroism toward the black.

At its worst the old Sophoclean hero, legatee to Homeric *arete*, becomes, under the pressure of the Stoic insistence on the life of reason, a hero-villain, a Satan as much as an Adam. By a potent anticipation of Dante's insight into the near-identity of punishment and crime, the Senecan hero-villain creates for himself a life of greed or lust or fear that is both his dereliction and his penalty. In Seneca's words: *scleris in sclere supplicium est*; the punishment is in the crime (*Ep*. 97.14). The miasma draws the gods into its fold. Juno proposes to inflict mighty suffering upon her stepson Hercules (*HF* 110ff.); in the process she ravages herself. In using Thyestes as an instrument for his own chastisement (*Thy* 259),
Atreus unknowingly prepares his own person for the same experience. The outward flow of evil is irreversible. "Senecan characters . . . do not commit evil out of calculation for specific gain but because they feel they ought to";[23] or, which is saying the same thing, because the Stoic experiment in rationalizing and taming the soul makes excessive demands on them. Because victims as well as victors share in the passions—Megara's hatred of the oppressor (HF 380ff.) is a case in point—everybody who counts for something in the plays is, on the Stoic scale of values, a delinquent, if not a villain. The refined verse and the glitter and the subtlety of the psychological analysis refract the sense of radical evil and suffer us to continue to talk of heroes. The imperatives to which the Senecan characters respond are difficult to accommodate within a clearly weighted scheme of moral differentiae. But the larger than life impression of tragic achievement remains.[23] And it is because of this that the didactic force,

the discriminability between models, and the very possibility of translating them into temporal action, must remain in doubt. The conceit of the ghost of Tantalus, that he would rather be in hell than on the Atreidae's earth (Thy 68ff.), and his advice to the dwellers in the underworld to love their tortures—amate poenas!—are the logical consequence of a radical Stoicism echoing the old Socratic conceit that an unjust man being punished is happier, or at least better off, than one who is not. The ghost poses as the warner (90ff.), but the ingrained fallibility that informs his own past life cancels the warner's voice. Stoic ethics stipulates an enormous distance between the ideal Stoic king and the king of past history and myth.[33] Stoic drama obliterates the distance. A leader, whether in legend or in contemporary experience, is nothing without his vitality, his passion to lead. To appeal to him to strangle his passion, or to expect of him that his smallish foibles will not grow into massive ills, is to defy the deepest political instincts and the stage traditions that feed on them.

"The road through precepts is long; short and productive the one through paradigms."[34] For the purposes of his philosophical prose, Seneca considers vivid paradigms to be more readily appropriate and economical than the ubiquitous obligato of commonplace aphorisms and precepts, what a modern writer, citing Bertolt Brecht, calls "reach-me-down sloganeering" or plimpes Denken.[33] Ep. 95, indeed, in tandem with Ep. 94 Seneca's most extended consideration of the usefulness of precepts, finds that for the acquisition of wisdom the "preceptive part" of philosophy is powerless unless the listener's soul is already battered down by doctrinal certainty. The large bulk of the letter, by way of showing what it means not to be properly secured, enlarges on the grossness of modern culture, particularly in the matter of eating and drinking. The language is concrete, the tableaux are vulgar, and one is reminded of scenes in Senecan drama where, presumably, precepts would fall on the same infertile ground.

The conventional distinction is between precepts, intended to stimu-
difference from the prose writings is that in the plays the categorical separation of the premises—that is, the maxims—and the conclusions—that is, the precepts—is effaced. One is reminded of Paul De Man's showing that in Nietzsche's theatricalized philosophy the distinction between constative and performative is suspended. In addition, the dividing line between paradigms and *sententiae* turns problematic. In Senecan drama, as in all tragedy bearing on the great issues of life, it is difficult to distinguish between a proposition that carries its weight by virtue of the person who offers it, and a truth or a briefing or warning that has no such backing. In the last analysis, because of the play of characters acting upon our imagination, drama contains few statements that are not geared to choices associated with the dramatic agents. What is more, as a dramatist Seneca endows the rhetorical commonplaces with an excitement and a stylistic elegance that sets them far apart from the sober premises of the prose essays.

We all have a gift for virtue (*Ep.* 108.8). Even a vicious person, Seneca warns, is capable of rising to the stirring sounds of noble sentiments in the theater. A scoundrel may have enough vestigial goodness in him to respond in his heart when the appropriate virtue is eulogized. But equally so, and more profoundly, Seneca's reliance on encapsulated precepts points in quite another direction: the miscreant applauds the call to rectitude because its respectability permits him vicariously to live a life from which his own diseased counsels should by right exclude him. The converse would also be true: a moderately good soul may be expected to thrill to the fiendishly immoral maxims delivered by an Atreus or an Aegisthus, vouchsafing a proxy admission to a realm of forbidden feeling. Thus every pronouncement, every clever aphorism or urgent piece of advice, is potentially counter-productive. The more impressive the formulation, or the more astutely positioned within the psychological curve of the scene or the drama, the more corrupting it could be. The question discussed at length in *Epistles* 94 and 95, whether, in emergency situations that leave no room for both, the palm is to be given to *decreta*, doctrine, without precepts or to precepts without doctrine, is, as we have noted, moot in drama, where the two merge on the level of the characters' intentions, and where the missionary effect of the pregnant formulations is at best uncertain. In Renaissance drama, which operates with a different understanding of the human individual, an excessive appropriation of maxims may have the effect of reducing that individuality; in the course of Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* "the effect of their [sc. the maxims'] recurrent use by Barabas is to render him more and more typical, to de-individualize him." At the same time, an audience can be roused to a great height of enthusiasm by a proper concatenation of

the fragments of tribal wisdom as in Gaunt's great speech in act 1, scene 2 of *Richard II*, where the maxims carry a patently implied prescriptive message for his son, Bolingbroke.

The urgency with which Senecan drama harps on the pitfalls and perversions of wealth does not sit well with modern readers, and it is doubtful that Roman listeners or readers would have allowed it to move them closer to vows of poverty. In the choral utterances and the dialogue of the older tragedians, such hectoring was incidental, and its import was often structural as much as ideological. In Aeschylus, or Pindar, *gnomai* served as devices of segmentation. In Seneca they are pervasive; they assume the prominence given to them by the Cynics, the systematic foes of a cultivated social order. Counsels concerning kingship, war, love, fortune, the golden mean and the middle way, death, and sundry other Stoic themes resist dramatic plausibility, whether reflectively delivered by the chorus or shot back and forth in anger between contestants. But their implausibility does not deprive them of a certain grandeur, because they are the themes to which a responsible member of the commonwealth must always return. Seneca's own estimate of the value of wealth, for example, crops up repeatedly in his writings. Characteristically, it varies; at one point (*VB* 22.4, 23.3) he finds that wealth is not needed for happiness, but that it is capable of making a contribution to it; at another (*Ep.* 84.11) he stresses its inherent threat.

Amphitryon and Megara, while waiting for Hercules to return from the underworld and rescue them from the scheming of the tyrant Lycus, engage in a dialogue in which they test the strained relations between wish and belief, between fear and assumption, between faith and fright, between fortune and goodness, between danger and safety, between luck and being caught (*HF* 309ff.). The series of propositions and repartees is elegant and witty; they have also been regarded as dramatically dead. It has been argued that the same nice
distinctions might have been put in the mouth of just about anybody in the play; that, because the truths are self-evident, they defy a linkage with character. But that is underrating the complex affinity between maxim and paradigm, and the special ironies that stamp the Senecan character. Note what the tyrant Lycus, characterized by his opponents as saevus, savage (329), says a little later (402ff.) about war. He promulgates a little essay about fighting and its effect that stamps him, temporarily, as a man of sound understanding. He offers less rant, more reflexion, more sense, and even more sententiae than his adversaries. He concludes: war is wrath; let us put aside hatred. We might have looked to the innocent sufferer, Megara, for these innocent reputable sentiments. It is a sign of Seneca's mature exploitation of the problematic standing of paradigm and precept that, temporarily and ironically, he engages Lycus in their service. Megara, meanwhile, is busy with the full unfolding of her hatred.

It might be argued that the tyrant's lecture is a piece of sophistry. Euripidean antecedents show the way; Jason, Helen, Menelaus pronounce fragments of wisdom gainsaid by their personal ambitions, but convenient in their passing difficulties. In Euripidean drama, however, the deceitful nature of the sermonizing is apparent and an enjoyable part of the intrigue pattern. In Senecan drama, where the hero is stigmatized and the martyr has a share in the world's sinfulness, where the chorus is radically removed from the arena of the action, the dramatist has greater license to attach the shorthand thoughts to the agents of the moment. The looseness is compounded by yet another factor. Seneca is fond of bundling maxims together in staves of five or more, with the not unexpected result that the immediate import gets clouded in the aggregate, with occasionally interesting aesthetic and dramatic results.

Let us say that where sentiments are introduced in apparent compliance with the speakers' temporary needs, the total picture is, didactically speaking, impenetrable. In the first act of Phaedra (186ff.) the heroine extols the power of Love, who defeats even the gods. The nurse counters with an explanation that Love is nothing but a projection of purely human drives. The chorus, introducing the second act, reverts to the perspective of Phaedra and acclaims the tangible lordship of the god Amor. In this case we are dealing not so much with brief maxims as with fully orchestrated points of view. But, like the shorter formulations, these extended arguments lack lasting resonance, and at the end we are left to wonder, not only what to believe, but whom to credit. In each case the coupling of speaker with what is said is, for the moment, authentic and dramatically persuasive. But, fortunately for the tragic substance of the play, the prescriptive momentum lapses into illegibility.

We conclude that sententiae and their combinations, no less than paradigms, lend themselves to a kind of mannerism, a pointed display of literary effects, with little overall relevance to the Stoic burden of the dramatic experience. Not surprisingly, those who doubt the Stoic complexion of Seneca's plays have pounced on precisely this kind of evidence, even though, as they admit, there are many choral essays that fit smoothly enough into a handbook of Stoic teachings: on the advantages of the simple life, on life as a preparation for death, and so forth.

Near the end of Oedipus, the messenger's speech detailing Oedipus's blinding is framed by two brief choral passages (882–914, 980–97):

Fata si liceat mihi
fingere arbitrio meo
temperem Zephyro levit
vela . . .
If it were mine to shape my fate
To my own pleasure, I would trim my sails
To the gentle breeze . . .
(882–85)

Fatis agimus: cedite fatis;
non sollicitae possunt curae
mutare rati stamina fusii.
By fate we are driven; then yield to fate.
No anxious care can change the thread
Spun by the unwavering spindle.
(980–82)
The refusal of drama to limit itself to an adequately defined lesson is unmistakable. Assuming that for once the chorus are deeply concerned about their king, Oedipus is made to stand as a paradigm for both positions: he failed to take the middle way, and Fate got the better of him. He serves both as a cautionary and as an exemplary model for the thoughts his sufferings stimulate in the hearts of his people. Or take Troades. In the second chorus we are told, in elaborate detail, that the underworld is a myth no right-minded person will accept: the stories about hell are "empty noise and hollow words, and a nightmarish tale" (405–6). This is an age-old intellectualist stand, issuing in the precept to keep one's mind healthy and fearless by not accepting the eschatological fables about Hades and Orcus and punishment and rewards. The stand is voiced again and again in the treatises and letters. But then Seneca turns around, and his drama achieves some of its most telling effects by the loving care with which it dwells on the horrors of the netherworld. Once again, the charge is shorted, and reflection or incitement within the drama are stripped of their decisiveness. Seneca himself, in several notable passages of his prose writings, makes no bones about the slipperiness of sententiae and chains of sententiae:

Peteis a me, ut... scribam tibi, quaec pars philosophiae, quam Graeci paraenetice vocant, nos praeeptivam dicimus, satis est ad consummandam sapientiam. scio Cre in bonam partem accepturum, si negavero. You ask me to... write to you, whether the field of philosophy called paraenetic by the Greeks and praeeptiva by us is sufficient for the achievement of wisdom. I know you will take it in the proper spirit if I say it is not. (Ep. 95.1; cf. also 108.8–9)

Like the paradigms, precepts forfeit a too easy legibility by remaining true, in their aggregate, to the fullness and the caprices of life, and to a philosopher's perception of that fullness. One might ask where this leaves, if not pity and fear, then the moral effect upon the audience, of which the chorus is the built-in representative. The answer is: in the position of the soul, which is most attuned to man's misery and least equipped to help him in his need.

"Some things, we say, recoil from custom, but then, by another route, they return to custom."[126] No persuasion, in the full sense recommended by the Socrates of the Phaedrus, is to be expected. The rhetoric is, technically speaking, imperfect, because it is not aimed at a defined target. Drama arouses a different kind of persuasion, which has nothing to do with the rhetoric of the school books; and that persuasion is not primarily dependent on precepts or paradigms or lectures for its success. To the extent that they come in, that they fit into the mosaic of the drama's rhetorical energies, they serve such momentary purposes as irony, frustration, enrichment, iconographic amplification, and, intermittently, psychological relief. Does this mean that the Stoic cast of the drama is thereby compromised? I doubt that it is, for in their dispersion, in their failure to engage the purposes of an integral agenda, they are not completely unlike the loosely organized topoi of the prose writings, not only of Seneca, but of other Roman Stoics also.

The third chorus of Thyestes, one of the most remarkable constructions in Roman literature (546–622), starts with a praise of fraternal amity, and then proceeds to develop the opposition between war and peace, with a full orchestration of the contrast through scenes from the land, from the larger world, and from mythology. Insensibly, however, logical contrast, designed to throw into relief the loveliness of peace, metamorphoses into the movement between contraries and into the Heraclitean interdependence of opposites. The essay terminates with a voicing of the Herodotean moral of mutability:

Nulla sors longa est: dolor ac voluptas
invicem cedunt; brevior voluptas.
No lot endures. Grief and Joy, each in turn,
Depart; Joy leaves the sooner.
(Thy 596–97)

Like some of the choral odes of Aeschylus, the chorus opens on a note of joy and closes on a note of despair. Unlike Aeschylus, Seneca manages the trajectory smoothly, without the jagged turns that define the Greek dramatist's vision of life. The line of thought is something like this: (1) war has ceased: Atreus loves Thyestes; (2) the cessation is an instance of mutability; (3) (not expressed, but understood by the audience as a likely consequence) mutability will cause Atreus and Thyestes to fall out once again. Individual segments of the Senecan passage are notorious sententiae: nothing is constant, pleasure is short-lived, Fortune and her wheel are in control. Some of the aphorisms cancel each other. The whole...
poem has a range and a power that far exceed any narrow discursive orientation. But the elements absorbed into it can be traced also in the treatises, and individual letters to Lucilius exhibit a similar smooth restlessness.

To sum up: Stoic drama incorporates components that we associate with orthodox Stoicism, including the suasive and the cautionary use of exempla and the rhetorical use of maxims, aphorisms, and injunctions, without necessarily in each case pledging itself to canons championed by Stoic philosophers. The reason for this is to be found not only in the special conditions of drama, but also in an insight of which Seneca, along with others, is richly aware in his own philosophical writings: that both paradigm and maxim can lead lives of their own, defying the ostensible matrix from which they spring, and that this freedom is not entirely alien to the function of paradigm and maxim in Stoic thought.

If this were all, we might perhaps be allowed to say that Senecan drama, in these instances, draws upon the materials of Stoicism. But we would hardly be entitled to conclude that Senecan drama, as an instrument of moral appeal, is Stoic drama. As long, that is, as we measure the Stoic component in Senecan drama only by glancing at the moral and educative contribution of the instruments of persuasion, the Stoic thesis must remain in doubt. For the neo-Stoics of the Renaissance, as for most of the Roman Stoics (but not for Seneca), Stoicism was a matter of ethics and of psychology, with some attention paid also to the relation between man and the gods. But the great shift from Greek tragedy to Senecan drama of which I spoke earlier is hard to account for solely in terms of how the Stoics defined moral man and his conduct and his religion. For a better understanding, we shall have to explore other aspects of the teachings of the Porch.

### Chapter Two

**Truth, Speech, Posture**

If compared with other poetic genres or literary universals, all drama, and especially tragedy, carries a Stoic stamp. Perhaps this is merely another way of saying that the Stoic saint, the disciplined, articulate leader presenting himself as a role model to the admiration of the flock and acting out his life and death in full awareness of the impression made upon the gallery, is cast in the dramatic mold, as is the Stoic sinner, the villain swollen with his passion. Epic, as pure narrative, untouched by the dramatic incubus that Aristotle piles upon its back, delineates the play of public forces, the lines of energy stretching between competing warriors. Epic realizes multiple collision, conquest and defeat, and the tidy adjustments and reconciliations demanded by the sanguine realism of the heroic order. It is transmitted by a narrative voice pretending to simulate a historical record. Lyric is, in antiquity, either a further development, an interiorization, of epic descriptiveness, or it examines the feelings, the perceptions and the biases, of a single speaker whose solitary voice reaches us from a distance. That voice is often addressed to a companion or a body of companions. In the bond between singer and addressee, the tangles of the lyric sensibility are appraised or unravelled. Neither in the epic nor in the lyric, if these modes can be thought to exist in a pure state, are we brought face to face with a struggle, a precarious moral conflict, a daring championing of unusual values, acted out with an eye to the impression registered directly upon members of the tribe.

To be sure, in Horace’s Roman odes, Vergil’s *Aeneid*, and other lyrics and epics derived from these imperial models, we encounter a fair measure of the selfconsciousness and the clash of responsibilities that we associate with serious drama. In their abstracted forms, however, as isolated by genre specialists, neither the epic nor the lyric builds on issues of incremental questioning or thrusts the contestants into a position of role-playing. That is left to the drama.
Once we look at the preoccupations that characterize mature Stoicism, especially in its Roman form, in Musonius, Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius, they are recognizably dramatic: the soul in conflict; the ego as exemplar; the agent as performer within the sight of an audience and answerable to it; death as a source of moral edification; the great imperative of either/or, which, on the level of intellectual preference, grants a man the choice between being a sage or being a fool. Above all, this is true of the test-tube situation, the great pointed dilemma, spilling furiously across the bounds of natural law and artistic decorum: Medea having to choose between humiliation and murder, Pentheus hovering anxiously between pride and prurience, Antigone discoursing about husbands and brothers. They find their closest analogue in the so-called Stoic paradoxes, the outrageous fictions under the pressure of which all moral niceties are thrown into doubt. "Cato believes that it is the same crime whether somebody strangles his father or a chicken." The ramrod dementia that empowers this paradox assisted at the birth of many European tragedies, from Sophocles’ Ajax to Artaud’s The Cenci. It is difficult to fathom how William Archer, quoted with approval by Christopher Ricks, could have said of Bussy D’Ambois: "Dramatists who could produce effects with such total disregard of nature, probability, and common sense, worked in a soft medium." Cleanthes is credited with saying: paradoxa, ou men paraloga, which we might paraphrase: paradoxes go against the grain of doxa = normal expectation, but not of logos = larger truth. Offenses against nature, probability, and common sense form the humus in which the European tradition of high tragedy took root.

Stoicism, alone among the Hellenistic and Greco-Roman philosophies, offers a body of thought and a language that are temperamentally adequate to the demands of serious drama. All tragedy strives for a constellation of issues, many of which are prefigured in the Stoic texts. Our task is to determine whether Senecan drama and its like-minded descendents share in properties that are in excess of that modicum of Stoic affinity. The point of this essay is precisely this, to confirm that, over and above the kinship with the Stoic manner that most drama exhibits, the Senecan revolution made for a large-scale intensification of the obvious analogy between Stoicism and drama. A full answer to this question will become apparent only in the latter part of our inquiry. But some preliminary observations are possible even now.

Can we get help from what Seneca says about tragedy in his prose writings? Regrettably, like other Stoics, and unlike Academics and Peripatetics, Seneca has relatively little systematic commentary on this head. With the exception of a few interesting offiders, notably Ariston of Chios (third century B.C.E.) and Diogenes of Babylon (second century B.C.E.), the Stoa seems not to have interested itself in poetics, in spite of frequent quotations from the poets, and in spite of Cleanthes' own considerable achievement as the author of the Hymn to Zeus. Seneca's feelings about poetry and drama emerge only marginally and are not always consistent. As a critic of literary genres, Seneca is ill at ease and uncertain. On the one hand, he reasons that verse can lighten suffering, and that some poets have, as it were inadvertently, expressed philosophic truths (Helv. 17.3; Ep. 8.8). On the other hand, in certain contexts he despises drama for its immoral tales and for its meretricious appeal to the senses (VB 26.6–8; Ben. 1.4.5). Most of the pronouncements in this vein are glancing and summary. Seneca refuses to face head-on the role of poetry in the life of the mind. Even the famous Epistle 88, on the educational significance of the liberal arts, shies away from the obvious difficulties posed by the achievements of drama. But here and there an incidental remark promises more, and I shall revert to some of them as I continue with the topic.

In Epistle 88 the theater is discussed under the heading of what the
Platonizing Stoic Posidonius categorized as the "playful art," *ars ludica*, or, to give it its Greek name, *techne paizousa or paidiodes.*\(^7\) By this Posidonius means the kind of aesthetic exercise that offers pleasure chiefly to the eyes and ears and must, it appears, be engaged in at one's peril. A caution is in order here, applying to much that is said by the philosophers about the Roman experience of drama. Customarily, when Seneca talks about the theater, the kind he has in mind is the mime or pantomime and related art forms, spectacular representations common in his time that did in fact offer little beyond the satisfaction of crude sensory needs.\(^8\) The recurrent emphasis on stage machinery and production tricks shows what is involved.

But it will not do to seek an alibi in a laudable contempt for a vulgar entertainment. Seneca's rejection of the theater goes beyond this; it comports with both his training as a philosopher and with his own private sensibilities. In *Epistle* 7.2 he reveals his larger revulsion: "The bigger the crowd, the greater the danger. There is nothing quite so damaging to a good character as sitting down in a theater. Immediately, because of the pleasure experienced, vices slip in."\(^9\) Just by joining in with the company of theatergoers, no matter what the fare represented, the life of reason, which is the only one that counts, is disrupted in two ways. The contact with the undisciplined multitude befuddles the mind and undermines opportunities for quiet contemplation, such as is recommended by Horace in an amusing and enlightening anecdote about an old soldier in an empty theater (*Ep.* 2.2. 128–40). More important, the exposure to the delights or, as Plato puts it, to the flatteries or humoring qualities of the presentation is equally disabling.

At best, *Epistle* 108 informs us, poetry, and that includes drama, has a propaedeutic value, or it helps to publicize teachings that depend on the sweetening of verse to reach larger numbers of people. But the passage in which Seneca says this employs an image, borrowed from Cleanthes, that seems to take us far beyond the argument from public relations or elementary education.

As our breath produces a brighter sound when a trumpet drives it through the narrow of an extended channel and spreads it at last through a wider opening, so our perceptions are rendered brighter by the narrow constraints of verse. The same material, when expressed in prose, meets with little interest and is less effective. But where verse accedes, and well-defined meters sharpen and expose the sense, that perception acquires the thrust of a hurled javelin.\(^10\)

The image from athletic contests is traditional, prepared for by Pindar and Cicero and others, but in the mouth of Seneca it takes on a special significance, as we shall see directly. Its association with the simile from the acoustics of brass music shows Seneca for once fully alive to the power that poetry, and especially public poetry, may under the proper circumstances possess. If he continues to have reservations about literature, and indeed about all the so-called liberal arts except philosophy, it is because only philosophy, he thinks, succeeds reliably in bringing about salutary action. In this conviction he is at one with the dominant philosophical schools, from Xenophanes and Plato down. The context in which he airs his conviction favors the primacy of philosophy. Still, the passage from *Epistle* 108 shows what Seneca is capable of thinking when he lets his hair down.

Poetry can be examined by a variety of interested people, by the *philologus* (historian-scholar-critic), by the *grammaticus* (linguist-grammarian), and by the philosopher (*Ep.* 108.3 off.). The same meadow, Seneca allows, offers grass to the ox, a coney to the dog, and a lizard to the stork. But only the philosopher, not the historian or grammarian, can translate the poetic impulses into moral energy. Conversely, and this takes us back to Cleanthes and the image of the trumpet, certain philosophical truths are of such consequence that they cannot be adequately and widely communicated without meter, rhythm, and song. Seneca would go along with his critic Quintilian, who says that what is needed in effective communication is a style (*compositio*) that reaches not only the ear but the feelings (*affectus*), to create the desired *motus animorum*, the intellectual and moral animation that both philosopher and poet, not to mention the orator, hope

—to elicit. The style needs to be equipped, as a hand that is armed is the more capable. Quintilian's phrase, in which old ideas about *psychagogia*, going back to Gorgias and Plato, have been refined by a Stoic concern with the passions, says nothing overtly about instruction. The accent is on the generation, deep within the emotive being, of impulses that translate into right action. To repeat what Seneca says, *ista ediscamus ut quae fuerint verba sint opera*: our reading must translate diction into action (*Ep.* 108.35). Because the truly
profound insights, those that shape a moral stance, are difficult to convey, a departure from quotidian speech may be more productive. At the same time, Seneca does not hold that the speech should stray far from the intended meaning; he does not subscribe to the allegorical method, the interpretive technique that became almost synonymous with the Stoic understanding of older poetic texts. Allegorization as an exegetical tool relies on the Aristotelian assumption that poetry is superior to other forms of discourse in that it is more philosophical. It also assumes that the poetic utterance can be translated into good discursive prose without damage to its complexity or truth, or rather to the advantage of its concealed meaning. It is as well that Seneca shows little interest in the opportunities or the systematic challenges of allegorization. His opposition (Ep. 88.5) relieves us of the need to look for hidden solutions to the difficulties posed by Senecan drama. It is a splendid vindication of Seneca’s ability as a writer of transparent verse and untransparent tragedy that in his pronouncements on literature he stands clear of the farfetched explanations by ambitious critics who try to make sense of Homer and Hesiod and Plato by pulling them down with them into a theological underbrush.

In sum, there are occasions when Seneca objects to poetry and to tragedy as he knows them; but in a number of texts he leaves room for a larger appreciation. As he says in a remarkable passage on classical writings, there is no book among them that will not bring home to you a wealth of examples of how men differ and of the uncertainty of their lives and of tears prompted by innumerable causes. The philosophical essayist who follows his mentors, both Epicurean and Stoic, in an easy condemnation of the meretricious arts is also alive to the emotional impact of great verse. Contrast a later courtier who had difficulties with his prince and who had read his Seneca very carefully. At the beginning of his Consolatio, Boethius has Philosophy chase away the scenicae meretriculae, the "theater molls," on the grounds that they have no remedy for his grief, but on the contrary will aggravate it with their sweet poisons.

In his role as a moral guide and imperial voice, Seneca naturally preferred to express himself in the flexible, but unequivocal, cadences of the philosophical tract. But no great leap of the imagination is required to see him turning to verse and to fully dramatized argument where he wished, not to teach accessible lessons, but to submit the more controversial, less settled movements of his thinking to the test of a confrontation with the realities of a familiar world. In the process, one imagines, he was also intrigued by the possibility of creating something new, an art that might show him to have written finis to a moribund tradition, and to have put in its place a worthy and enriching successor.

A detailed appreciation of the speech patterns of Senecan drama must wait upon a later discussion. But it is worth pointing out here that his dramatic language shows the same tendency toward rapid dialectic, the same strenuous exploitation and exhaustion of an issue by means of antitheses and progressive qualification, that is also found in his essays. Some of our best critics have said that the preference for antitheses that marks the Senecan argument is an index of the discord in his being. But the antithetical style marks, not the idiosyncrasies of an unsettled individual, but the climactic distillation of the insights of a whole movement, reinforcing the natural tendencies of serious drama. Seneca's use of antithesis is singular for the simplicity of its expression, the pared-down moves of active minds locked in combat. The self-questioning of Clytaemestra in Agamemnon (108ff.), the dialogues be-

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tween Atreus and his minister (Thyestes 245ff.) and between Medea and the nurse (Medea 155ff.) proceed with a spare and concentrated ferocity, without the artificial flourishes and the levelling symmetries of the Gorgianic or Euphuistic style. Here is the gist of what Phaedra's nurse says to her mistress in a vain attempt to dissuade her from her impulse (Phaedra 145ff.): Theseus does not see the crime—but Minos does; we can hide the crime—Sol and Jupiter will uncover it; the gods look away—your conscience cannot.

In the plays this taut dialectic is supported by a consummate skill in shuttle-speech (stichomythia ), the highly stylized arrangement of one-or two-line utterances and counterutterances. The sequences are always brief; the longest piece of shuttle-speech in Senecan drama is 13 lines long; Euripides' Ion has one of 115 lines. As against the practice of the Greek tragedians, who use shuttle-speech for a number of purposes, Seneca mostly reserves it for attack and counterattack, with key phrases or terms signalling a tortured and
Oppressive line of development. The combat is not one of close engagement, but of the refusal to consider what the opponent has to offer. Later I shall have more to say about the reasons that prompt the participants in these altercations to face away from each other. Here it suffices to stress the remarkable economy, indeed, the density, of Senecan stichomythia.

Seneca tells us himself, in the 59th Epistle, that he prefers a simple, compressed type of speech, emboldened by striking, but not elaborate, images. His principal advice is to keep the clauses brief. Helpful communication between decent people does not demand an elegant or contrived idiom; still, polish is permitted to the degree that it does not obscure the message (Ep. 75.1–6). The model is that of medical advice; we do not expect the physician to wax eloquent, but if he does there is no objection as long as his briefing is effective. In all these respects the essays and the dramas obey the same rules, although Seneca had his critics—the emperor Claudius, Quintilian, the orator Fronto, and others—who felt that the writing in his essays lacked punch. In the Renaissance the anti-Ciceronians, notably Erasmus, readily acknowledged Seneca as a model for their plainier, more pointed, less broadly academic speech, misleadingly called "the Senecan amble."

The same aggressive simplicity is the norm also in the images and tropes that enliven the Senecan style, again both in his prose and in the plays. This may seem surprising. The common notion of Senecan rant, with its presumption of prolixity and bombast, is firmly entrenched. For anyone who is familiar with the rhetoric of the Renaissance dramatists, it is easy enough to suppose that Seneca's tropes must be swollen, unwieldy, and indigestible. Not so. Both dialectic and imagery, in their relative economy and transparency, conform to the preferences of the Stoic-Cynic diatribe as attested, for instance, in Cicero's Stoic Paradoxes. The imagery employed by the Stoic teachers is not rich and allusive, but designedly natural, even obvious. Much of it is taken from the texture of everyday experience, from the customs and the furnishings of the ordinary household. It has been conjectured that Vergil's most homely image, the bucket of water reflecting the light of the sun (Aeneid 8.22–25), derives, via Apollonius Rhodius, whose Argonautica Vergil is imitating, from a Stoic source. In Stoic treatises the images are employed to illustrate or illuminate topics in the areas of ethics, of physics, and of anthropology. In Senecan drama also, the images, though indebted to the practice of the epic more than to that of the philosophers, serve as models of demonstration or illustration. They are external to the surface meaning to be clarified, but never so distant as to produce difficulty or friction. Even where the imagery is grandly developed, as in the lengthy sequence of the behavior of Cerberus in Hercules Furens (783–827), the pictorial scheme does not pull the understanding about, and has little of what Bottom calls "Ercles' vein."

What is true of the images is true also of Seneca's diction and syntax as a whole. Why then do so many critics feel that one of the contributions of Seneca's dramatic art to the Renaissance stage was to encumber the language? As one writer says about Bussy D'Ambois (the same might have been said about Tamburlaine or Antonio's Revenge, not to mention the Tudor Senecans): "All the notorious characteristics of the Senecan aura are present here: the epic similes, classical mythology, eruptions of Latinized vocabulary, syntactical tangles which sometimes defy unravelling." The Latinate diction may be in imitation of

Seneca's speech, but cannot very well be thought a fault of Seneca's; syntactic tangles are pervasive in Chapman, but much rarer in Seneca than they are in, say, Sophocles; epic similes and mythological references do not necessarily create stylistic corruption.

What Atlas or Olympus lifts his head
So far past covert, that with air enough
My words may be informed, and from his height
I may be seen and heard through all the world?
A tale so worthy, and so fraught with wonder
Sticks in my jaws and labors with event . . .
(Bussy D'Ambois 2.1.25ff.)

It is the bathos of the thought expressed, rather than the speech itself, that grates upon our nerves.

The more serious objection to Seneca's, and the Senecan, style rests on weighty authority. Bacon's words are typical of the Renaissance fault finders:

Little better is that kind of stile . . . which neer about the same time succeeded. . . . The labour is here altogether, That words may be aculeate, sentences concise, and the whole contexture of the speech and discourse, rather rounding into
it selfe, than spread and dilated: so that it comes to passe by this Artifice, that every passage seemes more witty and weighty than indeed it is. . . . And this kind of expression hath found such acceptance with meaner capacities, as to be a dignity and ornament to Learning; nevertheless, by the more exact judgments, it hath bin deservedly despised, and may be set down as a distemper of Learning, seeing it is nothing else but a hunting after words, and fine placing of them."

Oratio potius versa quam fusa, discourse modelled rather than extended: the distinction is elegant and suggestive; what usefulness it possesses concerns the prose style (Including that of Justus Lipsius) that is the immediate object of attack, rather than the drama, in which Bacon took less interest.

It will be noted that the complaint is not about extravagance or rant but about conciseness and wit and the sharpness of internal tensions. T. S. Eliot confirms this for the drama: "Though Seneca is long-winded, he is not diffuse; he is capable of great concision; there is even a monotony of forcefulness; but many of his short phrases have for us as much oratorical impressiveness as they had for the Elizabethans." What gives the language its special character, and in this it differs greatly from the speech of the prose essays, is the barely controlled hysteria of clashing passions and drives unlimited in their hunger. The brittle concatenation of pointed phrases, rhetorical questions, maxims and puns and shuttle-speech serves the purpose of defining a range of appetites and resentments. The severity of the control generates its own heat, which materializes as linguistic self-consciousness. The long chains of references and examples, catalogues geographical and mythological, the inability to come to a stop once a topic has been broached and exhausted, may appear to err on the side of indulgence. In a subsequent chapter I hope to show that Senecan copiousness is in fact not a matter of mismanagement but part of his larger loyalty to the Stoic matrix. At any rate, Eliot's "short phrases" and Bacon's "aculate words" are reminders that succinctness and concision are marks of the Senecan manner, no less than the tendency to string the units out in ringing, repetitive proliferation.

The world's a Theater, the earth a Stage
Which God, and nature doth with Actors fill,
Kings haue their entrance in due equipage, And some there parts play well and others ill.

All men haue parts, and each man acts his owne.

Stoicism prompts theatrical tropes. If the Roman Stoics, including Seneca and Lucan, focus on playacting in the presence of others, they do so especially at the point where the play draws to its conclusion, the plethora of possible masks has been discarded for the one authentic role, and the snuffing out of life has to be cast in a heroic mold. The hero's eagerness to put his suffering or his passions on display matches the Stoic's penchant for exhibitionism and truculence. Homeric heroism is direct, spontaneous, and untheatrical. It functions best in the heat of the battle when all energies are aimed at the sole purpose of erasing another life. It requires no audience, except for the subsequent glorification of the heroic deed. Stoic heroism is a planned, a highly contrived and intellectualized activity. It achieves its full meaning only if it draws attention to itself as the central spectacle in a crowded arena. Self-dramatizing, seeing oneself as an actor with an audience, entails the admission that life has meaning only as a performance, as an aesthetic experience. Otto Regenbogen refers to Dio of Prusa (13.36) for a vision of Rome that could stand as a motto for Seneca's vision of his world: imperial Rome seems to Dio like a huge pyre Achilles has constructed for the dead Patroclus from many spars and beams, from the bodies of victims and precious garments, sprinkled with fat and oil. Now he towers there with offerings and prayers and invokes the winds to fan the flames and devour the pyre. This grandstanding Achilles, with an eye upon the multitude witnessing the ceremony, is a far cry from the Homeric hero alone with his dead friend.

When the nurse ventures the opinion that a hatred openly confessed undermines the opportunity for action, Medea responds with disdain:

Levis est dolor, qui capere consilium potest et clepere sese: magna non lattant mala. Slight is the grief that yields to counsel And drops from sight; great troubles do not hide.

(Med 155–56)
The theatrical metaphor does not play an important role in Seneca's *Dialogi*, but comes in prominently in the *Epistles* (for example, 74.7, 76.31, 108.6–8, 115.14ff.). Seneca compares the students who look for philosophical instruction to spectators in the stalls. The world is an amphitheater in which an audience of immortals watches Cato struggle with Fortune. In the plays Seneca comes close, on a number of occasions, to making it appear as if attending an exhibition or a performance defined the agents appropriately and constituted their principal fulfillment as human beings. In *Troades* 1068–1103 the messenger contributes a remarkable sketch of the "theater" within which Astyanax performs his great leap. The messenger's speech is introduced by someone, Andromache or Hecuba (it does not matter; any experienced sufferer of the woes of this world will do), addressing him as follows:

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Expone seriem caedis, et duplex nefas
persequerere: gaudent magnas aerumnas dolor
tractare totas.
Detail the butchery, and itemize
The brace of horrors. My grief delights in savoring
The gruesome narrative entire.
(Tro 1065–67)

The speaker is prepared for the rehearsal of what is central in Senecan tragedy: the sequence and interconnection of misdeeds, in their mobilized particularity, designed to appeal to listeners who expect the worst and need to have their fears corroborated. *Tractare* has its own quality: handle, caress, but also manage philosophically, consolatorily. The speaker calls for a demonstration rather than a report. The demonstration comes with its own proper setting. The natural scenery of ruined tower, rocks, and hills, with hundreds of men in various positions, clinging to outcroppings and trees to watch the executions from a distance, suggests a *cavea* as it might have been sketched by Piranesi. The soldier-spectators weep and regret what they have done to Astyanax, and then turn round to do likewise to Polyxena (1118–20). Her death (1188ff.) renders the stage analogy, suggested in the act of Astyanax, fully explicit. The messenger openly compares the scene to the theater (1123–25). When, in his report, she meets her end, the killing is in slow motion: the sword entering deep into the flesh, the blood rushing from the huge wound, and the "angry" fall are all calculated to bring tears to the eyes of both Trojans and Greeks watching the maiden's martyrdom. The playbill is set and the scenario cannot be changed. This is an instance, in embryo, of the play-within-play convention that was to become so powerful in the later European theatrical tradition.

The fully realized play within the play, often engineered to pull the wool over the eyes of the characters, who are cast in the role of the entertained, maximizes the attractions of manufacturing lives, measuring them against the workings of a broader scheme of things, and displaying them for public approval or disapproval. A later period draws for this purpose on the convention of courtly masques and other entertainments.

In Seneca's own plays there is no scope for such diversions. The scene action is too compact and the dramatic energy too turbulent to permit the interposition of a distancing interlude. Still, contrast the theatricality of the deaths of Polyxena and Astyanax with Talthybius's account of the sacrifice of Polyxena in Euripides' *Hecuba* (521ff.). In the latter the same crowd is said to be in evidence, though there is no mention of Trojans. But the action is handled as a ritual occasion. Nothing is said about the feelings or the posture of the audience; attention is paid only to their silence, their amens, and their moves to honor the dead.

Stoic writings are full of this elementary conviction that men are either actors on a stage or witnesses in the orchestra. Zeno's student Ariston of Chios compares the wise man to a good actor who knows how to play Thersites as well as Agamemnon (SVF 1.351). The concept was originally associated with the Cynics, with Diogenes and his followers, whose paradoxical doctrines were marked by a histrionic emphasis that made of every act of "philosophical" instruction a piece of grandstanding. Teles, an early itinerant preacher of that movement who lived in the third century B.C.E., is said to have compared Fortune to a playwright, and to have remarked that you have to know whether you have been appointed a principal or not, and that there is no point in trying to switch.

In the very last paragraph of his memoir, Marcus Aurelius revives a simile used on a number of occasions in his book:

What is so terrible about being expelled from the city, not by a tyrant or an unjust judge, but by nature who put you there in the first place? It is like a magistrate hiring and then dismissing a player from the stage. "But I have not
played all five acts, only three." Agreed; but in life three acts complete the drama.

Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus tend to slip into the theatrical trope particularly when they highlight the alienation of the responsible man from his fellows and the loneliness that makes him see himself imprisoned at the center of a watchful universe. The central Stoic dogma that the self is under obligation of attempting to assimilate itself to nature produces a degree of reflection and argumentation that, paradoxically, problematizes the dimensions of the self. Seneca sees the danger: one of the causes of nervousness, he says, is the habit of striking a pose. Let us not dwell on the thought that others are always appraising us (TA 17.1–2). Marcus’s vision is the more dramatic because he writes about himself, with an urgency that puts his anxieties close to the experience of tragedy. So much so, that in a wonderful passage on the triviality of *kleos*, reputation (4.3) he can argue the moral: concentrate upon your self (here understood as the limits of the moral man) and regard the world (*kosmos*) as transience and life as a figment of the imagination.

The needs of the *theatrum mundi* affect the plays in various ways. We have to distinguish between self-dramatization at climactic moments; role-playing throughout an action; self-consciousness based on an inner weakness; dissembling for purposes of intrigue; mediating between the play and the audience for the sake of laying open the fictiveness of the action; and much else that comes under the heading of the theatricality of the Senecan play. The neo-Stoics of the Renaissance perpetuate the image of the *theatrum mundi*. Juan-Luis Vives, for instance, in his *Fabula de homine* (1518) exhibits man putting on a variety of masks, of which the mask of homo sapiens is only one; his real being, briefly revealed in a surprise flash of human optimism, is identical with that of Jupiter. More pessimistically, Justus Lipsius, in his essay on dissimulation (*De constantia* 1.8), comments that the whole world is a stage play. Here the moral is that when people grieve for themselves, they often pretend that they are grieving for a public ill. This raises a difficult issue: where is the boundary between performance and pretending? Stoicism does not recognize a revolt against *Rollenzwang* such as is brooded over by Strindberg. Seneca acknowledges that it may be difficult to play one’s role satisfactorily (*Ep*. 80.7). He also sees that it is not easy to distinguish between a healthy and effective role-playing and a tortured selfconsciousness, and recommends an unadorned simplicity, *nihil obtendens moribus suis* (TA 17.2), avoiding the masking of one’s true character. At such moments the Cynic and the Stoic teachings find themselves in minor conflict, resolved along Epicurean lines, with an accent on the delights of simplicity, a common theme in the choral essays of the plays, but significant also as a temporary, and ultimately abortive, truth in the mouths of some of the characters, including Thyestes (*Thy* 446ff.) and Hippolytus (*Phae* 483ff.). Such moments of utopian wishfulness are experienced as desperate attempts to get away from the grimmer message

that the fiction of peace and simplicity may in fact involve the most contorted playacting within the world of drama.

In Seneca, life as play intrrupts in the form of self-dramatization, the refurbishing of the self as a paradigm. It is a function of Seneca’s own brooding tendency to see himself as the lonely source of moral energy. Several letters, taken in combination, bring out the implications. In *Epistle* 10 Seneca calls for self-reliance; we do not, he says, need the active companionship of others. But then, in *Epistle* 11, he suggests that it is good to be able to think of somebody else, some prized fellow being, watching your every act. Similarly, in *Epistle* 19, he argues that it is important to examine *with whom* one eats and drinks, more so than *what* one consumes. Again and again the moralist seems to be recommending self-reliance and autonomy, but it is clear also that the old shame-consciousness of the culture inevitably calls for the approving presence of others. Without their express sanction, the achievement of the solitary agent would forfeit its value. To quote from the final chorus of *Troades* again:

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I am glad to see that many share his fate,
That he is not the only plaything of his doom.
(Tro 1014–15)
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Or, more disturbingly, witness the speech of Medea, pointing to Jason as her spectator:
derat hoc unum mihi,
spectator iste. nil adhuc facti reor:
quidquid sine isto fecimus sceleris perit.
One thing, I feel, was lacking:
That Jason saw it not. Count it as not yet done:
Without his presence my crime is nullified.
(Med 992–94)

Self-dramatization, the character’s intense recognition that he is creating his role for the
delection and horror of others, and that their presence adds substance to his standing, is
also a kind of existential exercise. Medea wishes to become Medea, and Hercules Hercules, to
conform both to their own expectations and to those of their enemies and friends.[38] Even the
inner conflicts, the protracted demonstrations

of instability and lack of center, prominent in Agamemnon, but evident in all the dramas,
are in the end folded into the dynamics of dramatic careers poised toward self-revelation.
"Zerrissenheit " joins with obsession to shape a furious spectacle. The character starts ab ovo
and hesitatingly or impetuously grows into what his public mission (and, in the case of
Senecan drama, the bettering of his sources) demands. The process becomes particularly
effective on the Senecan stage when it informs the climax of a heroic life drawing toward its
close. Near the end of Hercules Furens, after a remarkable speech by Amphitryon and a
moving, thoroughly unhistrionic dialogue between father and son, Hercules has one last
oration, the most hyperbolically theatrical statement of the play. Its extravagance is sparked
by its terminal position. He sees himself as if he were another:

iamdudum mihi
monstrum impium saevumque et immite ac ferum
oberrat: agedum, dextra, conare aggregi
ingens opus . . .
Now long enough has there been hovering
Before my eyes that monstrous shape of sin,
So impious, savage, merciless and wild.
Then come, my hand, attempt this mighty task . . .

and calls upon his father to give him the arms with which to kill himself:

arma nisi dantur mihi
altum omne Pindi Thracis excidam nemus
Bacchique lucos et Cithaeronis iuga
mecum cremabo . . .
Give me my arms,
Or else I shall from Thracian Pindus strip
The woods, the groves of Bacchus, and shall burn
Cithaeron's ridgy heights along with me . . .
(HF 1278–94)

The imaginative violence of the speech is a consequence of Heracles’ despairing
awareness that he has reached the end of his road. His frustration generates the images of an
actor carving out ever greater roles for himself. Othello, in his final speech, plays to the
gallery, or rather to an audience of his own selection. The terms of his address show him to
be an actor on the boards, preparing for an exit whose rhetorical and psychological
satisfactions will compensate for the ordeals of his tragedy. Contrast Marston’s Pandulpho,
pointing to his murdered son’s breast:

Man will break out, despite philosophy.
Why, all this while I ha’ but played a part,
Like to some boy that acts a tragedy,
Speaks burly words, and raves out passion:
But when he thinks upon his infant weakness,
He droops his eye.
(Antonio’s Revenge 4.5.46–51)

Here the theatrical trope is tied to revulsion and disavowal. Pandulpho thinks self-
dramatizing a weakness and prepares to escape the convention. But the convention is deeply
entrenched in the Senecan manner, which Marston continues to use to good effect, in spite of
the potential for comedy that self-inflation and cocking a jaundiced eye at one’s own
posturing carry with them.

Charles Rosen, in a commentary on Walter Benjamin’s analysis of German baroque
drama, speculates that self-dramatizing draws upon the admission that life has no meaning,
or rather that it has meaning only as performance, as an aesthetic creation in the midst of a
senseless void.[33] This comes fairly close to Eliot’s view of the matter in "Shakespeare and the
Stoicism of Seneca." In the Stoic play the hero clutches his flaw or his crime, and his exquisitely contrived end, as if they were things of beauty, and the resonance of the final speech converts the weakness into triumph and the ugliness into splendor. And because the exemplary Stoic life is a constant preparation for death, the terminal coloring may be found at every step. The ghost of Thyestes appearing at the beginning of Agamemnon (31) speaks lines that in their hyperbole are a fine instance of this consummative cast on the part of a villain who has reached the end of the line:

non pavidus hausi dicta, sed cepi nefas.

No translation could do justice to the Latin, if only because, as often, it dispenses with the possessive adjectives, and thus absorbs a whole world into the first-person action. Approximate overtranslations might be: "I did not timidly sip the ordinances of Fate through a straw; I

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drained it all, and it was crime." Or again: "Unafraid, without hesitating, I ingested the ordinances of Fate, and made them mine: a crime." The line may be an evocation of Aeneid 6.624,

ausi omnes immane nefas ausoque potiti,
All dared a heinous crime and won their gamble,

the summary statement about the great sinners in Hell. But Aegisthus's first person singular, the built-in negative foil augmenting the effect, and the simple, but telling, imagery from heavy drinking, point up the Stoic sharpening of the concern with the self.

Similarly Megara, in Hercules Furens (380ff.), regrets that she has to share her loathing of the tyrant with the people of Thebes. "Masochism" is too tepid a term to designate the fervor with which these Stoic heroes and heroines attest publicly their proud bondage to suffering and ugliness. In the same play Hercules describes what he is going to do for penance (1279ff.): he threatens to pile the whole city of Thebes upon his body and bury himself beneath it and be smothered by the collapsing structures. The prediction is exaggerated to the point of forsaking any claim to dramatic or even psychological probability. That is part of its meaning; it is designed to ring out as a heroic vow, a piece of exorbitant propaganda surrendering all moral or biographical significance to the sheer impact of physicality and horror.

In Caesar and Pompey the dying Cato, for once a virtuous and imitable champion, pulls out his entrails for all to see. It is an act of atrocious defiance, or a perverse display of narcissism, but even more an authentication of his commitment to his cause as he sees it. It is also a demonstration of the Stoic hero's obsession with the repellent, and of the aspiration to convert ugliness into the spectacular. This is in response to the Stoic insistence that the virtue of the sage shines most brilliantly when the obstacles, in the shape of misery and sickness, are most oppressive. Self-dramatizing is given a further edge by the hero's loathing for his surroundings and, by association, for himself. On the Senecan stage, the hero and the villain are, through the agency of this loathing, if for no other reason, one. The villain's macabre delight in his villainies generates the same fearful concentration on the repulsive. Evil, everything that the schooling of the acolyte is meant to fend off, is made concrete in the guise of ugliness, and ugliness, under the pressure of self-dramatization, acquires a lurid glamor.

As the messenger details the ghastliness of what happened to As-

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tyanax's body at his fall (Tro 1110ff.), Andromache rejoices in the knowledge that in this also, in the laceration of his body, her son is like his father. Even the most protracted scene of physical violence in the Senecan corpus, Hercules' murder of his wife and children (HF 994ff.), cannot compete with Andromache's joy for its canonization of horror and its enchantment with disgust. Ovid had shown the way,[3] especially with the hideous details of the combat of Centaurs and Lapiths (Metamorphoses 12.210–535), and Hesiod is a distant ancestor, particularly the "Hesiod" of the Shield of Heracles. But within the Stoic orbit, under the aegis of the conversion of significance into the sensory impact of theatricality, meaning reveals itself as shape, and shape, honed and stroked and feverishly embraced, turns grotesque.

The cult of ugliness is the price this kind of drama has to pay, and pays gladly, for its fixation upon the hero's selfconsciousness. Plutarch is not the most unprejudiced judge of Stoicism, but there is virtue in his comment: "Just as the beetles are said to eschew the fine scent and to seek out the stink, so the Stoic love keeps company with what is most ugly and
misshapen, and turns away from beauty." Why Plutarch associates Stoicism in general with a penchant for ugliness we shall have to explore later. Meanwhile, the disembowellings, the cutting out of tongues and hearts that garnish the intrigues of the revenge plays of the Renaissance and of the martyr dramas of the Baroque, not to speak of Artaudian scenarios on the modern stage, are a further harvest of this obsession with the repellent.

Julius Klein, whose account of Senecan drama, published in 1865, is in many ways still the fullest and one of the most original, though not the most sympathetic, introduced into the critique of that drama the concept of athleticism. He felt that the common experience of

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... gladiatorial games was at the very heart of Seneca's version of the heroic stance. The gladiatorial combat became for many contemporary writers a fitting image of extreme exertion and bloody accomplishment. The analogy is ubiquitous; Seneca rewrites myth so that it conforms to the grandiose or vicious practices of the Neronian period. Choral passages and speeches give him an occasion to enlarge on the building of the Corinth Canal, the drying of the Lernaean swamp, the imperial achievements in song and sports, and in amours. Also in poisoning, the murder of relatives, the dethronement of rivals, and all the other practices that haunt the records of the age. With all this there is a greater concentration upon concrete and differentiated agony than there is in Greek tragedy.

Seneca's prose also testifies to the popularity of the pregnant sense of "exercise." Misfortune and danger exist, Seneca says (Prov. 4.7) to elicit a brave response, to try the mettle, to summon the quality of the soldier: Hos itaque deus quos probat, quos amat, indurat recognoscit exercet. Even without the provocation of Fate or God, the moralist wrestles with himself. In the words of Marcus Aurelius (7.61): life resembles wrestling more than dancing, because we have to stand ready and without slipping against all assaults, foreseen or not. Stoic language is full of the play of muscles and weaponry, to a degree never developed by the Greeks, who had their own games to draw on had they wished. In the prose works the final conquest, always hinted at but never consummated, often presupposes a twisting and a battering of the soul, which has its analogue in Christian saints' lives. The gladiatorial spirit bears its most exotic fruit in the anecdote told, on whatever authority, by Thomas Heywood, about Julius Caesar playing the principal part in Hercules Furens (he means Hercules Oetaeus but forgets that the death of Lichas is reported, lines 808–22, rather than acted out) and getting so carried away that he killed the slave (a condemned criminal?) acting the part of Lichas, swinging him about his head, "terque quaterque (as the Poet says)."

In Greek tragedy the agent establishes his commitment and broadcasts his desires and his aversions. Only rarely does he grant us the glimpse of an inner conflict. Where this happens, as in some plays of Euripides, the clash of loyalties or ambitions is shaped as a dialogue,

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... with much of the decorum of a philosophic exchange or a political debate. This is true even of the most excruciating case of decision-making, Medea's harrowed monologue about the fate of her children (Eur. Med. 1021ff.). The inner conflict is played out with little recourse to the language of warrior or athlete. The Senecan hero's struggle is one of flesh and blood. The self-absorption of the militant who poses as the paradigm observed obstructs the balanced disclosure of natural impulses. To borrow words that William Hazlitt used of another writer:

His strength and his efforts are convulsive throes—his works are a banquet of horrors. They are full (to disease) of imagination—but it is forced, violent, and shocking. This is to be expected, we apprehend, in attempts of this kind in a country, like America, where there is, generally speaking, no natural imagination. The mind must be excited by overstraining, by pulleys and levers.

May we think of the Greeks as natural Englishmen, and of the Romans as prevenient Yankees? What Hazlitt says about Charles Brockden Brown is not intended by way of a compliment. But we might remind ourselves that what works in a certain kind of drama is less pleasing in a romance. And as Nietzsche said: "Our most sacred convictions... are judgments of our muscles."

Stoic sensationalism and Stoic athleticism are the informing principles by which to distinguish the Stoic hero’s death from the death of Socrates, whom many Stoics regarded as a Stoic before his time. Both Plato and Seneca can be quoted to the effect that all life is a form of dying. But Socrates died to live; the death of the ironist, in Plato's Phaedo, is sketched in lightly, almost shrugged off, because it is only a means, a passport to a greater
being, or a convenient closure to a full life. The Stoic hero makes of his death a production. It makes possible. True, of Seneca's heroes only Phaedra, Deianira, and Jocasta fall by their own hands. But the spirit of the dying is always there, with even Jason and Aegisthus, in all else cowards confessed, showing a readiness for death equal to that of the hardest. Antigone tries to argue Oedipus out of his death (Phoe 182ff.), pointing out that he has nothing more to fear, and that he would merely be demonstrating cowardice if he were to decide on suicide now. Oedipus, resorting to the same cold, yet impassioned, logic, defines the reasons for his resolve to die. Deianira, the instrument of Hercules' death, announces (HO 842ff.) that she is going to kill herself. But like Oedipus in his play, she decides that mere death would not be condign punishment, and considers various forms of death, including everybody else ganging up on her to murder her, and Juno killing her out of annoyance at Deianira having succeeded where she has not. The argument continues at great length (the longueurs of this play have persuaded most to declare it spurious), and at one point she asks Hyllus to do the killing.

The choruses too, clouded mirrors of the principal messages in the treatises and letters, dwell on the various aspects of death that a Stoic thinker needs to consider. Death as terror, death as liberation, death as one phase in a general cosmic collapse, death as a challenge and death as transubstantiation: these are some of the themes taken up in the choral essays. Some of the choral pronouncements are moving specimens of grand poetry. This is particularly true of the third chorus of Hercules Furens (830ff.), with its haunting picture of vast crowds moving silently through Hades, and its closing lines on the ineluctability of death:

Qualis est vobis animus, remota
luce cum maestus sibi quique sensit
obrutum tota caput esse terra?
stat chaos densum tenebraque turpes
et color noctis malus ac silentis
otium mundi vacuaeque nubes. . .
. . . tibi, mors, paramur.
So our spirits mourn, when each feels crushed
In darkness underneath the weight

Of this great earth. There chaos reigns,
Repulsive gloom, the hateful dark
Of night, the torpor of a silent world,
And barren clouds.
. . . . .
. . . life is but practicing for Death.
(HF 858–72)

The essay, addressed to Hercules and taking off from his visit to the underworld, fills the dramatic space within which Hercules is off killing Lycus. Other choruses, notably the third chorus of Agamemnon (589ff.), proclaim the gentle benefits of a willing death over one imposed, or over a continued, but useless, sojourn in the guesthouse of life. But the choruses can do no more than furnish a discursive obbligato to the solo profession of the hero. The Herculean spirit refuses to acknowledge a single natural cause of death; all nature conspires to make death, and the death in life, an autonomous reality, without the need of a specific trigger mechanism. Bussy's dying speech may stand for many:

My sun is turned to blood, 'gainst whose red beams
Pindus and Ossa, hid in endless snow,
Laid on my heart and liver, from their veins
Melt like two hungry torrents, eating rocks
Into the ocean of all human life,
And make it bitter, only with my blood.
(Bussy D'Ambois 5.3.192–87)

"Bussy's proudly affirmed Stoicism . . . erupts into an overwhelming sense of disaster," observes Nicholas Brooke. But the sense of disaster is also a truculent perception of the magnificence of a world in dissolution, and Bussy's indispensable part in it. His gladiator's body absorbs the ravage, as his grammar reflects the dissolution.

"Tragedy is . . . a dress rehearsal for death; it is life breathing, moving, and talking in a winding sheet . . . it is death wearing a splendid, gaudy mask." But then Kenneth Tynan continues: "There would have been splendid English melodrama had Seneca written no plays; but our tragedy would be miserably depleted had he written no Epistles." As should be
clear by now, I cannot go along with this separation of the dramatic from the non-dramatic in Seneca's oeuvre. And Tynan's de-

preciation of the importance and influence of Seneca's plays is an instance of his bracing fractiousness. But the compliment paid to the Epistles is helpful. On the level of explicit argument, the Senecan obsession with the challenges and the splendor of death is more easily instanced, and the instances are more easily quoted, in the philosophical works. Epistle 101, for instance, is entirely devoted to the proposition that the only alternative to a life that is not fully and joyously lived is a speedy death, and quotes Maecenas with disapproval because he advised postponement. Epistle 82, on the Stoic evaluation of death, is one of the best: both cheerful and solemn, it celebrates the Stoic virtue of meeting adversity rationally, and that means with full allowance for death as an exercise of reason. One is reminded of Goethe, during the time of Werther, sleeping with a loaded pistol under his pillow. Perhaps the vision of the last chapter of the second book of the Naturales quaestiones is more expressive:

eo itaque fortior adversus coeli minas surge et, cum undique mundus exarsit, cogita nihil habere re tanta morte perdendum. quod si bibli parari credes illam coeli confusionem . . . si in tuum exitium tanta ignium vis excutitur, at tu solati loco numero tanti esse mortem tuam.

Confront the threats of the heavens, and when the universe is in flames around you, consider that in such a mighty ruin you have nothing to lose. But if you can bring yourself to believe that that convulsion of heaven . . . is aimed at you . . . then you may surely regard it as some consolation that your death is costing so dear.

(WQ 2.59.11–12, tr. J. Clarke [1910], modified)

This grandly aesthetic conception, which is especially common in this treatise, is, of course, only one of the many, often contradictory, ways in which Seneca talks about death, in both media. The cataclysmic dimension of this vista will be the subject of a later discussion.

Seneca's view of the possibility of survival after death varies from the notion that death is final to the expectation that in the beyond the wise are reunited with other wise men. The latter vista is, understandably, rare in the dramas. In any event, the dramatic formulations, not to mention the enactments of deaths, are often more powerful. The bravura mood of the many reflections upon death offered by the choruses and heroes aligns them with the other instruments of self-dramatization we have inspected. Tynan contends that "the topmost utterances of tragedy hold an essential residue of belief, an inflexibility of mental stance," and chooses to recognize them in Seneca's prose writings rather than in his dramas. By the same line of reasoning he is driven also to declare Macbeth nontragic, because of the sea change in the king's resolution at the moment of death. But this narrowing of the conditions for tragedy seems to me to fly in the face of what the European tradition of high tragedy has encouraged. That tradition calls for a consistency of mood, and of power, rather than of belief, though these are difficult to separate, especially in a Stoic environment. If, for the Stoic believer, life is a sustained and declaratory testing unto death, the histrionic stance is bound to undermine the momentum of ideological consistency or philosophical dedication. Marcus Aurelius expresses himself in a way that is unrealizable on the stage:

You have subsisted as a part. You will pass from the scene in what begot (you). Better, you will be taken up again, as change dictates, into its seminal spirit.

(4.14)

Or again, more lucidly:

Do not despise death, but take pleasure in it, for it, too, is willed by nature. . . . As you now wait for the emergence of your baby from the womb of your wife, so you should accept the hour when your tiny soul will drop from this shroud.

(9.3)

Marcus's privileged language and composed faith derive from the particular application of a highly specialized body of doctrine, presented by one who knew how to integrate the discordant elements of that doctrine in a near-saintly sobriety. The stage, even in its choral extensions, calls for a different direction. In this area, the area of life and death and the energies summoned to shape the arc of a heroic career, the analogies between the drama and the Stoic faith are to be sought in the moods and the tangible feel of what it meant to be a Stoic in a hostile world, rather than in points of doctrine. For doctrinal coincidences we shall have to look elsewhere.
Chapter Three
Causes, Necessity, Gods

In the search for the Stoic identity of Senecan drama, I have looked at the function of Stoic topoi; at the use of paradigms and precepts to support or, often, undermine the authority of the topoi; at the reflection of the Stoic life-and-death struggle and its histrionic exuberance in choral disquisitions and in climactic scenes of heroism and villainy; and at other, less obvious links between the ancient dramatic tradition and Stoic insights or formulations. There is much here that is impressive or suggestive, and that gives some inkling of why and in what sense Roman imperial tragedy is different from its Greek ancestors. Certainly these are some of the elements that the Renaissance Senecans and the authors of German baroque Trauerspiel looked to in the fashioning of their own dramatic poems. Yet our findings leave something to be desired.

All serious drama, including Greek tragedy, exhibits many of the features emphasized, albeit in a less consistent and concentrated manner. Aeschylus is sententious. The Heracles of Sophocles' Trachinians perches perilously on the line dividing heroism from villainy. The life-and-death struggle is of the very substance of Sophoclean drama, though its artistic execution lacks Seneca's unusual talent for generating hysteria and near-madness. Those who say that Senecan drama cannot rightfully be termed Stoic tend also to minimize the systematic difference between Greek tragedy and its Roman successor. I would agree that it is difficult to pinpoint precisely where the differences lie between the ethical assumptions of, say, Euripides' Hercules Furens and those of Seneca's play of the same name. A close study of the literary structures and of the contingent formal characteristics would demonstrate the ideological and temperamental divergences that do indeed exist. A number of excellent analyses along these lines are available, not only for the Hercules plays but also for others that invite comparison.\(^1\)

As I now continue to search for the reasons that set Senecan drama apart from other theatrical traditions, and as I begin to focus more narrowly than before on a possible Stoic legacy, I turn to a topic that will, I suggest, bring us closer to our quarry, though the route will be slow and circuitous. I start with a quote from a recent study of genre theory. "To interpret a work as dramatic is to interpret the relation [sc. between mind and world in the work] in terms of causality," observes William E. Rogers.\(^2\) It is only because it is felt that one thing should follow unmistakably and disturbingly from another that the sequence of events, or the sequence of sufferings, is thought to be tragic. Aristotle made much of cause and effect and their psychological vagaries in drama.\(^3\) The plot he regards as the best owes its supremacy to the cogent force of its causal structure, to the compelling ligatures that, under the aegis of the probable and the necessary, make of every turn in the action a consequence or a result. Tragedy may well claim to be the principal literary and scenic demonstration of the causal compulsion, of the fiction that everything has a cause in conformity with a larger dispensation, even if that dispensation is intuited rather than clearly discerned. The commitment to causality remains paramount, by implication, even in those examples of modern dramaturgy in which special effects are achieved by the programmatic subversion or attrition of the principle.

Historians of science have argued that the earlier Greeks were beginning to gain an insight into the causal nexus predicated on a notion of natural law, but that the Stoics were the first to make a concerted and penetrating analysis of the cause-and-effect relation and its varieties; that they were the first to state the connection between causal law and induction, and to take the revolutionary step of distinguishing between an understanding of causes and an understanding of functions.\(^4\) The details of these advances are part of the history of logic and of the history of science, especially mechanics. In one of his Epistles (65; cf.
also 19.6), Seneca himself offers a discussion of the Stoic view of causes, dwelling on the delight to be derived from a study of their complexities, of their imperfect anticipation in the thought of Plato and Aristotle, and, in the end, of their coincidence under the one axiom of causality. He maintains that the active cause has a privileged status, with all other "causes" being necessary conditions rather than proper causes. His essay, not one of his better or more reliable commentaries on the thinking of his predecessors, terminates in praise of God, who, for him, evidently embodies the unitariness of the causal principle.

Underlying all thinking about this subject in Stoic theory was the hypothesis of the pneuma, the corporeal continuum first postulated by Aristotle and the physicians, but worked up into a universal explanatory canon by the Stoics (see chapter 4 below). The pneuma, the all-pervading stuff of divine coherence, came to be the material coefficient of the causal chain. Continuity or, with some allowance for our experience of discrete events, contiguity was recognized as the essence of causation; causes are bodies in motion, making contact and affecting other bodies. Of the Aristotelian causes, the efficient comes to absorb the rest. The material cause turns arche, originating principle, and virtually disappears from explanations of empirical experience. But that does not mean that the Stoics subscribed to the axioms of traditional mechanics. Their concept of body does not primarily turn upon dimensions or solidity. Rather, it is talked about in terms of acting and being acted upon; it is action that authenticates body. In Seneca's own words, quod facit, corpus est (Ep. 106.4). Note that God, the corporeal source of all action, has no fixed form.

But this is to anticipate. In the earlier Stoic examinations of cause, prior to Posidonius, who reopened the question and enriched the analysis, the aim is above all to elucidate human action and accountability, and less to explain natural phenomena. But this is a matter of emphasis and illustration rather than a categorical distinction. It goes against the grain of Stoic science to restrict causes, and action and being acted upon, to one realm or another. Issues of human responsibility called for criteria little different from those pertinent to relations within the physical world. Seneca's own imaginative procedure in the Naturales quaestiones shows everywhere how the natural cosmos is made to serve as a trope for movements within the psychological spectrum, and vice versa, and that the two form a sustained band of action and reaction.

Chrysippus's inquiry into the relation between fate and (free) will benefited particularly from the distinction, prominent in the Stoic sources, between an antecedent cause, whose effect persists after the cause has ceased its work, and an operating cause, which subsists along with its effects. Precisely what is involved in this distinction, and how it is made to bear on the vital issues of answerability and attribution, is not entirely clear. But it appears as if the former, the antecedent cause, might be illustrated by the pulling of the trigger that propels a bullet, while the latter, the operating cause, can be seen in the force or velocity that speeds the bullet on its course. In the terms accepted by Stoic thinkers, such a force, and in fact both factors, would have to be regarded as corporeal.

In the contexts of volition and of the play of emotions, the operating causes are carried by the horme, the drive or appetite, and it is they that form the nerve structure of tragedy. The Stoics do not recognize a causeless change; the continuum hypothesis guarantees that everything that happens, and everything that is done and thought and enunciated, is both effect and cause of another effect. In our daily lives the causes that make us act or refuse to act are not always apparent, and are often desperately hidden. It is the business of the dramatist, as it is that of the social philosopher, to employ the probe of his idiom, not so much to lay them bare, as to construct a likely model of their interaction. Our appreciation of the meaning of what characters say or do in a play is shaped by our sense of what makes them speak or act, and how the cause-and-effect filiation is distributed over the arc (or, depending upon the type of play, the vortex) of the aggregate action. (We are here talking about the sequentiality of an experience, or of a text, and not about the coherence of a character and its traits.) The pinpointing of a cause, either immediate or remote, often contributes to the shattering impact of the tragic exposition, especially where, as Aristotle recommends, the cause uncovered is found to be different from the one that had been tracked or suspected.

studious contemplation sucks the juice
From wizards' cheeks, who, making curious search
For nature's secrets, the first innating cause
laughs them to scorn as man doth busy apes
when they will zany men.
(Anthony's Revenge 4.1.45–49)

That kind of surprise will be less important in Senecan drama than it is in some of the intrigue plays of Sophocles or Euripides. But, as we shall see, the dependence upon a scheme of constraining causality is, if anything, even stronger.

With Aristotle one has the impression that logic and psychology, questions of necessity and probability, are not forced into neat separation, and that some of his pronouncements in the Poetics owe their power and their suggestiveness to the unacknowledged friction between the two realms of consistency. In Stoic thought, the filiation of various kinds of causes becomes ever more complex. The assumption of corporeality, that all causes are bodies in motion, is taken so seriously that it is largely a lost hope to want to isolate the rules of logic and the patterns of psychology from the material behavior of physical masses. Causality, in the words of Johnny Christensen, turns "unitary, universal, and absolute, the basis of a methodological monism." The violent objection to Epicurus's atomic swerve is an index, among others, of the steadfastness with which the Stoics rejected the possibility of chance events.

Neither Plato's deflection of natural causes via the medium of the errant cause (Timaeus 48a) nor Aristotle's virtual subsumption of other causes under the umbrella of the teleological lent themselves particularly well to the moral and biographical paradoxes of serious drama. The Stoic formulations are more congenial. Everything that is enacted has a cause; the cause may not be apprehended by us; each cause is also, though we are unlikely to know precisely in what way, a result of a prior causation. This synthesis of dogmatic belief with admission of ignorance, without the derogatory implication of ignorance stipulated in Plato's metaphysics, is more or less what the needs of tragedy require. As one student of the problem puts it in his remarks on the inclusion of the possible in Stoic determinism: "Instead of

seeing causation as a one-dimensional chain of actual occurrences they [sc. the Stoics] saw it as a many-dimensional network of potential occurrences . . . out of which, and in accordance with the rules of disjunction, only one course will be actualized." Here we find both the suspense of the moment prior to the actualization of the effect, insistence upon the need for a causal factor, and an understanding of the complexity of the system within which the operating cause is made to work, all of which call to mind the preoccupations and tensions of great drama. Chrysippus appears to have talked of a "swarm of causes," smenos aition (SVF 2.945). There is, in fact, a remarkable and ironic similarity between this kind of thinking and that of Nietzsche, who, in his Gay Science and elsewhere, protested against the very concept of causality. To cite a recent authority: "Nietzsche believes that every event in the world is inextricably connected with every other. . . . He thinks that the history of the whole world, or, in more modest terms, the history of each person, is totally involved in every moment." Starting from the same premise of a pervasive network of interrelation, Nietzsche and the Stoics arrived at opposite conclusions. Nietzsche abandoned the notion of cause as inadequate to the purposes of a life vigorously lived, while the Stoics ratified the pervasiveness as a scientific dogma.

The elevation of the causal principle to absolute rule is known as determinism. The enemies of the Stoics objected to the Stoic hypostases of Fate (heimarmene) and Necessity (ananke), and alleged them to signal an impossibly rigid conception of the workings of the world and of man's position in it. In the Stoic texts, we find subtle distinctions between Fate (what will be), Necessity (what must be), Providence (what God foresees and assigns), and Fortune (what happens, seemingly at random). For Chrysippus, these are merely different ways

of talking about one and the same fundamental state of affairs, and he may have been more latitudinarian than his critics allowed. Alternatively, he may not have been able to solve the difficulties posed by a strict determinism. Once again the difference between cosmology and psychology, between whether the causal system is viewed as covering all there is or whether the focus is on a human life and its coordinates, remains secondary.
By and large Seneca, in his prose writings, agrees, though on occasion he is intrigued by other ways of ordering the evidence, such as subordinating one of the hypostases to another, or breaking free of the constraints of the system and claiming that the soul is stronger than Fate (Ep. 98.2.). Cleanthes, for one, could not admit that evil as well as good was brought about by divine cause, and drew a line between events providential and fated on the one hand and events fated but not sanctioned by Providence on the other (SVF 2.933). Neo-Stoicism is given to similar scruples. Lipsius objects to the rule of immutable law—his revealing name for it is "Violent Destiny"—which he contrasts unfavorably with God's Providence and the destiny innate in the created world.  

"Violent Destiny," perhaps inspired by Seneca's discussion of the immutability of physical laws (NQ 2.36), is a fitting label for the spirit of causal compulsion alive in Seneca's dramatic world.  

quae nexa suis currunt causis.  

(Oed 990)  

Opponents of the idea that Seneca writes Stoic drama have argued that his tragedy eschews the benign Providence linked with heimarmene in the more mercurial passages of Stoic treatises, and that it repudiates the self-determination of man and the perfection of the gods or God, both of them axioms prominent in the Stoic texts, which we know from ancient attacks upon them. And Kurt von Fritz,[18] as we have seen, though a supporter of the view that Senecan drama is Stoic, confesses his embarrassment by declining to call it tragedy. In his opinion, heimarmene and tragedy are irreconcilable.  

The beauty of tragedy is precisely that the precise affiliation be-

tween the various partial perceptions of the principle of causality is not clear.  
There is a deep nick in Time's restless wheel  
For each man's good, when which nick comes, it strikes;  
As rhetorict yet works not persuasion,  
But only is a mean to make it work,  
So no man riseth by his real merit,  
But when it cries "clink" in his raiser's spirit.  
(Bussy D'Ambois 1.1.134–39)  

Chapman's implicit analogy between the forces that determine a man's life and the powers that shape a work of literature is instructive. Chapman follows this up with a deeply pessimistic sequel:  

Many will say, that cannot rise at all,  
Man's first hour's rise is first step to his fall.  
I'll venture that; men that fall low must die,  
As well as men cast headlong from the sky.  
(ibid., 140–44)  

There are here memories of the kind of thinking incorporated in The Mirror for Magistrates, according to which every casus has its causa, everything that befalls a man is likely to lead straight to his fall.  
But seeing causes are the chiefest things  
That should be noted of the story wryters,  
That men may learne what ends al causes bringe . . . [19]  

The conviction that Necessity is operative also in the various clicks of Fortune may be found scattered through Seneca's writings, both prose and dramatic. Note the exchange between Clytaemestra and the nurse  

Clyt.: ubi animus errat, optimum est casum sequi.  
Nurse: Caeca est temeritas quae petit casum ducem.  
Where the soul is adrift, it is best to follow fortune.  
Blind rashness chooses Fortune as its leader.  
(Aga 144–45)  

Casus is, perhaps, a term from dice. In this case, with Clytaemestra deciding to let the chips fall where they may, casus is the chance direc-

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tion her feelings and actions will take, thus an inner dynamic rather than external cause.  
The nurse, however, interprets casus as inescapable Fortune.  

Omnes cum fortuna copulati sumus; all of us are fastened to Fortune (TA 10.3), is neither a desperate cry nor a shout of triumph but a gentle, open-minded admission that we are all in different ways wards of the same custodia, stewardship. Fortune can be many things, all the way from seemingly random chance to the strict pattern of metastasis into the opposite: in se ipsa fortuna ruit (BV 4.1), to the consolatory (and, one presumes, ultimately
delusory) notion that the soul is stronger than any kind of fortune (Ep. 98.2). Seneca's thinking about Fortune and Fate and their relationship is unusually rich and varied, and much has been written about it. A fascinating index of Seneca's interest in the issue is his verse translation of four lines by Cleanthes (SVF 1.527) in Ep. 107.10, terminating in the notorious conclusion

Ducunt volentem fata, nolentem trahunt.  
Fate gently guides you, if you consent; if not,  
It drags you.

a formulation that recalls many similar conceits in the dramas. Man's proper relation to whatever Fortune has to give is illustrated by means of an image taken from Attalus (Ep. 72.8): like dogs, gulping down the scraps thrown them by their masters and immediately clamoring for the next scrap, many of us are not satisfied with the gifts of Fortune; only the wise man is content, or, as Seneca puts it, plenus: he accepts the gifts joyously, and is at rest with himself. Here we see that Fortune is easily accommodated within the ambit of the Stoic wise man. As Chrysippus said (SVF 2.973), what men call chance is really an aitia adelos, an illegible cause. Atreus's quis influentis dona fortunae abnuit?  
Who'd spurn the gifts of an accommodating Fortune?  
(Thy 536)

is the villain mirror image of the saint's contentment.  
The refusal of the drama to align itself unequivocally with a primer of tenets deflates any attempt to define the Stoicism of the tragedy in
dogmatic terms. Seneca himself and many of his contemporaries were quite aware of the nice, if varying, differentiae, argued by a succession of Stoic writers, between Fate and Fortune, between Destiny and Chance, between the will of the gods and the constraints of nature. But the heavy pull of paradox and the manipulation of human aggression for a poetry of fullness, rather than clarification, blunt the distinctions, a process our own less sensitive ears help to complete. Let us return to Seneca's observation that "we are all fastened to Fortune" (TA 10.3). The whole passage is worth quoting because of its imagery of the puppet action that goes back to Plato's Laws (645a), but more particularly because of the almost playful imbalance of its details and the suggestion that the total picture counts for more than a specific affirmation.

omnes cum fortuna copulati sumus: aliorum aurea catena est, laxa, aliorum arta et sordida, sed quid refert? eadem custodia universos circumdedit alligatique sunt etiam qui alligaverunt, nisi forte tu leviores in sinistra catenam putas. . . quibusdam aliens suprema custodiae involutum est, quibusdam sua . . ; omnis vita servitium est.  
We are all fastened to fortune. In the case of some the chain is of gold and extended, with others it is short and mean. But what does it matter? The same guardianship has enveloped all; those who have strung the cable are themselves attached, unless perhaps you think that the chain on the left is lighter. . . Some have their heads bowed down by the power of others, some by their own. . . All life is dependence.

In this text Fortune is either a subspecies of Fate or identical with it. Chance is a general mishance. Similarly in the plays Fortune is not only the force that directs men and their affairs, but a collective term, for those affairs (Aga 88–89). The chorus of Phaedra (959ff.) appears to differentiate radically between nature and the supreme deity, controlling the regularities of the larger world from their distant seat; and blind Fortune, championing the cause of the worse among men. But the sequel of the action, with its dovetailing of the natural and the monstrous, and its intrusion of the Olympian into the terrestrial, shows up the untenability of the distinction. In fact that distinction is more absolute than comparable demarcations in the treatises and letters. It is a conventional index of the chorus's shortsightedness rather than a reliable commentary on the action.

Still, as might be expected, in the plays the qualifications of the radi-
cal concept of Fate are richer than they are in the treatises. A moment such as the one in Hercules Furens where the chorus calls on Hercules to break the bonds of destiny—fatum rumpe manu (566)—to go against the law of nature, is not within the scope of the theoretical writings. Hercules' "rupture of fate,"—that is, his crossing of the boundary between life and death and back—in the end does not do the chorus's bidding, for it embroils him even more tightly in the meshes of another, more constricting fate. This is the kind of modulation some would call irony, which it is the special privilege of tragedy to arrange. A slightly different version of the same dislocation is found at Troades 360ff., the speech in which Calchas announces that the fata demand blood, even more blood than has been spilt by the heroes.
This is Seneca's way of motivating the murders that are mythologically given and dramatically necessary. Thus the text and its requirements, the world of discourse, calls for its own species of determinism. *Naturales quaestiones* 2.34–38 raises the question: if *fatum* is immutable, what is the point of praying and supplication? and answers it by the seemingly specious solution that the results of prayer are also part of *fatum* (cf. also *Pol.* 4.1). The answer acquires a much stronger appropriateness in a dramatic setting whose outcome is largely fixed in the tradition.

Hercules, in *Hercules Furens*, is hardly a Stoic saint, but the world in which he is a player, and the challenges to which he responds, are most easily understood against a background of Stoic discussions of Necessity and Fate. The same is true of the many references to Fortune in the plays. If the fourth chorus of *Phaedra* (1123–53) pictures Fortune striking those most highly placed and sparing the lowly,

\[
\text{\textit{Raros patitur fulminis ictus umida vallis}}
\]

The verdant valley rarely attracts
The thunder's stroke
(1132–33)

the *topos* is not only a hoary property of the tragic idiom. It is also a ready reflection of the common Stoic idea that our perceptions are not capable of isolating each element in the swarm of causes, and that random chance is an unavoidable corollary of the inadequacy of knowing. Even the concept of an incremental Fortune, of a random shower of boons and benefits (*Thy* 536), should be appreciated as a signal of human blindness and not as an authorial rejection of Stoic determinism.

Fortuna vires ipsa consumpsit suas.
Fortune herself has swallowed up her powers. (*Aga* 698)

Cassandra's resignation (*Aga* 698) converts the disabling force of fortune into a process destructive of itself. Often Fortune, as random chance, turns out to be a projection of the villainous hero insisting on his fiendishness and deluding himself into regarding it as a token of human freedom.\(^{[23]}\) Stoic pessimism, combining with its creed of causality a willing admission that we cannot hope to discern the various strands of the causal tissue and that we are reduced to manufacturing our own crude triangulations, was well suited to merge with Pauline Christianity as the Renaissance rediscovered it.\(^{[24]}\)

But historians of philosophy have also made clear, in a series of subtle and compassionate reconstructions of the fragmentary evidence, that "Stoic determinism does not exclude a coherent theory of voluntary human action," and further, "that the Stoic concept of moral responsibility . . . represents an advance on Aristotle in raising sharply the problems of heredity and environment."\(^{[25]}\) The latter is important. In Stoic thinking, ethics, theology, cosmology, biology, and psychology are closely intertwined because of the basic premise that the *pneuma*, the stuff of life of which all vital entities are manifestations, is corporeal. Hence an examination of moral action cannot be conducted without a full accounting of the various biological and environmental factors that enter into it. I shall return to that subject. For present purposes, however, the first part of the statement quoted above is crucial. It is only by hindsight, via the structured retrospective glance enjoyed by audiences in the theater, but rarely by anyone else, that a complex of actions and events and responsibilities can appear to be perfectly determined. *Heimarmene* as a working assumption makes due allowance for the contributions of the human will, which must be counted as particles in the causal swarm:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{if the thing} \\
\text{Accomplished would seem to accomplish only its own} \\
\text{Inevitability, and the thing that exists} \\
\text{Would seem to fulfill only its own being,} \\
\text{And to be but the Q.E.D. of a fatal sorties,} \\
\text{Yet the accomplished was once the unaccomplished,} \\
\text{And the existing was once the non-existing,} \\
\text{And that transition was the agony of will} \\
\text{And anguish of option . . .} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(*Robert Penn Warren,
*Brother to Dragons*, p. 111)

The most celebrated Stoic text advocating modifications of strict external determinism and preparing the way for the recognition of an inner cause, and of human volition, is,
characteristically, not about a human act but about a natural motion. If we want to savor the full implications of the passage, we must go to the parallels Seneca draws in the *Naturales quaestiones* between physical events (usually meteorological phenomena) and human experiences (usually passions). As reported by Cicero and Aulus Gellius (*SVF* 2.974 and 1000), Chrysippus said that if a cylinder rolls down an incline after it is pushed, the cause of this is not only the push but also the shape and the rollability of the cylinder. Thus antecedent and operating causes are jointly credited. What follows in Gellius’s Latin text may be a somewhat garbled account of what Chrysippus actually wrote:

\[
\text{sic ordo et ratio et necessitas fati, genera ipsa et principia causarum, movet, impetus vero consiliorum mentiumque nostrarum actionesque ipsas voluntas cuiusque propria et animorum ingenia moderantur.}
\]

Thus order and reason and the necessity of fate, the very essences and principles of causation, does [sic!][26] the moving, but the force of our intentions and minds and our very actions are governed by each person’s will and by his native talent.

It is curious that the human will, participating in the complex of causes, but also, at least rhetorically, standing aside from it, should be illustrated by the image of the cylinder, with its native capacity for rotary motion. The Stoic axiom of universal corporeality presses for the use of examples from the world of physical objects. In any case, with this concession to the power of causes at home in the heart of our moral being, the Stoics, including Chrysippus, who is generally chided

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as the most chillingly deterministic of them, come closer to Aristotle’s argument (*Nic. Eth*. 1110b9ff.) against any position that implies that all action is involuntary because it is prompted by external causes. In its essence the Stoic concession is not a concession at all, merely a further assertion of the amplitude of a causal nexus whose strands may show up in the least expected quarters.

Without an acknowledgment of the role of human initiative, an important element in the moral and social sector studied by the philosopher would be missing. It has been claimed that Seneca, perhaps because he was a Roman, and for that reason not tied to traditional Greek ways of defining human motivation, was the first to import *voluntas*, an understanding of the contribution of the will, into the Stoic debate.[27] Albrecht Dihle has modified this claim in important respects, though he too believes that it was the Romans, and especially the Roman lawyers, who fully opened up this dimension in our discussion of ethical and psychological realities.[28] Though the Greeks did not quite have a word to correspond to the Roman *voluntas* (which is not exactly the same as the English “will” or the German *Wille*), it would be difficult to deny that the Greek writers had a fair understanding of volition, in spite of the emphasis on *logos* and *dianoia*, reason and intelligence, as the prompters of human purpose and decision. In the protreptic of Seneca’s philosophical writings, however, *velle* and *voluntas* play an unusually large role: *Quid tibi opus est, ut bonus sis? velle*: What do you require to be a good man? To have the will (*Ep. 80.4*). The emphasis is such that it is in Seneca’s interest to soft-pedal the Chrysippian talk of *heimarmene*. True, the Stoics had from the very beginning wrestled with the problem of how the moral requirement of free choice is to be integrated within their larger vision of the causal network. Chrysippus had written on this (*SVF* 2.974ff.), as had Cleanthes and others.[29] But where earlier Stoic authors had attached the greatest value to the human instinct for self-preservation, Seneca came to stress the will to live, and the will to make life worth living. Under the pressure of his ethical concerns, the old distinction between the

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wise and the fool is converted into one between two wills, the wills for good and for malevolence. In this respect Seneca may be said to have played into the hands of the ancient critics of Chrysippus and of the strict constructionists of Stoic determinism, and to have once again anticipated the neo-Stoics.[30]

But leaving aside this particular development, if a tragedy can be said to achieve its effect by cultivating the obliquity of the relation between freedom and necessity, between voluntary action and external constraint, between the moral and the universal, then traditional Stoicism is beautifully equipped to provide the medium, and Senecan drama, with its strained, but programmatic, shuffling between contraries, exploits the tensions to the hilt. These tensions derive from the recognition that specific predicates, at home in the realm of the finite and the particular, can trigger surprising contradictions when fitted into a more comprehensive order. When Atreus says, *scelus iuvat ordinare* (*Thy* 715–16), we may freely,
if circumstantially, translate it: there is pleasure and usefulness in an aesthetically pleasing, meticulous structuring of the crime. The two planes of ethics and aesthetics, or of law and art, are made to collide. Again and again in Senecan drama, through the dovetailing of irreconcilables, judgments and feelings are made to clash, and are compacted into a poetry of oppression. For in the drama the discordant strains are not serialized and disengaged, as they often are in philosophical prose, but are forged into an overwhelming tissue of syntheses. Arguments for this or that position, for or against wealth, or freedom, or death, will still put in their isolated appearance, but their isolation is not a matter of argumentative clarity or conclusiveness.

The example of Bellerophon cited above (p. 20) warns that a play must be taken complete, in one gulp, and not as a series of separate, or even sequentially unfolding, propositions. In the drama the Stoic alternatives are stripped of their explanatory or referential power and fused together to set up a field of energy within which the agents plot their moves (or rather, as we shall see later, within which the agents are conditioned to move). The language shifts back and forth between Fortune and Destiny, between random chance and the guiding hand of the gods. The audience is not invited nor are the characters perceived to subscribe narrowly to one or the other of these categories or formulations, in spite of the patent commitments attached to them in Seneca's philosophical corpus. The effect of a speech on the subject of Fortune, of which there are many in Senecan drama (and which remains a favorite gambit in later drama, such as that of the Viceroy of Portugal in Thomas Kyd's _The Spanish Tragedy_ 1.3), is not to extend and harden our imagination along ideological lines, but to enrich our sense of the fullness and contrariness of the living scene. Thus the drama reasserts its claim to be an imitation of life.

Philosophically we distinguish between opposed stances and accord to one of them our (provisional) approval. The Senecan tragic vision, readied by the weighing of systematic alternatives, grants simultaneous asylum to Jealous Fortune and Blind Error, to Necessity and Will, to the angry power of the gods and the dispassionate functioning of causation. All are featured at a level of intensity that builds up their status as constraints without explaining anything. Fortune, random chance, is in these texts often little more than a sham perpetrated by a speaker who has his own interests at heart, and thus a perverted emblem of human freedom. This would explain Thyestes' remarkable line cited earlier:

>Non pavidus hausi dicta, sed cepi nefas.  
_(Aga 31)_

Fortune, he appears to be saying, was the originator of the crime, but he, Thyestes, drained or highjacked Fortune's dictates, and thus commandeered the unspeakable _(nefās_ ) offense.

The drawing of unambiguously logical lines between conflicting assumptions is of merely local usefulness. Against the paradoxes and the fullness of the whole, such topical gains are doomed to insignificance. The Senecan scene is a nexus of seemingly dominant operational causes belying faith in an orderly system, voiced in a language that resolves into darkness. The diction is Stoic; it is the signature of Stoic thinking, stripped of an evident or lasting adherence. The individual terms and many of the ideas are taken from the Stoic canon; the burden of the argument—"argument" here taken in its technical sense, appropriate to drama—derides the more settled findings of the philosophical model. The victim becomes the essential accomplice, provocateur—No, more, is the principal—and the real victim

Is he whose hand was elected to give the stroke,  
But is innocent.  
_(Robert Penn Warren, Brother to Dragons, p. 139)_

The Stoic paradoxes win out over the Stoic sermonizing.

I have argued that much that is valuable in Stoic thought comes to be carried over into the speech and thought of Senecan drama, though with a difference. Once such item is the Stoic interest in divination. Because of the doctrine of the interconnectedness of all fibers of the causal nexus, and of our blindness in the face of it, induction is readily sacrificed in favor of divination, _mantike_, educated guessing at probable effects, even far in the future, on the
basis of signs. Cicero's *De divinatione*, especially book 1, is the principal document permitting us to glimpse Stoic thinking on the subject. Posidonius is said to have written a work in five books on *mantike*. Seneca's *Naturales quaestiones* 3.32.ff., on lightning bolts and bird omens, gives us his ideas about divination. We differ from the Etruscans, he says, in that we believe that only certain things that happen regularly, *ratione*, allow us to make the predictions of the future that come under the head of divination. But as he goes through his evidence, the gulf between himself and the Etruscans narrows. The discrimination between regular, or natural, events and chance events is clearly vitiated by his admission that we just do not know enough about the incidence of lightning and about birds' calls to make truly verifiable inferences from them. With greater knowledge, more links in the causal chains might be discoverable.

Of those associated with the Stoic succession, only Panaetius (second century B.C.E.) disagreed with the acceptance of divination as a scientific technique *faute de mieux*. The conservatives assumed that the world is full of signs guaranteed by the benevolence of the gods, a notion repeated by Plotinus (3.3.[48]6.19), and that errors were caused by signs badly read, and not by the unreliability of the signs. Scenes of divination, such as the inspection of entrails for the purpose of reading the will of the gods or the prospects of the future, are turned in Seneca's hands into powerful vehicles of the macabre. *Oedipus* features two sequences of divination. In *Thyestes* (755ff.) the inspection of the entrails of the slaughtered boys—*tremunt* . . . *spirant* . . . *calentes* —is, in its horrible way, a celebration of the vital spirit that infuses all creation, even where it is temporarily stunted. Why Seneca should be drawn to these scenes of black augury will become clear later.

Divination and hieromancy testify to the continuing importance of the gods in a philosophy otherwise committed to the search for natural causes, which deals with the gods under the rubric of physical science. The reading of signs, however mysterious, has been known to proceed without a belief in divine agents. The inspection of unusual signals for the purpose of extrapolating a distant cause or an equally distant effect has its own perfectly secular status. But because the signs deciphered are often taken from the realm of meteorology or planetary motion, areas traditionally associated with divine acts, the gods are absorbed into the inquiry. The Epicureans pushed the gods back to the frontiers of the empyrean, at most bringing them back into the picture as a trope for the sacredness of the bond of friendship. The Stoics preserved the divine metaphor, and indeed accepted both the traditional deities and the long-established unitary God of philosophy, as part of their acknowledgment of the interlocking forces of the universe. The Homeric model of political and social relations within the divine pantheon lent itself elegantly to the task of fixing the attractions and repulsions in the physical world, especially with audiences who needed to fall back on the familiar language of religion and myth.

In perusing the Stoic philosophical texts, one cannot escape the impression that the recognition of the gods is determined by a variety of contexts and designs. On the one hand, as we have seen, the gods are cyphers, publicistic necessities for the sake of interesting the masses, shorthand for more complex or abstract intuitions. The gods are introduced in human form to teach the uneducated that they, the gods, exist. At a higher level of sophistication, the word "god" was taken in various senses. God as ultimate principle is ontologically different from God as fire, for the latter has form and is capable of quantitative change. Both, in line with the demands of Stoic corporealism, are bodies, or body. Again, the sources suggest that the gods perpetrate no evil, but are responsible for some evil. Note the contemptu-
his oeuvre, as in *De beneficiis* 4.7–8 where fortune is also brought in, and *fatum* is equated with Liber (= Bacchus), Hercules, and Mercury. There is, we are told in *Epistle* 41.1, no need to raise your arms in prayer: *prope est a te deus, tecum est, intus est;* your god is near, with, within you. But lest we put too spiritual an interpretation upon this piece of aculeate Senecanism, we also learn (*NQ* 6.3.1) that when the sky or the earth gets shaken, this is not owing to any wrath of the gods; there are natural causes; sky and earth are unbalanced by certain faults, just like our own bodies; when they seem to be doing harm, they are really receiving harm. The implication is that the gods can neither do nor receive harm, nor experience wrath. No wonder that Lipsius came to the conclusion (*Const.* 1.18) that in his remarks about God as a maker of destiny, Seneca did not really mean what he said.

In the drama the gods are endowed with a more formidable, though equally multiform, presence; the publicistic need has become generic necessity. In the epic the gods form an apparatus; they are a mirror in which men can recognize themselves, or they function as the levers of momentous change. But in contrast with the heroes who are the prime objects of the bard's attention, the gods lack a meaningful life of their own. In the lyric, the gods figure as ceremonial authorities, or as the tyrants of this or that passion. Only in the drama do the gods occupy a position and assume a variety of functions that render them indispensable. They represent the order or disorder, and hence the mystery, of the contingencies and the impediments without which the tragic action would be frivolous motion in an empty setting. They can be fellow sufferers, or tyrants, or objects of inquiry. But above all they are the old dramatic mechanism for evoking the interconnectedness of causes in a resistant cosmos.

Occasionally, in the Senecan plays, we find rather pallid conversations about what constitutes divinity. *Hercules Furens* 448ff. features a debate between Amphitryon and Lycus. Ostensibly it is about what makes a hero, but mixed in, as a minor premise, is the question of the difference between men and gods. It is Lycus, the Machiavellian realist, who argues the complete separation of the two, while Amphitryon wants to efface the boundary line between them, citing gods who were temporarily men, and men who became gods. Unlike Amphitryon in Euripides' *Heracles*, Seneca's Amphitryon does not rail against the gods, perhaps because of his investment in the cause of his son, whom the tradition makes the arch-straddler of the line between the two species. Like Lycus, Amphitryon is capable of employing syllogistic reasoning in support of his conviction (445–46). But the conviction is authentic, and his response to the first hints of Hercules' return from the underworld,

> audimur! est est somitus Herculei gradus
> Our prayer is heard! It is his step, the step
> Of Hercules!
> (*HF* 523)

has all the earmarks of the announcement of a divine epiphany, which indeed had been prayed for by Megara (279ff.). Hercules himself thinks he is, or wants to be, a god (958ff.).

But Hercules and the feelings expressed about him are unusual. Once in a while someone, like the nurse in *Phaedra* (195ff.), will try to humor or console a sufferer by suggesting that a god is a fiction invented to make sense of an inexplicable occurrence or passion. But as a rule the human agents view the gods as literature and philosophy have taught them to view them, at a distance from themselves and active or inactive in the various guises that human distress precipitates. Indeed, John Herington has argued that Senecan tragedy, like Aeschylus's, is religious theater. Seneca, he says, leaves no ultimate questions open. "Our earliest ancient tragedies, the first plays of Aeschylus, were composed when the Western world was just emerging into an era of free inquiry. . . . Our latest tragedies, those of Seneca, seem . . . to mark the beginning of the reverse process, the transition from free inquiry to an era of religion." But the two playwrights share between them a

"desperately urgent sense of the absolute reality of sin and virtue."[33] I cannot subscribe to all the terms of this comparison. I do not think that either Aeschylean tragedy or Senecan drama "shows an unquestioning faith in the ultimate workings of the world." They would, in fact, not be tragedies if this were so. But there is some truth to the proposition that Senecan drama is religious drama, in the sense that the presence of the gods is not only taken for granted but exploited for powerful ends.
For "gods" we may also write "demons." With the exception of the fragmentary *Phoenissae*, all of Seneca's plays, including the spurious *Octavia*, have within them demons or, as we would call them, ghosts. In three of them, *Troades*, *Medea*, and *Oedipus*, messengers report the appearance of ghosts; in three, *Agamemnon*, *Thyestes*, and *Octavia*, a ghost or ghosts appear on the scene; and in one, *Hercules Oetaeus*, the voice of the hero at the end is that of a hero turned demon. It is true that many of these ghosts are revenant humans. But their survival in another world has given them the intermediate, quasidivine status to which the Greeks, from Hesiod on, have accorded the label "demon." Both Chrysippus and Posidonius are known to have written books on demons. As encyclopedic students of human experience they could not disregard the ubiquitous worship of the lesser divinities. The difference between gods and demons is largely one between remoteness and propinquity, between spirituality and incarnation. Demons were thought to be more concretely or devastatingly embodied than gods in the affairs of men. They were appealed to in the matter of curses and *defixiones*. For the purposes of drama it is helpful that demons appear, and that their appearance is automatically disruptive and violent.

In Seneca, the distance between gods and demons is diminished. Drama can do little with the Stoic God, whom Cleanthes and Chrysippus and Posidonius identified with the life-giving *pneuma*. Where the gods are introduced in their own persons, as is Juno at the beginning of *Hercules Furens*, their malevolence shows them to be indistinguishable from demons. Gods and demons alike are conceived as visual manifestations of the engines of action, of the intractable causes, the unlucky coincidence of errant motives that circumscribe the road the hero has to travel.

More properly, their horrific presence hints at a fundamental instability to which the world of Senecan drama is heir. Juno runs in her own person through all the changes of temper and of will that are subsequently exhibited in the violent turns of the hero's career. The ghost of Tantalus, in the prologue to *Thyestes*, embodies several contrary conceptions at war with one another. On the one hand, he is needed in, the palace to initiate and preside over the crime (62ff.); on the other, he must not tarry (105–6) because otherwise the whole world will be desiccated with the thirst of which he is the mythological guarantor; and finally (95) he expresses a desire to stay and prevent the crime, a desire he is incapable of translating into action because he will not enter the palace. The incongruities underscore both the enormity of what is afoot and the illegibility of the causal skein. And so the supposed engines of action are stripped of their power as intelligible initiators and turn into allegories of uncertainty and terror.

On the Tudor and the Jacobean stages, where Greek and Roman gods are admitted only in very special circumstances, the ghost survives to preserve the sense of *divinatio*, of the authority of the undecipherable. The entrance of the demon carries with it a glimpse of the future, of a more inclusive reality. In Seneca's *Troades*, the ghost of Achilles is merely mentioned; in Thomas Heywood's translation, the ghost appears and has a soliloquy of thirteen stanzas between acts 2 and 3, "in a tone which Peele could hardly outdo." But the irruptive vehemence of his entry also points up the weakness of those exposed to the apparition. In Ben Jonson's *Catiline* the two prologues of Envy and of Sylla's Ghost sound a lasting echo of the Stoic belief that the hazards of enforcing circumstance are most strikingly caught in a formulation that conserves, though in a censored shape, the old divinities of the genre. The ghost is a contribution of science rather than religion, the echo of a speculation about the world gone sour. In the absence of an ideological commitment, let alone a confessional identity, it is difficult to see how either Greek tragedy or Senecan drama can be called religious in the sense in which a medieval mystery play or baroque martyr spectacle or a work by Claudel is religious.

In Seneca the gods give themselves either not at all, as in the first

chorus of *Thyestes*, or they parade their malignity for all to see, in the guise of demons and ghosts. Divination furnishes an imponderable link between Stoic science and Senecan dramaturgy. The ghosts document the Stoic awareness that the structure of the world is not completely amenable to methodical inspection, or rather that even the most complete inspection will have to allow for inaccessibilities and surprises. What the Senecan drama makes of this insight goes far beyond the careful adumbrations of a scientific skepticism, and
comes down hard on the noxiousness of the inscrutable. Confidence in the face of complexity has turned into black magic. But the language continues to remind us of the vigorous exploration of the causal network that entangles man in a larger cosmic web. As Oedipus sees the ghost of his father, and wonders whether Antigone sees him too,

we recognize the source of the ghost of Hamlet's father. Euripidean ghosts, including that of Polydorus in *Hecuba*, are calm, narratively informative; they are little more than messengers of history, retailers of the antecedents or consequences of the text. Greek gods demonstrate a heavenly assurance. Aphrodite, in *Hippolytus*, and Dionysus, in *Bacchae*, can be cool and imperious because in the vision of the playwright they represent forces that, though by no means entirely legible, are thought to be dominant and unrefracted. In Senecan drama, gods and demons lack this assurance. They, like the men and women they can neither assist nor, of their own volition, destroy, are the furious, but impotent, prisoners of an inscrutable universe.

Finally, by way of a postscript to the chapter, a few words about freedom and its implications in Stoic thought and in Seneca, a topic to which I alluded briefly above. Within the constraints of the causal and motivational machinery, the dialectic between heroism and freedom is unusually problematic. The Cynics, who elevated freedom into a policy of unconditioned liberation, had had no difficulty with the concept because they made it ride roughshod over all other obligations, including those of a civilized life and of the duties of leadership. By identifying heroism, as in the figure of their cult hero Heracles, with the license to act as one wishes, they dispensed with whatever worries attached to the relation between freedom and the challenge of social action. Cleanthes wrote a book entitled *On Freedom*, and other Stoics have things to say about the idea of an action that is unhampered by manifest constraint. Still, considering the importance we give to the notion of the freedom of choice in the history of philosophy and in the annals of political thought, it is remarkable, or rather understandable in the light of Stoic determinism, how rarely the Greek terms *eleutheria* and *exousia* have that meaning in the extant Stoic texts. The Stoic emphasis, where it is found, is on being able to act without being dependent on factors beyond one's control. Freedom means "doing one's own," that is, refraining from any act that would enmesh the agent in the foment of his environment. As we shall see later, Stoic physics stamps this aspiration as an irreclaimable hope.

Zeno and his successors, moreover, following Plato's identification of the ruler with him who rules over himself, equated the wise man and the "king," the responsible leader with his obligations (SVF 3.332, 617, 691), and thus perpetuated the political accent Greek ethics had borne from the start. This is an emphasis congenial to tragedy, where an affirmation of complete freedom, freedom of choice unchecked by obligations, can only debilitate the tragic passion. Further, in Greek and Roman Stoicism, the wise man is not, even outside of the political arena, completely free to act, but is bound to the *logos*, the code imposed by his insight into levels of controllability. The language of Origen belongs to a later era. Origen says that the wise man is free inasmuch as he has received the power of willing from the divine Creator. No such liberation by the grace of God is available to the Stoic. His notion of freedom is coupled with that of the observance of the law itself, and of the limitations thus imposed on the human agent. The Stoa expressly rejects the view that freedom, what is *eph' hemin*, allows for the possibility that we could do the opposite. The good can only act well, the bad ill. All Hellenistic philosophy, of course, shows a gloomy interest in the possibility of one supreme self-determined enterprise, the radical act of the free choice of death. But once
again, this belief in the autonomy of suicide is hedged in by a whole battery of limiting conditions. Where suicide is not prompted by fear or desperation, it is dictated by a rational decision derived from the sanctions of the *logos*. In any case, such a decision can be made only by those who have steeled themselves by the constant practice of abnegation expected of the Stoic saint. Likewise in tragedy, a decision that is made freely, that might, in fact, have gone the other way, is useless or trivial. The dramatic concern with constraint and compulsion leaves freedom far behind. We must remember also that the Stoic wise man, or saint, or king, is a figment of the utopian imagination. Our world knows only *prokoptontes, proficientes*, men and women who are attempting to get closer and closer to that ultimately inaccessible state of wisdom. Even if Stoic kings were, by definition, free, which, in the strict sense of the word, they cannot be, the learners of this world, including those venerated by disciples, are not.

The topic of the Stoic king, of his rights and opportunities and obligations, is a constant one in Seneca, both in his philosophical writings and in the drama. Medea assumes that kings have power; they can be useful, and they can protect and save the weak:

*hoc reges habent magnificum et ingens, nulla quod rapiat dies: prodesse miseris, supplices fido lare protegere.*

*This is what kings can do, A mighty privilege that time cannot extort: To succor the afflicted, to provide a firm Refuge for those in need. (Med 222–25)*

She might equally well have said that kings have the obligation, rather than the opportunity or freedom, to assist the helpless. In *Epistle 73* Seneca condemns some radical Stoics for their opposition to monar-

chly, on the grounds that after all the institution guarantees communal well-being. Public service is, in his eyes, a Stoic demand; he acknowledges this even in the treatise in which he reviews the joys of retirement, *De tranquillitate animi*. His own forced retirement from politics is certain to have embarrassed him. Curiously, in the second chorus of *Thyestes* (336ff.), the portrait of the Stoic king is conceived in the terms of the Epicurean *lathe biosas*, of the call for a life away from the center of the storm. This coincides with the Sophoclean and Euripidean *choral* sentiment, diametrically opposed to the heroic temper, that it is better not to be exposed to the stresses of politics and leadership.

The Senecan plays and treatises abound in debates concerning the requirements of kingship, and concerning what makes a strong ruler as opposed to a Stoic king. This is particularly true of *Thyestes*, the play in which the temptations of kingship are graphically tested. Thyestes holds out against the crown, but is softened up by his son Tantalus (*Thy* 404–90) and yields before the siren call of Atreus's deceitful surrender (534–45). It is obvious that the term "king" can, under these circumstances, be invested with the most spectacular ironies. The Renaissance stage perpetuates the discussion and the ironies. Andrugio, the attractive victim in *Antonio's Revenge*, has a fine Stoic speech on kingship in act 4 of the preceding play, *Antonio and Mellida*. In the later play, act 2, scene 2, Piero and Pandulfo engage in a shuttle-speech on tyranny that is literally translated from *Thyestes*. A passage in *The Spanish Tragedy* (3.1.1–11), on the tribulations of being a king, is modelled on Seneca's *Agamemnon* (57–73). The new political constellations of the Renaissance helped to restore the relevance of those old debates. In Seneca's own plays, however, the Stoic message of what is expected of the perfect king is even more equivocal than it is in the treatises. The debates are conducted, not with the evident aim of helping one or the other view to acceptance, but to define the fluid social matrix within which human purpose and human welfare are buffeted.

One prominent thought stands out from the confusion of conflicting findings, and achieves prominence within the Senecan dramatic corpus: the thought that perfect wisdom imposes the recognition of ties and the willingness to live up to them, and that it is the tyrant's delusion and the source of his crimes that he considers himself free, without obligation:
Who to himself is law, no law doth need,
Offends no king, and is a king indeed.
(Bussy D'Ambois 2.1.203–4)

The couplet purports to stake out the privileges of true kingship; Bussy's own subsequent dereliction and failure demonstrate that the freedom of the king must turn into the license of the tyrant. And the tyrant necessarily develops a suicidal hunger for greater and greater license.

Wise men can be truly royal only if they cease aspiring to temporal power. Thyestes is made to think he can carry his newly discovered attunement to the simplicities of his sylvan retreat with him into the royal palace (542–43); he crashes in the attempt. But a sage who separates himself from the bonds of the community and refuses to respond to its demands has no business on the tragic stage. The tradition of the polis in Athenian tragedy paradoxically requires the presence of the king at the heart of the drama. Without the active role of princes and kings and temporal leaders and the ruling heads of households, tragic issues fall away. Aeschylus's Persae could not have been conceived as a tragedy if the playwright had put Athenian democracy at the center of the stage.

Stoicism gratefully adopts the old political orientation, along with the ancient myths to which the medium was attached. But Stoic drama also draws attention to the precariousness of the old tragic perception that a king is political man generalized and raised to his highest potential. It further collapses the established dramatic bond between royalty and passion, or rather it exaggerates the bond and makes the king over into a living incarnation of wrath, thus creating a paradigm to face the Stoic "king" from the opposite end of the spectrum. As Medea confesses:

Difficile quam sit animum ab ira flactere
iam concitatum quamque regale hoc putet
sceptris superbas quisquis admovit manus,
qua coept ira, regia didici mea.

How hard it is to turn the soul from anger
Once it is roused, and how the seizure of
The sovereign scepter spurs persistence in
The sovereign path, I know: the crown has taught me.
(Med 203–6)

The more violent the king, the kinglier he is: this is a favorite conceit of the stage tyrants of Senecan drama. Thus heroism is questioned, and

reduced to the hard contours of parody. The Stoic philosopher-king merges with the tragic hero-villain. Some say that Greek tragedy, especially that of Euripides, is a poetic rebuttal of the pretensions to progress and perfectibility associated with the movement of enlightenment, the Sophists, in the second half of the fifth century B.C.E. Senecan tragedy is not a protest but a continuance. Its kings and queens exploit the warnings and the precepts that Seneca's own philosophical discussions of kingship have made available. But in their own tragic careers they confirm the insufficiency of those precepts and the doom dimly perceived in the warnings.

What should not be overlooked, in the end, is the usefulness of the royal cypher in a dramatic tradition that stresses the imponderability of causes. The royal ideal hints at a maximum of control, at an efficacy of will and determination that human society rarely concedes. The tyrant is the champion of the special presumption that claims freedom from the causal network. As the plays, with their repeated discussions of what it means to be a king, show unmistakably, the concept of the king is just as delusory as the assurance of the tyrant is vicious. Both of them believe the necessary truth that all of us are hemmed in by a swarm of causes that shape our very being and mold our actions. Many of the causes are internal to ourselves. But neither the king nor the tyrant is capable of exploiting this internality for lasting purposes of his own. Within the Senecan world, a clear sight or control of the causes of action is denied to all. Only in a very limited way can Polyxena or Antigone, much less Hercules, be said to be in command of their lives. The reason is not just that the complexity of the network defeats all hope of mastery, but that the causal system may itself be inescapably flawed and diseased, and intrinsically corrupt. The image of the Stoic king, carefully maneuvering between his own needs and the intuited forces of a lawful universe, is a mirage. Senecan drama appears, now and then, to hold out the comfort that the reins of our existence are within our grasp. But because it is tragedy, and clinical tragedy at that, the comfort is extended only in order to be thoroughly demolished. Mastery might be possible in a universe that obeys fixed laws, in a world that is healthy and theoretically analyzable. The
universe of Senecan drama is diseased; its causes are those a physician rather than a
governor is best qualified to attempt to track. It will be the task of the following chapters to
establish that this vision is acceptable within a Stoic understanding of how the world behaves.

PART TWO
THE NEW COSMOLOGY

Chapter Four
Body, Tension, and Sumpatheia

These lines, from the pen of a poet who lived about a generation before Seneca, give creative
expression to a body of thought about the cosmos that originated with the early Stoics, based
on suggestions supplied by Aristotle and his immediate successors, and older traditions on
which they drew. Aristotle distinguishes between soul and the inborn pneuma; Zeno collapses
them and makes of his soul-pneuma the unifying stuff that guarantees the working (and the
frequent misoperation) of the organism. Chrysippus extended the notion of the bodily pneuma
to cover the whole world, with important consequences for the nature of the cosmos, of which
man, the character in the cosmic drama, is a consenting or dissenting member.[4] He defined
heimarmene as a dunamis pneumatike (SVF 2.913), a pneumatic power, which means that
the pneuma is both causal nexus and force. "Pneuma in a cosmic sense is a conscious,
ra tional, material force, working like a craftsman on inert, formless matter and fashioning
different sub-

stances by variations of its own tension."[5] Chrysippus's pneuma was a refinement of the
"craftsman fire" of Zeno and Cleanthes,[6] "a cool fire, sun's breath, the solar wind," to fall
back on the language of a modern poet-philosopher.[8]

We are now broaching the heart of our study, the cosmological analysis for which
everything discussed up to now has been preparatory, and which, I hope, will clarify
important issues our earlier remarks have had to skirt. Significant aspects of Seneca's
dramatic practice, including the language of the plays, the nature of the action, and the
character of the agents, can be appreciated more fittingly once it is understood that Senecan
drama is the beneficiary of a new cosmology, of a new way of looking at the world and its
parts and the manner of the interaction of these parts. Occasional hints of the new
perspective have already been given in the preceding chapters. It remains to explore more
fully, and with explicit documentation, how the Stoic world picture scores in the dramatic
practice of Seneca and of some of his successors.

The Stoic presumption is that, with few—according to most accounts, four—exceptions,[8]
all that exists is corporeal, or physico-biological. Hence ethics and theology are subjects
rooted in the findings of the natural sciences. This was held by Chrysippus and by Marcus Aurelius. It is also the view of Seneca, as emerges clearly from his encomium of *sapientia* in *Epistle* 90.28ff. God is corporeal; so are justice, passion, reason, truth, virtue, vices, judgments, the soul. All of them are bodies, not in the sense of exhibiting specifically defined surfaces, but in the sense of sharing in the materiality of the whole. That materiality is, thanks to the *pneuma*, in large measure animate rather than inert. Events are corporeal, and so are their causes. "Chrysippus' affirmation of the corporeal nature of causes is a flat rejection of the incorporeal causes of Plato (the Ideas) and Aristotle (the unmoved mover)."[7]

As we have seen, Stoic corporealism is argued along three different lines.[8] First, the definition of body is "that which is extended in three dimensions with resistance [*met' antitupias*]." This pertains to the objects of our daily sensory experience, though by no means to them alone. Second, a body is "that which either acts or is acted upon," a way of talking about the effective constituents of a living whole that goes back to Platonic precedents (for example, *Theaetetus* 156a and *Sophistes* 247c-e).[9] Within the cosmic dimension, that which acts is the *logos* or the god, and that which is acted upon is the *hule*, the elementary material of which the four elements are specific manifestations. Finally, on the strength of their larger commitment to a totally material universe, the Stoics can ascribe the term "body" to any item that shares in the vitality of that universe. This accounts for the statements that most perplexed or enraged the opponents of Stoic corporealism, including some of the Renaissance neo-Stoics. In his chief commentary on Stoic physics, the *Physiologia* of 1604 (2.4ff.), Lipsius touches upon what he considers to be the inconsistencies and irrationalities of the Stoic claim that everything that is is corporeal.

With reference to the emotions and ethical perceptions of men and women, Plutarch gives a picture of Stoic beliefs that vibrates with outrage at the intellectual extravagance that could have devised so foolish and absurd a philosophy.[10] In his acrimony he talks interchangeably of bodies and animals (or, more properly, animate beings), *somata* and *zoa*, a conflation that, in the light of the relevant Stoic concerns, carries a certain justice. Here are a few sentences from Plutarch's account:

They assert . . . that not only are the virtues and vices animals, and not only the affections, cases of anger and envy and grief and spiteful joy, or apprehensions and mental images and cases of ignorance . . . but besides these they further make the activities bodies and animals—taking a walk is an animal, dancing, putting on one's shoes, greeting, reviling.

In the end he cites Chrysippus: It is not the case that the night is a body but the evening and the dawn and midnight are not bodies; and it is not the case that the day is a body but not the first day of the month and the tenth and the thirteenth and the month and the summer and the autumn and the year.

(De comm. not. 1084bff., tr. H. Cherniss, modified)[11]

Chrysippus is on record (SVF 2.307) as having said that the virtues are animate bodies: *virtutes esse animalia*. The fire in the soul is the same as that in the sun; it is also *pneuma*, and is fed by blood (SVF 1.140). Plutarch's talk of animals, *zoa*, in discussing mental activities, is, therefore, not far from the mark. Hence Marcus Aurelius's disjunctive harangue (9.39): "either acknowledge [Stoic] reason or believe in [Epicurean?] atoms. [But the former is obviously right; hence, if you want to show your stupidity] go ahead and say to the *hegemonikon* [that is, the central control station of the mind]: 'You are dead, you have perished, you have turned into a wild beast, . . . you are one of the herd, you take fodder!'"

With the brackets in place it would indeed appear as if Marcus stood up against the notion, which curiously enough he derives from atomism, that the central intelligence is (an) animal. But the brackets are mine; and if the text is read without them, it is by no means clear that the (animation =) animalization of the mind could not also be derived from a Stoicism of corporeality that differs from Epicureanism chiefly in not allowing the cutting asunder and dispersion of bodily particles, and that substitutes living energy for the intrinsic inertness of the atomic corpuscles.[12]

If animation can, as Plutarch shows, be read as animalization, and theatricality identifies animals with beasts of the wild, the relevance of this to Senecan drama is obvious. The whole
world can be visualized as a gigantic assemblage of beasts, of monsters that crowd the human agents who are thinly disguised exemplars of the same species. As the third chorus of *Oedipus* (709ff.) rehearses the foundation story of Thebes, the old animal mythology, the tales of the dragon teeth and of the dismemberment of Actaeon, is reinforced by Stoic concerns until the very genes of the city are shown to be beastly. The relation between Hercules and his lion (*HF* 30–74) is welded into near-identity, and the conflation of the Nemean lion skin with the zodiacal sign of Leo imports the animal dimension into the whole, richly peopled world.\[13\] Hercules's own powers are reanalyzed as the ancient legacy of infernal, zoomorphic powers. Medea's witchcraft (*Med* 670–848) feeds lovingly on snakes, dragons, and all manner of beasts representing the hellish forces loose in the world. It is, once again, the living throng of the zodiac that Medea harnesses for her awful purposes. It is characteristic that in Euripides' version of the tale there is none of this. There the space occupied in Seneca by the cosmic monsters and the voodoo animal ingredients is taken up with the report of what the magic clothes do to Creon and Creusa. Modern criticism of Seneca has poked fun at the disproportion between Medea's *kolossale Fähigkeiten* — Medea herself catalogues the cosmic disturbances caused by her magic incantation (752ff.) — and the trifling result: *ein leider ziemlich alltäglicher Giftmord*.\[14\] What matters, however, is not the witchcraft as a dramatic incident, but the totalization of the Stoic insight that the world, qua corporeal, is also animal, and an aggregate of animality. The causes, the imprecations, the whole world picture count for more than the specific consequences of an intrigue or a character formation.

The dramaturgy of *Oedipus* is particularly revealing. In Sophocles' version of the tale, the inquiry addressed to the higher powers is limited to Creon's consultation of the oracle, the report of which occupies some seventy lines, a smallish portion of the text. The drama, qua drama, is enacted on a plane that accommodates only the purposes of men and women, and the relations between them. In Seneca the drama encompasses a larger world, brimming with vital and threatening ani-

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mal substances (291–658). Not knowing the truth, and with the agreement of Oedipus, Tiresias organizes an *extispicium*, which is reported by Manto, the pretext being that Tiresias is blind. Two victims with gilt horns, an expanse of smoke, the lowing of animals, and much else is made available to the audience's sensory imagination; the slaughter of the beasts is recounted in great detail, as is the condition of the flesh upon inspection. As if this were not sufficient, the results are declared to be inconclusive in order to make room for yet another drama of inspection: an act of necromancy, reported by Creon. Only after these various scrutinizings of the animate world and its animal population is the quarrel between Oedipus and his associates permitted to begin. The effect of the dramaturgy is to strip Oedipus of his lone, towering standing, and to engulf him in a cosmos of which he is shown to be a pulsating, but feeble, constituent. He carries within him the beastly genes of his city; it is only fitting that he cannot be seen save against a background of monstrous animality. Likewise the golden ram, the totem of the clan in *Thyestes* 225 ff., is not just a mythological curiosity but a fitting exemplification of the *fortuna* of the royal house, a fortune that is alive, concrete, and freakish. Greek drama had occasionally wandered in this direction, as in Euripides' *Bacchae*. In Seneca the language of animality is not tied to the requirements of a particular plot, but extends throughout the dramatic repertory.

As Seneca tries to fit shapes to the events and abstractions that call for pictorial analogues (cf. *tamquam pictor* in *Epistle* 113.26), the animate universe furnishes him with an inexhaustible storehouse of organic energies. The Stoic belief in pervasive corporeality, with the pendant belief in pervasive animation, creates some remarkable challenges, and not only for the logic of classification. There is no fundamental distinction, in terms of substance and motor behavior, between body and soul. "There is no difference for Seneca . . . between physical and moral light and darkness."\[13\] Not only are "the mental/moral disposition and the physical state of the human psyche one and the same," but ultimately "Stoic ethics is . . . parasitical on physics."\[14\] In his *Naturales quaediones* Seneca documents the interdependence and the virtual identity of the physical and the spiritual, or of the cosmic and the personal, by ending a number of the books on a note of per-
sonal application, by bringing science and ethics together. Thus the final chapter of book 4, which is on (the Nile and) snow and hail and heat, presents an attack on superstition and effeminacy, a characteristic combination of the social, the moral, and the aesthetic. On the literal level Seneca chastises the dissipated Romans for cooling their distemper and tempering their indigestion with snow and ice. But it is hard to escape the impression that Seneca is, however cumbrously, saying something about the more than figurative identity of cosmic and human disturbances. Similarly, at the end of book 5, Seneca establishes a link between the winds and greed. Though once again the ostensible thought is less startling—winds, in themselves indifferent, are converted to evil purposes by human vice—the juxtaposition creates its own presumption of affinity.

The meteorology promulgated in the *Naturales quaestiones* is, for the most part, in close imitation of Aristotle's *Meteorologica* \[17\] (though Seneca cites a fair number of other authorities). But where Aristotle is single-mindedly concerned with cosmic phenomena, from shooting stars to earthquakes to lightning and thunder to the processes of liquefaction and consolidation, Seneca is "Stoic enough by habit to draw little or no distinction between spiritual, moral and material realities. . . . (and) treats all phenomena as belonging to the same order of being. His discourse slips, without warning or break, from the vastness of the soul to the vastness of the starry sky."\[18\] The explanation lies, once again, in the pervasiveness of the *pneuma*, the *spiritus* without which, Seneca says (*NQ* 6.16), the world could not live.\[19\]

In the plays we find the same subsumption of ethical and psychological concerns within a medium that stresses the dynamics of the body, of the corporeal, and of the energy that defines bodily functions. Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, but also the earlier Stoics, including Zeno and Chrysippus, and indeed Seneca himself, are on occasion willing to talk about the life of the soul, the moral life, as if it registered its claims in isolation from the material sum total to which it be-

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In this respect Stoic ethics and psychology have the option of proceeding in channels initiated by Aristotle's separation and specialization of inquiry. The dramatist, however, rarely chooses that option. The needs of his genre, as he sees them, induce him to take the demands of Stoic corporeality literally. In Senecan drama the moral emerges, in its own right, only fitfully and tangentially, in choral essays and the occasional abortive sermonizing by a character, often a nurse or an attendant. In a manner of speaking, the exclusively moral statements in a Senecan drama are *exq tou dramatos*, outside of the drama proper, to use Aristotle's phrase. The drama itself is played out in terms of the prior biological reality, in terms of body and muscle and animal energy.

But more of this later. Let us look once more at the Stoic conception of "body." The Platonic and the Epicurean worlds, and, with some qualifications, also the world of Aristotle, may be said to be fundamentally stereomorphic. Their cosmos is a structure of crystals, together forming the cosmic crystal, which is spherical only by a violent shift of the imagination. The material world as a whole, and its constituent parts, are measurable and irreducible. In Plato's words:

> Fire and earth and water and air are bodies. And every sort of body possesses volume, and every volume must necessarily be bounded by surfaces, and every rectilinear surface is composed of triangles. (*Timaeus* 53c, tr. Jowett)

Plato's stereometric analysis of the natural world derives from the minima of the Eleatic school and rivals theatomism of Democritus and Epicurus in its confident reliance on the permanence of primary physical bodies. In the Renaissance, John Dee and Robert Fludd, and the Italian Platonists who inspired their writings continued to see the world as a cluster of measurable shapes. The remarkable diagrams that embellish their texts are eloquent testimony to the survival of the stereometric plotting of the cosmos.\[20\] The measurability is also, in the wake of Pythagorean impulses, perceived in musical terms. Both music and stereometry presuppose the existence of stable quanta constituting a world that is, in its natural state, orderly, complex, and beautiful.

Contrast the Stoic cosmos, which is one of dynamic tension, fluid, soft, a biological and chemical field in which contrary energies are at

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best held in an equilibrium and at worst engaged in a constant struggle for superiority, straining toward excess and explosion. I said earlier that in Stoic discussions of corporeality,
causes and bodies are described in terms of acting and being acted upon. But paradoxically, in their talk about how the world gets on with itself, the Stoics are far less body-minded than their predecessors, if by "body" we mean a measurable quantum. They emphasize the physical continuum of space and matter, a consequence of the agency of the pneum
tuna. As Chrysippus says in his work *On Motion* (SVF 2.550): "The cosmos is a perfect body, but the parts of the cosmos are not perfect in that they have a relationship to the whole and do not exist by themselves." True, as they make their distinction between ultimate principles, archai, and the pneum
tuna, on the one hand, and the four material elements—fire, air, earth, and water—each of which has a specific form or bodily condition, on the other, the Stoics may be thought to compromise their rejection of limiting boundaries. But the recognition of a constantly changing mixture of elements points up the precariousness of the concepts of "form" and "shape" in Stoic thought.

It is tempting to characterize Stoic thinking about the natural world as an analogue of modern field theory, by contradistinction with the corpuscular theory of the atomists. As long as one does not press the analogy, the comparison is instructive. In their analysis of the behavior of the natural world, the Stoics found they could not avoid the language of their predecessors. and they spoke of shapes as well as bodies. And it ought to be repeated that Zeno, in inaugurating a new way of looking at the unity of the cosmos, took much from Aristotle and his successors in the Peripatos, as well as from Plato and his disciples. But though Aristotle's achievement in the various disciplines of biology is remarkable, cosmology is, for him, largely tantamount to physics, the disposition of constants and the plotting of orderly forces and spatial configurations. It is only in Stoic cosmology that biology comes fully into its own. Aristotle's discovery of the coordinates of potentiality and actualization is itself indebted to a biological model. But while Aristotle's biological system was one of evolution and the final cause, and

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focussed on the life curve of organisms, the Stoic model transcends the level of individual organisms and the life of the species and takes its incentive from a more radical understanding of life forces. That is why it is appropriate also to refer to it as a chemical model. The varied and unstable fusion that animates the cosmos is played out in a matrix that is both pure "acting and being-acted-upon" and pure fluidity, extending from the elements to the smallest inanimate objects, bringing everything under the influence of the pneum
tuna. The ethical paradoxes of the Stoa are paralleled in the ontological dimension. The ontological paradoxes derive from the fact that the customary predicates, applying to the realm of the finite, of bodies as our senses experience them, and of elements, lead to insoluble contradictions when applied both to the Whole and to the archai. The pneumatic constitution of the cosmos assures its incalculability; the archai, the organizing principles of that world, are disarmed and virtually obliterated by their reanalysis as pneum
tuna.

The medium of animation operative within the realm of pneum
tuna, and responsible for both unification and variation, is tonos, tension. The term was apparently introduced by Cleanthes (SVF 1.563), who spoke of it as a "thrust of fire," plege puros. But it was fully developed by Chrysippus, who distinguished between an inward and an outward movement characterizing the tonos. The emphasis on tension and on the balance of tensions is a leading feature in Stoic accounts of the material world. Seneca devotes chapter 6 of the second book of the *Naturales quaediones* to an encomium of intentio. Tonos displaces the Aristotelian explanation that some elements are heavy and pull toward the center. In Stoic thinking, also, each element has a natural motion of its own. But once we look at the cosmos in its primary biological aspect, the picture is different. Radical Stoic cosmology has some considerable difficulty with the notion of free fall, or of any inherent tendency toward gravitation or levitation. All parts of

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matter are connected by continuous forces, both in space and time. Motion is primary in the sense that there is nothing that is not in a state of tension with other parts, not to mention the fact that tonos is built into the very pneum
tuna that constitutes creative life. As Seneca puts it in an argument against atomism, air is not composed of discontiguous particles, otherwise it could not be in tension; and tension is the agency whereby the divine spirit (spiritus, Seneca's term for pneum
tuna) holds everything together (*NQ* 2.6.2–4).
Tonos operates within entities as well as between them. What is not clear from the sources, but is logically inevitable, is that the tension between things must have the effect of altering the tensions within them, and vice versa. In the tradition, the qualities of an object are equated with pneumatic tensions (SVF 2.449). Chrysippus looked upon the tensional motion as a force guaranteeing stability. But the conclusion is problematic. To be sure, iron remains iron, but it also turns into rust. Thus tonos shares in the uncertainties that, as we shall see, the doctrine of the pneuma raises for the dominant optimism of the Stoa.

The tension is sometimes, especially in the allegorizing interpreters of poetry, defined as a bond or chain that integrates the universe. The Great Chain of Being, though indebted also to Platonic antecedents, is a latter-day version of the Stoic tonos, hardened in defiance of the fluidity of the original, as when Philo says that the pneumatic tension is an unbreakable chain. It is as if the Stoic allegorizers, in their eagerness to substitute fixed units of interpretation for a language that embarrassed them, strove to recover a stability that Stoic science proposes to abolish. Aristotle and the Epicureans look upon motion as a quantifiable process that occurs between fixed points. The Stoics, with their tonos, build motion into the physical state itself, and thus discover the modern idea of force. The physician-philosopher Galen, living in the second century of our era, adapted the Stoic tonike kinesis, tensional force, for his explanation of muscular action (SVF 2.450). This was anticipated by Chrysippus, who in his work On Passions talks about tonos in the musculature and then transfers the same concept to the soul:

> As in running, clinging to something, and similar activities, which are accomplished through the muscles, there is a certain effective state and an ineffective state, depending on whether the muscles are tensed or relaxed, so also analogously in the soul there is a sort of "muscle" according to which we speak metaphorically of people being either with or without "muscle." (SVF 3.473)

Renaissance anatomy is firmly indebted to this aspect of the Stoic imagination.

It should be evident that the idea of tonos and tonike kinesis, which Philo uses metaphorically to refer to the word of the Lord (SVF 2.453), is brilliantly relevant to the dramatic mode, though it might be rash to establish a one-to-one equation between Stoic tonos and what we call dramatic tension, the tonos in the body of the drama. Aristotle’s call for the interrelatedness of the parts of the artifact has a closer philosophical analogue in the Stoic energy field than it has in Aristotelian perfectionism or Aristotelian physics. As the New Critics made us see again, one way of unlocking the secrets of a drama is to appreciate the pressure of the various parts upon one another, and the strains between them, via irony, duplication, counterstatement and other principles of structural dynamics. In the spirit of the Stoic model, motion and tension are the primary realities, not any fixed units or forms from which the tension takes its origin. Beyond this, in the spirit of Galen and Chrysippus before him, action conceived as strained physical motion, muscle pressing upon muscle and ligament upon bone, weight tugging against weight, is an almost emblematic realization of what distinguishes above all Senecan drama. Motion and tension circumscribe not only the wills of the agents and their tight pressure upon each other, but, what is really saying the same thing, they define the rhetoric, with its explosive and often bizarre developments; they inform the themes and the precepts, jostling each other to the point of neutralization; and, foremost, they trigger the life of the passions, of plotting, and of man’s inhumanity to man.

To be sure, in the majority of Stoic accounts tonos, tension and countertension, equilibrium, are associated with health; sickness is atonia, the absence of tension, flaccidity or imbalance. The manifest incongruity between the violence and aberrations on the Senecan stage, on the one hand, and Stoic reflections upon health and regularity, on the other, is not the least of the reasons that have led critics to shy away from acknowledging the Stoic identity of Senecan drama. But, as I shall try to show, Stoicism entails a recognition that the achievement of a perfect balance is in constant peril, and that tonos has built into it the capacity for derailment. The dynamism of tonos is forever on the verge of catapulting itself into dislocations. In muscular terms: exertion and spasm are contiguous, and only the (utopian) wise man known exactly how far to take the tonos that constitutes his maintenance of harmony and health.
In Seneca's prose writings, suggestions of cosmic disorder are in the minority. In the letters, and even in the *Naturales quaestiones*, the implications of Stoic cosmology are blunted by the overriding need to discover, within a labile universe, the fixed position that will enable man to live at relative peace with himself. To realize this goal, Seneca often talks, informally, about the body being a burden and a prison house of the spirit fighting against it (*Ep. 65.16; Ep. 92.33*), as if the bodiliness of the soul were not also a major Stoic tenet (*Ep. 106*).[33] It is only fair to concede that there is a difference between "body" as the flesh-and-blood structure clothing the human soul, and "body" as a physical or biological substance defining the composition of what exists. The notion of the human body as a prison house cramping the life of the soul goes back to Socrates and the pre-Socratics. Characteristically, Seneca argues that it is only the faith in an all-powerful deity (= *necessitas*) that equips him to understand why he himself, with his "vulnerable and fluid and perishable body"—the word for "vulnerable" is *causarium*, literally: enmeshed in causes or subject to chance—should be alive.

Throughout the introduction to the first book of *Naturales quaestiones*, of which these lines are a part (4), the point is that by investigating the cosmos and the gods (theology being simply another mode of cosmology), we recover a perspective and an optimism that the terrestrial experience is bound to distort and demolish. Nothing is more beautiful or more enduring or better organized than the cosmos; but men think of it, in their silliness, as fortuitous and disorganized and liable to disintegrate. Seneca declares himself not to be frightened by portents. At the beginning of book 7 of *Naturales quaestiones*, he has an eloquent plea for regarding the routine operations of the universe with as much attention as the deviations from the norm. He shrugs off the fears of men who wonder whether a comet is a prodigy or just a star. Seneca's showy optimism, his declaratory conviction that the universe is a body of beauty and regularity, and that the spirit by contemplating it may ensure its own well-being and increase its chances for wisdom,[34] is helped along by the direction Stoicism had taken under the Platonizing guidance of thinkers like Panaetius and Posidonius. But the insistence on beauty, regularity, and fixity is at crucial moments crossed by an understanding that is more in tune with the original Stoic insight into the cohesion of man and the world, and into the inevitable consequences of physicality. In the drama, which does not answer to the psychological needs satisfied in the prose writings, the full consequences of Stoic thinking about the cosmos are more naturally incorporated. Stoic drama, obedient to the demand for disorder, without which drama cannot exist, reduces even further the chances of the wise man succeeding. It catches the process of debilitation at the critical point where the tension goes wrong, the balance is queered, and the narrow confines of order and reason are burst apart.

I return to a passage that has concerned us before, apropos of the inconclusiveness of *praecepa*. The third chorus of *Thyestes*, 546ff., starts out with an equable recital of the clean opposition between war and peace, as the restoration of a state of normalcy after the heinous turbulence of slaughter.

Utium tanto subitum e tumultu
quis deus fecit?
What god has fashioned this sudden lull
In the midst of loud alarms?
(*Thy* 560–61)

But as the choral essay, one of the most compelling in the corpus, continues, the evenly weighted tension, and the promise of the practicability of peace, are left behind, or rather transmogrified into a Heraclitean oscillation, truer to our experience than the tidy opposition that forms the point of departure. From logic and temporary sanity we have moved to a world in confusion, in which peace and war, pleasure and pain, fortune and misfortune are no longer kept apart, but have come to imply one another.

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*miscet haec illis prohibetque Clotho
stare Fortunam, rotat omne fatum.
Clotho mingles good and ill; she whirls
The wheel of fate, nor suffers it to stand.
(*Thy* 617–18)


It is not enough to say that the chorus moves from an appraisal of *tonos* and balance to a description of *atonia*, the lack of proper tension. Rather, the mutuality of fortune and misfortune that the chorus of *Thyestes* deplores, a common theme of many of these choral essays, is itself a powerful version of a tension whose primary battlefield is to be looked for in the Stoic cosmos. This version signals the deep pessimism of the Senecan stage, according to which all *tonos*, because of the fluidity of the medium upon which it is premised, is more likely than not to score disastrously. *Atonia*, slackness, the lack or privation of tension, is hardly the right term for the convulsive consequences that the transformation of *tonos* carries in its wake. Both Cicero and Galen have a number of discussions in which *tonos* and its congeners are analyzed, with interesting results for an understanding of the complex interplay between health and sickness, and of the ease with which tension can lapse from harmony into friction and ruin.

*Tonos* is the energy system that, for better or worse, welds the Stoic cosmos into a unity. The tensional relationship between the constituents of the cosmos, including the incorporation of man and his life in the larger world, Posidonius called *sumpatheia*. It is probable that Chrysippus himself subscribed to this view of cosmic sympathy, or of universal interaction, guaranteed by the *pneuma* that pervades and subdents all, which forms the organic support of the causal network discussed earlier. Stoic *sumpatheia* has its roots in earlier Greek thinking, notably in some passages of Plato’s *Timaeus*. But in its refined and explicit form it was recognized as a specifically Stoic contribution. One of the principal differences between Aristotle and the Stoics is that in the thinking of the former, the heavens are exempted from change, while Stoicism recognizes no radical separation between the terrestrial and the celestial spheres in this regard. The Stoic character of the theory continues to be evident even in its adaptations in some of the later philosophical schools, as in the teaching of Plotinus, and it was under Stoic auspices that Renaissance science rediscovered the mutability of the heavens.

Seneca’s own citation of the idea of cosmic sympathy is couched in unmistakably Stoic terms, though he substitutes *aer*, air, for the more abstract *spiritus* or *pneuma* in the interest of illustrating the power of sympathy in a natural setting:

numquam enim nisi contexti per unitatem corporis nissus est, cum partes consentire ad intentionem debeant et conferre vires. . . . intentionem aeris ostendent tibi . . . voces, quae remissa claraeque sunt prout aer se concitant. quid enim est vox nisi intentio aeris, ut audiatur, linguae formata percurru? quid cursus et motus omnis, nonne intenti spiritus opera sunt?

For there can never be internal effort in a body held together in any other way than by unity, since the elements must be in agreement in order to contribute their united strength toward the tension. . . . The tension of the atmosphere . . . is proved by the sound of voices sinking or swelling according to the stirring (= vibration) of the air. For what is voice save tension of the air moulded by a stroke of the tongue so as to become audible? What is all running and motion? Are they not the effects of tense air?

(Naturales questiones 2.6.2–4, tr. John Clarke)

A modern critic defines the notion as follows: "For every differentiation *D* at region *R*, there will be some, however small, differentiation, *d*, at any region, *r*, in the world."[32]

This doctrine of universal interaction not only pertains to the most disparate parts of the universe but embraces the moral and the spiritual aspects of our world as well (VB 8.4–5). We should remember, of course, that in the Stoic view much that we consider immaterial shares in the corporeal nature of the universe. "In Seneca, the passions, the tides and the orbits are phenomena of the same kind, are causally interrelated, and can be discussed in interchangeable terms,"[39] "All things are united together . . . and earthly things feel the influence of heavenly ones," as Epictetus (1.4.1) puts it. Some Stoic sources, falling back upon the ready mechanism of a divine nomenclature signalling cohesion, refer to *sumpatheia* as Aphrodite, or Love.[43] The cohesion of the cosmos, primarily conceived of in strictly physical terms, can also be regarded as evidence of the feelings and the desires of the godhead. Lucan, who refused to endow his epic with the conventional divine apparatus, thinks of sympathy as a proof of divine immanence, an active working of the gods throughout the world, which finds egress at certain places, such as Delphi, or through certain souls, the prophets or the philosophers.[42] In Seneca, compare Agamemnon’s words to Calchas:

arte qui reseras polum,
cui viscerum secreta, cui mundi fragor
et Stella longa semitam flamma trahens
dant signa fati, cuius ingenti mihi  
mercede constant orae: quid iubeat deus  
effare, Calchas, nosque consilio rege.  
Who by your mystic art can open heaven,  
And read with vision dear the awful truths  
Which sacrificial viscera proclaim;  
To whom the thunder's roll, the long, bright trail  
Of stars that flash across the sky, reveal  
The hidden signs of fate; whose every word  
Is uttered at a heavy cost to me:  
What is the will of heaven, Calchas; speak,  
And guide us with your counsel.  
(Tro 354–59)

The prophet affords a point of entry into the global signa of the divinity.

Cicero translates sumpatheia as consensus naturae, or, more fully, as rerum consentiens conspirans continuata cognatio, the kinship of

things united in feeling, in aspiration, and in extension. The proponent of sumpatheia with whose views Cicero largely identifies himself is the Stoic Balbus. It will be useful to quote the whole paragraph from which the formulation above is taken.

Again, consider the sympathetic agreement, interconnexion and affinity of things: whom will this not compel to approve the truth of what I say? Would it be possible for the earth at one definite time to be gay with flowers and then in turn all bare and stark, or for the spontaneous transformation of so many things about us to signal the approach and the retirement of the sun at the summer and the winter solstices, or for the tides to flow and ebb in the seas and straits with the rising and setting of the moon, or for the different courses of the stars to be maintained by the one revolution of the entire sky? These processes and this musical harmony of all the parts of the world assuredly could not go on were they not maintained in unison by a single divine and all pervading spirit. (Cicero De natura deorum 2.7.19, tr. H. Rackham)

Balbus mentions the behavior of the sun, the moon, the planets, the fixed stars, heat, light, and moisture, especially the latter, the atmospheric and terrestial conditions enveloping men’s affairs, as evidence of the unity and the cohesiveness holding the universe together. Balbus is the hymnodist of universal harmony, of the way nature at its best cooperates for the good of all.

Sumpatheia is both state and process. On the one hand it signals connection, bonding, integration, and kinship; on the other it indicates the operation of one and all parts of the whole on each other. In the latter capacity, which is the one that rules supreme in the dynamics of drama, the concept has medical origins. The holistic outlook of Hippocratic medicine and its successors emphasized the impact of

various constituents of the body upon each other: "There is one confluence, one common vitality, and all things are in sympathy within the human body." Significantly, another term by which Cicero chooses to render sumpatheia (De divin. 2.33; De fato 5) is contagio, which is contact, in the medical sense, hence, sadly, infection. Certainly medicine, though supportive of the notion of harmony and balance and healthy tension, is fully alive to the variety of causes that may trigger a breakdown of the harmony, and to the extremely narrow scope within which tension can be expected to operate successfully. The concern with bodily weakness and disease, paramount in the medical treatises, is also one of the prominent themes of the Stoic writers; arrostemena, debilitation, is a surprisingly common term in the Stoic fragments. Thus sympathy turns into vulnerability; it entails the uncontrollable and potentially invidious operation of the swarm of causes. In this respect a passage like the first chorus of Seneca’s Oedipus, reporting the plague with a love of detail far in excess of the symptoms cited in its Sophoclean counterpart, converges in interest with the Stoic condemnation of weakness in all its forms, but also confirms the Stoic recognition that sickness is an inevitable implication of sumpatheia. Note also the second chorus of Phaedra (736ff.), on Beauty and its imperilled estate, because it cannot isolate itself, even in the sylvan retreat Hippolytus favors.

The time has come for us to make a distinction between Stoic perfectionism and Stoic realism; or rather, we need to recognize that they coexist and form a powerful complex, signified respectively and jointly by the names of Epictetus and Galen. In Epistle 95, on the inadequacy of praecepta unsupported by prior doctrinal preparation, Seneca confesses, in a generally optimistic context (52): membra sumus corporis magni, we are all the limbs of a large body. And, we conclude, we have little control over a distant part that may suffer some
damage. Rabelais, a later Stoic, physician and moralist, "ties into one grotesque knot the slaughter, the dismemberment and disembowelling, bodily life, abundance, fat, the banquet, merry improprieties, and finally childbirth." In Rabelais the spirit is comic, with the final accent on salvation and continuance. But, as we shall see, the implosive mixture of health and decay, of vitality and ugliness, is precisely what the Stoic concept of *sumpatheia*, with its built-in expectation of the constant danger of disarray and infestation, openly implies.

On the surface, and especially in evangelistic contexts, *sympatheia* encourages a delight in the physical, which is to say the biological richness of the world. Again and again Cicero's Stoic champion, Balbus, even in his hymn to reason and speech (*De nat. deor.* 2.59.147ff.), communicates the joy in the interlocking and continuousness of physical parts. Where he advances empirical proofs for the existence of the gods, he propagates the well-known deist argument from the clock-work functioning of the cosmos. But the bulk of that speech is an encomium on the beauty and the serviceability of the natural world. His showing how everything in nature is marvelously adapted for the use of man results in an essay on the mouth, the gullet, the stomach, the lungs, and the bowels, whose fleshly physicality is pictured in a manner that should satisfy the most committed sensualist, which has its closest analogues in Senecan rehearsals of sickness, lust, and cannibalism. *Sumpatheia* inspires both jubilant praise of the organic beauty of the order created by the divinity and grisly catalogues of that order gone wrong. Cicero's *contagio* points to a dimension of *sumpatheia* that becomes extraordinarily fruitful in the conception and language of post-Greek tragedy, that is, in the perception that when one constituent of the cosmos is disturbed or off balance, the whole world, because of the total interconnectedness, is affected. As one of the texts puts it: if a person is cut in his finger, the whole body suffers.

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Chapter Five

*Krasis*, the Flame and the Moist

"A drop of wine penetrates the whole ocean." This is Chrysippus's. way (*SVF* 2.479 and 480) of illustrating one of the extreme consequences of the Stoic doctrine of cosmic cohesiveness. He taught that bodies could be combined in one of three different ways: by mechanical juxtaposition, *parathesis*; by the generation of a new body from two old ones, *sunchusis*; or by a blend in which the identities of the two blended substances persist, *krasis* (*SVF* 2.473, 475, and passim). Of the three species of combining substances, the last, *krasis*, coextension, is the most radical development of the idea of *sumpatheia*. In Chrysippus's example, it is not just the case that there is not a single molecule of sea water that is not bonded with wine, but the reverse is also true: every particle of wine is mixed with water. This completes the lesson that may be drawn from other formulations of *sumpatheia*: on one interpretation, body, in Stoic physics, has neither extremity nor beginning nor end but infinite extension (*SVF* 2.485), and there is no contact between bodies, only *krasis* and interpenetration (*SVF* 2.487).

Senecan drama is replete with extraordinary demonstrations of *krasis*. Here is one example. The nurse tells Medea that she is alone and defenseless; Medea answers:

Medea superest; hic mare et terras vides
ferrumque et ignes et deos et fulmina.
Medea is alive. In me you find both sea
And land and fire and sword and gods and thunderbolts.

*Med 166–67*
One modern critic speaks of Seneca's literal and figurative running together of sea and land. He distinguishes this from Euripides' less conflationary practice. I would stress "literal" over "figurative." **Krasis**, coextension, removes the need for figurality and comparison, though the poetic speech often appears to retain the traditional forms of linkage. In any case, the dramatic figurality is based on the literal acceptance of *krasis* in the Stoa. Another example, which will come up again in another context, is the brief hubristic career of the lesser Ajax in *Agamemnon* 532–56. Here we have a Herculean character built into a storm, to enhance our sense of its fury. Ajax embraces the lightning and becomes lightning himself:

```plaintext
dirimit insanum mare
fluctusque rumpit pectore et navem manu
complexus ignes traxit et caeco mari
conlucet Ajax; omne resplendet fretum.
Head-on he breaks the waves. Grappling the ship
He trails a burst of fire on the lightless brine:
Ajax burns bright, and the ocean blazes back.
(Aga 540–43)
```

The storm itself is relevant. It is the cosmic counterpart both to the Trojan War and, more significantly, to the inner war in Clytaemestra. For the time being, the storm is a surrogate for the queen's fury; the two occupy the same imaginary space. R. D. Laing's "engulfment" and "implosion," categories explored in his *The Divided Self*, are modern analogues to the psychological and aesthetic implications of *krasis*. The craving for fusions, seemingly at odds with literary and dramatic selectivity, is part of the power of the Senecan vision.

Coextension would seem to fly in the face of the Aristotelian, commonsense assumption of identity, according to which no two bodies can occupy the same space, an assumption argued with great force and much rancor by the most important of the ancient critics of Stoic krasis, Alexander of Aphrodisias (ca. 200 of our era). Logically, there is also a distinction between coextension and that aspect of *sumpatheia* according to which one body or substance influences or affects another. But the formula "body passes through body"—*soma dia somatos chorei* (SVF 2.469)—indicates the affinity of *sumpatheia* and *krasis* (and, consequently, change). However distinct in terms of logical definition, the two models are mutually supportive, as we shall see when the various concepts we have been discussing are tested against the Senecan material. Stoic *tonos* further authenticates the assumption that one and the same unit of space can be occupied by more than one object.

The most celebrated and most discussed homogenization of this sort is that of body and soul, both of them corporeal, though the soul is a more rarified substance. But in addition to this ancient challenge to the mind-body dualism, the imperial Stoic texts insist on the coextension of all sorts of pairs of seeming opposites and irreconcilables, including life and death, the special condition always being that in this integration the two merged identities or substances are preserved as identities. Coextension was to bear marvelous fruit in much of the mannerist writing of the Stoic Renaissance. This is how Chapman describes two lines of swordsmen lining up against each other:

```plaintext
Every man's look showed, fed with either's spirit,
As one had been a mirror to another,
Like forms of life and death; each took from other;
And so were life and death mixed at their heights,
That you could see no fear of death, for life,
Nor love of life, for death . . .
(Bussy D'Ambois 2.1.45–50)
```

To be sure, in the next line Chapman cites as the authority for the thought that life and death "in all respects are one" the Skeptic Pyrrho. But in fact Pyrrho could also be quoted for the opposite opinion, or for the opinion that nothing meaningful could be said about either life or death. The possibility of thinking that life and death are consubstantial goes back to Heraclitus, but finds its classical confirmation in the *krasis* texts of the Stoics.

*Krasis* is the most powerful manifestation of *sumpatheia*, especially of what we might call "affective" *sumpatheia*, the force that not only
binds the particles of the universe together, but in fusing them affects, *confuses*, and disturbs them. Susceptibility to being affected extends to inorganic matter as well as organic. When the Stoicizing Philo says that the structure of inorganic matter is a bond, not unbreakable, but hard to dissolve, the statement confirms the bondedness but also leaves room for the element of disorder that the ubiquitous interconnectedness and affectability, the *contagio*, entails. This is the philosophical grounding—hinted at in the Stoic writings but usually smothered by a missionary optimism—for the remarkable flourishing of *contagio* and *arrostrma* in Senecan drama. Where the imbalance has its origin—what small flaw it is that initiates the toppling of the harmonious structure and induces the rippling effect of havoc and suffering—is passed over in silence. Whether it is a minute deviation in the course of one of the planets that sets off the wider disaster or a piece of human stupidity or indulgence that triggers a cosmic turbulence is hard or impossible to discover. What is clear is that the potential and desirable, but never demonstrable, harmony can be upset from both directions, through the agency of *krasis*, the irritation induced by confluence, and that human and environmental disturbances go hand in hand. *Krasis*, the fusion or coextension of entities that a well–designed harmony would keep apart in friendly discreteness, completes the work of *sumpatheia*, and substantially guarantees a spoilage of that harmony.

To appreciate the difference between the Greek tradition and the new focus of Senecan tragedy, it is useful to look at a passage in Euripides' *Hecuba* (592–602). The ancient queen develops the precise moral calculus that has always guided her action: contrary to what we see in the case of the soil, where it is a matter of chance whether the harvest is good or bad, a good person will always be good, and a bad person bad, no matter what the circumstances. This is a distinction, not only between adventitious luck and innate quality, which has recently been the subject of much discussion, but also between an ethically indeterminate world around us and morally determined humanity. Stoic science is not at liberty to allow this contrast between material and spiritual values. To be sure, there is no scarcity of statements in the Stoic writers alleging, like Euripides' heroine, that a good person will do good, and a bad person the opposite. But the implications of cosmic *sumpatheia* countermand the simplicity of that faith.

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The graphic detail of the plague in the first chorus of *Oedipus*, mentioned earlier, is anticipated by a remarkable speech by Oedipus himself, which highlights the impossibility of any member of the collective being excepted from the general malaise:

*cui reservamur malo?*
*inter ruinas urbis et semper novis*
*defienda lacrimis funera ac populi struem*
*incolmis astro—scllicit Pheobi reus.*
*sperare poteras sceleribus tantis dari*
*regnum salubre? fecimus caelem nocens.*

For what new horror

Am I reserved? Amidst my city's woes,

Amid funeral pyres kept streaming with fresh tears,

Amid the piles of the dead, I stand unscathed,

Apollo's felon? Could you have hoped to gain

A wholesome kingdom for your deadly deeds?

I have spread my guilt to the sky.

*Oed* 31–36)

About the rapid pendulation between "I" and "you" and back to "I," I shall have something to say later (see chapter 7 below). Here Oedipus, at the center of a diseased world, knows that the disease will translate itself to him also. But he also knows that in some mysterious way he is himself responsible for the cosmic sickness. Man and the world have become linked, with infection the inescapable accessory and coextension the dreaded consequence.

The pestilential double bind recalls Artaud's theater as plague, from which streams the contagion of all the plagues buried in the soul. Perhaps we are also reminded of the Jacobean revenge play in which the virtuous revenger cannot but take on the viciousness of the tyrant. When Antonio and his allies, in Marston's *Antonio's Revenge*, cut out Piero's tongue, and serve him a dish of Julio's flesh, before stabbing him to death, only to be praised as saviors by their fellow citizens, the automatism of the spreading evil and its outrageous physicality point back to the same insight that Cicero's *contagio* catches in a word. (One wonders what effect the performance by the boy actors might have had on the audience!)
Seneca himself, in his philosophical writings, leans on the medical trope to throw the spotlight on, but also apologize for, the spread of corruption. In a characteristically overwrought passage in the Epistles (95.22ff.), he chalks up the increasing complexity of the physician's art to diseases caused by the manner and nature of what people eat. But this thought sequence turns out to have been an extended simile for the decay of philosophy in the wake of the corruption in the hearts and bodies of men and women. We recall that the body is *causarium ac fluidum perturatumque*, vulnerable, unstable, and destined to perish (NQ 1 prol. 4). In Seneca's drama the medical aspect of *sumpatheia* turns into obsession, a fervid fixation upon the malignant interlocking and fusion of cosmic constituents. Compare Donne:

Is this the honour which man hath... that he hath these earthquakes in himself, sudden shakings; these lightnings, sudden flashes; these thunders, sudden noises; these blazing stars, sudden fiery exhalations; these rivers of blood, sudden red waters? . . . O perplexed disposition, O riddling distemper, O miserable condition of man!

(Devotions, 1st meditation)

We have seen that the radical corporealism of the Stoa gives poetry a chance to express its insights in a language that emphasizes physicality. Before moving on to other poetic and dramatic entailments of *sumpatheia* and *krasis*, I would like to spell out further the importance of physicality in the Senecan scheme. Joy and horror, approval and disgust, are voiced so as to elicit the vision and feeling of massed bodies and sensory impact. The official, evangelistic impulse is one of marvelling at the material appropriateness of the physical world. Balbus's hymn to reason and speech in Cicero's *De natura deorum* 2.59.147ff. starts with empirical proofs of the existence of the gods, along with passing observations on cosmic behavior, the consensus of men, recorded divine manifestations, and divination. The bulk of the speech is an encomium on the beauty and suitability of the natural world, detailed in somatic, even anatomical terms. Similarly, the same Stoic speaker, at 2.54.133ff., after rehearsing the variety, fullness, and harmony of the elements, and of the heavenly bodies, and appending a translation of verses from the astronomer-poet Aratus, launches into a paean of how everything in nature is beautifully adapted for the use of man. We recall that he celebrates the mouth, the gullet, the stomach, the lungs, and the bowels, and the machinery of the intake of food. Marcus Aurelius's reflections often carry the same message. As he talks about the life of the mind (10.35), the emperor proceeds not only to vision and dentition but also to digestion to vindicate the excellence of the divine design. He articulates his delight in corporeal attractions, even ugliness:

If a man has sensibility and deeper insight into the workings of the Universe, scarcely anything... but will seem to him to form in its own peculiar way a pleasing adjunct to the whole. And he will look on the actual gaping jaws of wild beasts with no less pleasure than the representations of them by limners and modellers; and he will be able to see in the aged of either sex a mature prime and comely ripeness... And many such things there are which do not appeal to everyone, but will come home to him alone who is genuinely intimate with Nature and her works.

(Meditations 2.2, tr. C. R. Haines)

Physicality is the key word for these capital exhibitions of the good that Stoic optimism finds in all the workings of a harmonious world visualized as a cooperative body. Our earlier observation that "Stoic ethics is ultimately parasitical on physics" can be focussed more narrowly to declare that Stoicism pushes its language toward the experience of physicality, and especially of the physicality of living bodies and their parts and their relations. This is not the same as Nietzsche's panegyric of physics as a foundation for rejecting outworn moral values. Rather, moral values and physical experience are felt to be coextensive and identical.

But physicality, because of the implications of *krasis* and *contagio* and the uncontrollable potential of dislocation and arrostema, can (and, ultimately, must) work in the opposite direction and challenge the most resolute optimism. The same Marcus Aurelius also recommends (6.13) that the experience of the physical be realistic; that as one eats pork one should think: this is a dead pig; as one makes love, one should think: this is rubbing a bit of flesh and spasmodically excreting a bit of mucus. For delusion, he explains, is unwarranted; the physicality must not be mistaken for a source of beauty and enjoyment only. Disgust must be a close neighbor of delight; only in that way can the corporeality of all that is be fully appreciated. Thus the cleavage of the human and the cosmic is erased under the aegis of the coexten-
sion of the aesthetic and the physical, the healthy and the sick, the corporeal and the limitless. In the words of M. Bakhtin about Rabelais (with some acknowledgement also of the contributions of Pico, Giambattista Porta, Giordano Bruno, and Campanella): "The grotesque body has no facade, no impenetrable surface... It contains, like Pantagruel's mouth, new unknown spheres. It acquires cosmic dimensions, while the cosmos acquires a bodily nature."\[18\]

In modern and postmodern criticism, physicality has come to be ranged closely with figuraiity and allegory, with language furnishing its own body alienated from the plane of reference and burgeoning into pure signification. " Allegories are in the realm of thoughts what ruins are in the realm of things."\[19\] The victory of the signifier over the signified generates the materiality, the physicality, sometimes the paresis of speech and literatures.\[20\] The aims of these modern critics are vastly different from what Seneca and Marcus Aurelius (and, for that matter, Rabelais) had in mind. Stoic radicalism and Seneca's own apocalyptic vision shy away from the allegorical uses of a nature that, because of the demands of _krasis_, takes its identities _au pied de la lettre_. The Stoic allegorizers are at pains to relocate human affairs in the cosmic edifice where they are truly at home. But the postmodern emphasis on physicality spilling over into a language that approaches autonomy in regard to its customary usages bears some faint resemblance to the linguistic power of the body in Senecan verse.

For the autonomy of the body speaking its own language, we could cite no finer example than the drunken ditty—or is it a serious rejoicing at the recovery of good fortune?—chanted by Thyestes (Thy 920ff.) as he feasts on his children's flesh. He wants to be merry, but the very roses on his head wither, he sweats and groans, sadness and tears overcome him, and _ululare libet_, he has an urge to howl. He thinks these are signs of _impending_ trouble; he wonders _an habet lacrimas magna voluptas_, whether great joy has its store of tears. But then:

>nolunt manus pareere,Crescit pondus et dextram gravat;

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admotus ipsis Bacchus a labris fugit
circaque rictus ore decreto fluit,
et ipsa trepido mensa subsiluit solo.
The hands will not obey; the cup—
How heavy it has grown, how it resists
The grasp! And see how now the wine itself,
Though lifted to the mouth, avoids the touch,
And flees the disappointed lips. Behold,
The table totters on the trembling floor.
(985–89)

And later:
_Quis hic tumultus viscera exagitat mea?
quid tremuit intus? sentio impatiens onus
meumque gemitu non meo pectus gemit._
What is this tumult torturing my bowels?
_Why do my vitals quake? I feel a load
Unbearable, and from my inmost heart
Come groans that are not mine._
(999–1001)

The body owns a knowledge of itself that, temporarily, is beyond the control and understanding of the remedial mind. As Walter Benjamin asserted about the character of German baroque drama: history is victimized by physical nature, and thus secularized and spatialized; man is a creature, on the same level as animals and plants, and thus not a candidate for salvation.\[21\]

The prominence of the body and the bodily, the language of the body, and language as body: these are the marks that link the vitality and the despair of Senecan drama most closely to the Stoa. Amphitryon recognizes Hercules by his body:
_agnosco toros_ 
_umerosque et alto nobile in trunco caput._
_I recognize the limbs
And shoulders and the noble head upon
Its mighty trunk._
(HF 624–25)

The man is identified by his muscles and by his viscera.\[22\] In _Epistle_ 11.1 Seneca dwells on the automatism of the body; prompted by the
blushing of a young man, he admits that the natural behavior of the body cannot be regulated by intelligence. People blush, sweat, tremble, even intelligent and well-disciplined people, and there is nothing they can do about it. In Epistle 120.15–16 he associates the complaints of the body with our universal lack of stability and then cites Horace on fickleness.

Thyestes’ agonized comments on the children in his maw (Thy 104ff.), Atreus's details of the cooking of the children, earlier reported by the messenger (105ff., 64ff.); the grandiose description of the sea monster that prompts the death of Hippolytus (Phae 1035–49) and of the mangling of Hippolytus's body by the horses (1093–1104), and Theseus's abortive attempt (125ff.) to collect the pieces that might reconstitute Hippolytus's body: these are just a few of the numerous passages in which bodies assert their rights and the language of the body flowers and seethes. Melancholy and despair tied to the body can reach virtually Shandyesque proportions, as when Oedipus talks about his intrauterine predestination for evil:

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The messenger's account of the killing of the children by Atreus (Thy 71ff.) seems stylized and almost restrained: one corpse continues to stand, and then falls on the killer; a head, complaining indistinctly, rolls aside; the third corpse, struck by two wounds, falls and quenches the altar fires. These zigzag enactments of death are Hellenistic in origin; parallels may be found in Apollonius's *Argonautica* (3.138ff.). The authentic ugliness is reserved, as a surprise (744–48), for the account that follows (755ff.): the intestines are pulled out, and the bodies are cut up for the stewing and frying. The fire, the water, and the smoke are all reluctant to collaborate.

Amphitryon's description (HF 991ff.), in spurts, of what happens to Hercules' children and to Megara is delivered in the noisome physical terms we have come to expect. Roman literature, from Ennius on, delights in scenes where heads or limbs cut off continue to have a life of their own. In the Greek repertory that has come down to us, *Philoctetes* and *Rhesus* are the only plays that have any claim to showing something equivalent to the physicality and the ugliness of Seneca's scenic art. Once again, baroque drama, such as Garnier's *Porcie* and Gryphius's *Katharina von Georgien*, furnishes the closest parallels to Seneca's obsessive somatic particularity. When Porcie learns that Brute has fallen, she invokes the infernal tortures of old: she wants to have her heart torn by fiery tongs; she begs for her heart, her sinews, her bones, her lungs to be burned, cut, broken, pulverized (1638–51). In Garnier's *Antigone*, Oedipe is disgusted with his body:

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Ugliness, aimless motion, victimization, revulsion: contagion here turns synecdoche for the reciprocality that *sumpatheia* demands.

The raw dramaturgy of the body spreads effortlessly, but methodically, across all parts of the cosmos. Where the universe and its manifestations are felt to be uncontrollable—that is, where evil is feared to be automatic and mandatory—the Stoic scientist and sentient, deprived of choice or responsibility, can revel in its aesthetic horror. We must remind ourselves that the graduation from "ugly" to "evil" and vice versa is possible only at the level where the moral and the aesthetic have been redefined in the terms of cosmic corporeality. Elsewhere the preferred term of Stoic ethics is *to cheiron*, "the worse," a comparative that magnifies the power of intelligibility in the scale of things.
Chrysippus is said to have stated that, by analogy with the human head, which as the seat of reason needs to be delicate and therefore also vulnerable, flaws occur not by nature, but by certain unavoidable consequences of nature.\[29\] The logic of this statement is tortuous, but the implication seems to be that as nature develops ever subtler forms, it surrenders some of its defenses. There is this difference between dominant Stoic doctrine and what we find in Senecan tragedy: Chrysippus and other Stoics, including Seneca in most of his prose works, make allowances for a world that is fundamentally admirable, and whose basic goodness, though shot through with the untoward effects that come with *sumpatheia* and *contagio*, can still be divined, lived up to, and praised. In Senecan drama the scope for decency and goodness is greatly narrowed, and the consequences have rendered the world awash with a degree of instability and ugliness that can be read into the very definition of the cosmos.\[30\] To revert to an earlier topic, ugliness is easily linked with self-dramatization; the hero's insistence on his suffering and on the physicality of that suffering, and the disgust with the self that is thinly disguised by the boasting, cannot but issue in a kind of heroic vulgarity.

There is virtually no trace left of that other explanation of evil, parallel to the argument from consequences, that is eloquently expressed by Epictetus: after proposing that snot and running noses give the hands a chance to show what they can do, he continues: "What do you think Heracles would have amounted to, if there had not been a lion like the one he encountered, and a hydra . . . ?"\[31\] This is the accounting for evil as assisting the good, or as forming a foil to it. The ugly is a corollary of the beautiful, as Marcus Aurelius tells us (6.36); they have the same origin, and deserve the same reverent contemplation. This is an old position, found as early as Plato, if not earlier. It is more optimistic and less subtle than the argument from consequences, which in Plato appears in the guise of the errant cause. The role of the former in early Stoicism, and in Senecan drama, is virtually nil. The example of Phaethon, the Ovidian treatment of which is cited in *De providentia* 5.10–11, demonstrates that the testing of bravery results in dislocation and perdition. "*Per alta virtus it,* " Seneca's melancholy comment on the youth's daring, is virtually identical with the fuller formulation which I have cited as the quintessential motto of Senecan heroism (above, p. 7).

The argument from consequences is not very different from, and perhaps a subspecies of, the argument from infection. The second chorus of *Phaedra*, on Beauty (736ff.)—both the beauty of Hippolytus and Beauty in general; the progress of the choral essay weaves the two together in a flexible tissue—zeroes in on the imperilled state of a splendor that cannot isolate itself from danger and inroads, even in the benign isolation that Hippolytus has chosen for himself. Once again, it is merely a short step from this pinpointing of vulnerability to the dramatization of full cosmic disorder, as sampled in the fourth chorus of *Thyestes* (789ff.); or to the Roman theme of *exilium*, the threat to the commonwealth and the purgation of the city by removing the contagious and potentially lethal intruder, a theme that is exploited in Seneca's *Medea* as powerfully as in Cicero's *Catilinarians*, except that Seneca's urging of *sumpatheia* negates the possibility of removal and purgation.

I have already noted that at the end of each book of the *Naturales quaestiones* Seneca chooses to bring science and ethics together under the aegis of the life of physicality. Book 4, on the Nile and on snow and hail and the effects of heat, terminates with an attack on vicious Romans who cool their distemper and indigestion in snow and ice. At the end of book 5, a disquisition on winds is closed off with a denunciation of greed. And book 3 furnishes a transition from talk about waters and rivers and their fertile abundance to the superfluities of luxurious living. The *tertium comparationis* is fish. They are plentiful in nature; contrast this, Seneca complains, with the extravagance and idiocy of cultivating fish for gourmet food.\[32\] It is clear that at these moments Seneca does not find in the observation of the order of the cosmos the consolation that he looks for elsewhere, as, for example, in *Ad Marciam* 18. By the same token, Senecan drama is a repudiation of

Balbus's argument in support of the beauty and the stability of animal and vegetable life. Seneca accepts the Stoic preoccupation with physicality, but balances the joy of it with sadness and disgust. Within the rubric of dramatic action the special quality of deeds is that they tend to be crimes; and such crimes must be open for all to see and feel and smell within
a setting commensurate with them. Their openness is a function of their physical and biological essence and impact, of their bodiliness.

But corporeality must not be confused with solidity. Senecan drama conceives of process not only as the action of muscle and vigorous animal tissue; it puts a large premium also on blood, bile, entrails, storms, earthquakes, and conflagrations, with special attention to those viscous and mucous and putrescent elements that document the fluidity and the proneness to disease of all that is, which are calculated to incite our disgust. As we have noted, the *sump[ath]e[ia]* of the world body carries in its wake a constant confrontation with dissolution and corrosion, a tendency to decompose and melt. Critics have remarked on the heavy emphasis on slime and rankness in the writings of some of the contemporaries of Seneca, such as Lucan and Persius, writers who are equally obsessed with the inclination of their world to go to pieces in a manner likely to offend our sense of smell or sight. This tendency of Stoic drama and Stoic poetry to go for corruption was as pronounced in the Renaissance as it was in the first century of our era. In a telling chapter entitled "The Transmutation of *King Lear,"" a recent critic has spelled out the prominence of the agents of decay and putrefaction, of dew and solvents, as part of the process defining the man. Repulsion comes to be the authentic answer to the experience of a world rotting away. The pregnability of bodily nature helps to certify the inexorability of evil; hopelessness becomes drama’s gain.

In act 4, scene 1 (154–58) of *Bussy D’Ambois*, Montsurry says to Tamyra, whom he suspects of misconduct with Bussy:

*I know not how I fare; a sudden night
Flows through my entrails; and a headlong chaos
Murmurs within me, which I must digest,
And not drown her in my confusions,
That was my life’s joy, being best informed."

The meteorological and seismological speculations in *Naturales quaestiones* turn on fire as a rolling, volcanic substance, rather than on its function as a pure, dry emitter of light. Throughout *Hercules Furens* there is talk of burning, heating, scorching; when Hercules awakes after the terror of his rampage, he wants to burn himself. The Stoics distinguished between productive fire, the vital element co-substantial with the rational seed that is also God, and destructive fire, "lacking skill," the fire that stands for the negative volatility of the world, and that periodically erupts in an act of total conflagration. Cataclysm and
conflagration are merely two different ways of talking about the world consuming itself by the logic of its indigenous contagion (see also below, pp. 148f.). Fire and water jointly form the corporeal matrix within which mutability, a constant theme in Seneca's writings, expresses itself.  

More typically, ruin is embodied in clouds, smoke, and chaos. Book 3 of *Naturales quaestiones* is entirely about fluids and veers back and forth between the cosmic and the human, between the physical and the (supposedly) spiritual. At one point (3.15.4) we read: As in our bodies, so in the earth it is the humors that often generate the flaws: *humores vitia concipiunt*. Liquidity is both the setting and instigator of everything that is wrong with the world. It is the sensible index of *contagio*. Life is a “sea of troubles,” as we learn in the *Consolatio ad Polybium*, written to console a freedman of Claudius when Seneca was in exile in Corsica:

omnis vita supplicium est: in hoc profundum inquietumque proiecti mare, alternis aestibibus reciprocum et modo adlevans nos subitis incrementis, modo maioribus damnis deferens iactans numquam stabilis loko. pendemus et fluctuamur et alter in alterum inilidimur et aliquando naufragium facimus, semper timemus in hoc tam procelloso et in omnes tempestates exposito mari navigantibus nullus portus nisi mortis est.

All life is a mortification. Cast out on that deep and restless sea, a variable, fluctuating seasaw that raises us high with sudden windfalls only to take us down again with tremendous losses, we are never sure of a firm foothold. We remain suspended and are tossed about and bruise one another. Shipwreck is not uncommon; fear is constant. As we sail along on this ocean pounded by squalls and exposed to storms from all quarters, there is no haven save that of death. (9.6)

The fourth chorus of *Thyestes* dwells on this ruin:

trepidant, trepidant pectora magno
percussa metu,
ne fatali cuncta ruina
quassata labent iterumque deos
hominesque premat deforme chaos,
itern terras et mare et ignes⁴⁴⁰
et vaga picti sidera mundi
natura tegat.
Our hearts are trembling, battered with fright
That all the world collapse in ruin,
And shapeless chaos as before crush down
Both gods and men, and nature bury once more
All land and sea and fire and the coursing stars
Of the firmament.
(Thy 828–35)

Ruin itself, etymologically, is a "flowing," a rush and a collapse like that of overly wet clay.⁴¹ Cosmic flux is a favorite theme or image in the Stoic poets of the first century of our era; the imagery of dissolution, that is, contagion and liquefaction, is pervasive in many places in Lucan's *Pharsalia*:

membra natant sanie, surae fluxere . . .
. . . et nigra destillant inguina tabe.
The limbs swam in corruption, the calves began
To flow . . . the groin dripped with black flux.
(Pharsalia 9.770–72)

Liquidity need not be catastrophic; again and again it enters the text as a token of the locus in which human affairs are precariously anchored. Men must understand that

vitam mortemque per vices ire et composita dissolvit, dissoluta componi
Life and death alternate: where joined, they dissolve, where dissolved, they are rejoined.
(Ep. 71.14)

*Troades*, Seneca's most subtle and most sensitive dramatic composition, unfolds against the backdrop sketched early in the play. Hecuba comments on the collapse of Troy, and on her own situation:

nec caelum patet
undante fumo: nube ceu densa obsitus
ater favilla squalet illaca dies.
The face of heaven is hid
By that dense, wreathing smoke; our city's day,
As if beset by some thick, lowering cloud,
Grows black and foul beneath the ash.
(Tro 19–21)
Undante, "billowing": once again the deluge furnishes the imagery for the moment of disaster and for the sense of desolation that ensues.

In a passage which has something in common with Bussy's "I know not how I fare,"

Phaedra says of her suffering:

pectus insanum vapor
amorque torret. intimis saevus fuit
penitus medullis atque per venas meat
viscibus ignis mersus et venis latens
ut agilis alas flamma percurrat trabes.\(^2\)

My maddened heart with vaporous love is scorched;
My inmost marrow rages with the fire.
Concealed within my vitals it travels through
The veins and, hidden there, it races like
The flame that guts the highest timbers.
(Phae 640–44)

The crucial word here is vapor. In this particular instance vapor and love form one single element, a *hendiadys*, as is indicated by the verb in the singular, torret. In line 102, vapor is the word used of Phaedra's suffering. In *Hercules Oetaeus* 1613, *vapores* is a synonym for *flammæ*. The shade of Tantalus, at the beginning of *Thyestes* (87–89), refers to himself as crime personified, in the guise of vapor and pestis.

Vapor is exhalation. It is a fugitive, but potent, substance, sharing

in the moist and the dry, in heat and chill. It serves as a pregnant fixing of the Stoic perception that the world, both in its quotidian state and at critical junctures, is "vaporous": This brave o'erhanging firmament . . . appeareth no other thing to me
than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours.
(Hamlet 2.2.316–18)

Vapor is common in *Naturales quaestiones*, as are its derivatives *vaporans*, *vaporarius*, *vaporatio*. In book 6, on earthquakes, Seneca has the vapors either causing the quakes (chapter II) or being a poisonous side effect of them (chapters 27 and 28). As exhalations, they nourish the celestial bodies, including the sun. But vapores can also kill.\(^3\) The Sun draws up the vapors of the earth and the sea, with important consequences for the equilibrium of the environment. Exhalations are held responsible for material changes early in Greek literature and philosophy, from Hesiod and Heraclitus to Aristotle. But it was in Stoic cosmology that the focus on fluidity and *contagio* made talk of vapors unusually fruitful. Here vapor is both the stuff of the world, a stand-in for the pneuma, and a manifest sign of fluctuation and instability. The earth and the human body are compared for their vessels of fluids, and for the corruption spread by them.\(^4\) Just as, Seneca says (*NQ* 3.15.2ff.), there are within us many kinds of *humor*, not only the blood, but the brain, the marrow, mucus, spit, tears, and the lubricant that moves our joints, so the earth contains its own varieties of *humor*. Some are necessary, others are contaminated and more gelatinous. In the sequel Seneca elaborates the dire consequences that ensue from the operation of the fluids. Once again, *contagio* and putrefaction are the well-nigh automatic corollaries of the world's vaporous identity, in which even the gods (all but Zeus, who equals the *pneuma*) are subject to change and dissolution (*SVF* 2.1049ff.).

The plays are the beneficiaries of this kind of thinking, including *Hercules Oetaeus*, which Chapman mined for *Bussy D'Ambois*. The playwright combines Greek scientific topoi about liquefaction and cloud formation with the Stoic concept of the energy field to herald the

critical moments when the precarious balance is, as it must regularly be, evaporated, with incalculable consequences for the health and the sanity of the characters and their designs. The invasion of the psychological realm by language originally devised to plumb physical and biological processes is the most important contribution Seneca made to the development of European drama. Such language is unthinkable on the stage before the advent of a philosophy\(^5\) that envisages life, not as an orderly system of stable and mutually exclusive schemata, but as a complex of energies and tensions defining the relations between entities that constantly threaten to metamorphose into one another. Chapman and Marston fully exploit this impetus provided by a new integrating science of meteorological flux:\(^6\)

O now it nothing fits my cares to speak
But thunder, or to take into my throat
The trump of Heaven, with whose determinate blasts
The winds shall burst, and the enraged seas
Be drunk in his sounds; that my hot woes
Vented enough, I might convert to vapour,
Ascending from my infancy unseen,
Shorten the world, preventing the last breath
That kills the living, and regenerates death.

(Bussy D’Ambois 5.1.41–49)

This is once again the voice of Montsury, to whom, through the last act of the play, the most "cosmic" speech is given. It is instructive to compare the third chorus of Seneca’s Medea (579ff.), in which the jealousy of the deserted wife is said to be more potent—nulla vis tanta, quanta cum—than fire, wind, rain, a river in flood, and snow melting. The force of "more," which appears to cancel the identity of the heroine’s feelings with the meteorological correlates, is undone, not only by the power of the imagery in the lyric, but by the scene of witchcraft that follows, in which the magical coextension of the psychological and the cosmological is ritually clinched.

Or take Massinissa in Marston’s Sophonisba:

Thou whom, like sparkling steel, the strokes of chance
Made hard and firm, and, like wild-fire turn’d,
The more cold fate, the more thy virtue burn’d,
And in whole seas of miseries didst flame:
On thee, loved creature of a deathless fame,
Rest all my honour.

(5.4.49–54)

The temporary hardening for which Massinissa admires Sophonisba is, by virtue of the poetry, drowned in the rush of conflagrations and "whole seas of miseries." The cosmic energies, far from merely forming the setting within which the agent maintains his own solid integrity, turn into a trope for the volatility of all natural behavior. Indeed, "trope" is the wrong word; they come to occupy the very heart of the human endeavor. In the Senecan world, the natural forces do not serve as icons; they are the human energies, caught at a different angle.

From the plays of Seneca, I choose, at random, two characteristic passages. Near the end of the first chorus of Oedipus, the pestilence is apostrophized:

O dira novi facies leti,
gravior leto:
piger ignavos alligat artus
languor, et aegro rubor in vultu,
maculaeque caput sparsere leves;
tum vapor ipsam corporis arcem
flameus unit
multoque genas sanguine tendit,
oculique rigent et sacer ignis
pascitur artus.[48]

O cruel, strange new form of death,
And worse than death!
A weary languor seizes the sluggish
Limbs, a sickly redness marks the face,
The head is blotched with subtle stains.
Soon fiery vapor burns the body’s
Secret citadel

And throbbing temples swell with blood.
The eyes turn rigid; a cursed flame
Devours the limbs.

(Oed 180–87)

Here both vapor and ignis, the two vital manifestations of pneuma, are made symptomatic of the plague.

In act 2 of Seneca’s Agamemnon (108ff.), Clytaemestra addresses herself and her animus, her soul, as if that animus were the equivalent of the Greek anemos, "wind," though the principal burden of the imagery comes from the sea and from fire rather than from the air. In her wavering between plans of aggression and thoughts of secret flight, the imagery of motion and of flux comes naturally, though the pervasiveness of the environmental language is remarkable. After the initial quid fluctuaris? "Why do you [= I] waver [= act the wave]?” and after the nurse’s recommendation of delay, Clytaemestra develops a self-portrayal of flaming and watery uncertainty:
In the last line, Clytaemestra identifies her irresolute self with the sea in motion. Unlike the cross-action of the surge in the simile about Nestor's thinking (Iliad 14.16–19), the attack of the wind and the action of the surf are both seen as mala; the environmental processes are drawn into the orbit of the moral life and receive their moral rating accordingly. In the end Clytaemestra surrenders herself to the flux: "It is best to follow chance," optimum est casum sequi (144). Thus pain, terror, jealousy, lust, conscience, anger, and hope are, like the bodies in which they are experienced, made over into functions of winds and flames and waves. They are struck and pressed and floated and piloted as if the only sea and the only fire that counted were those found in the soul. Flux rules supreme; the imbrication of the wavering soul within the tide of waves and winds makes cruel demands upon the self. The Stoic sensibility, regarding everything as impermanent and evanescent, fixes on the present with a frantic and parodic obsession. The Senecan selves and their actions are so often exaggerated and their motives distorted precisely because from a true philosophical vantage point their fixity is illusory, their limitation within the human realm is swept out of court, and the benevolent tolerance that the essayist Seneca and the memoirist Marcus Aurelius call for is, especially for the purposes of drama, not an available option.

Chapter Six
Sickness, Portents, and Catastrophe

utrum poetae Stoicos depraverint an Stoici poetis dederint auctoritatem non facile dixerim; portenta enim ab utrisque et flagitia dicuntur.

Whether it is the poets who have corrupted the Stoics or the Stoics who have given the license to the poets is hard to say. But it is a fact that both of them have things to say that are monstrous and appalling.

This is Gaius Aurelius Cotta speaking, orator, politician, and spokesman for the Academy in Cicero's De natura deorum (3.38.91). The time has come to recapitulate and to expand some of our earlier findings, preparatory to focussing more narrowly on some of Seneca's literary techniques. To begin with, a reminder that the Stoic obsession with contagio, krasis, humors, and sickness has to be squared with the undoubted truth that in their ethical deliberations, undisturbed by questions of cosmology and the natural sciences, the Stoics professed a stiff-lipped optimism, summarized in the famous commandment that the wise man, or the man who aspires to wisdom, or happiness, must seek to homologoumenos zen, to live in harmony.
Interpretations of this prescript differed, but it was commonly understood to mean: to live in conformity with nature. Idem est beate vivere et secundum naturam: it is the same to live happily and according to nature (VB 8.2); and beata est ergo vita conveniens naturae suae: the life that goes together with one's nature is happy (VB 3.3). The idea of an adaptive health, of an eudaimonia achieved by the proper direction of one's physical and spiritual being, was inherited from the Sophists, whom Plato had criticized for their shallow creed of adjustment. The optimism implied in the notion of a successful adaptation or integration is the principal feature of the power of positive thinking that most people associate with Stoic ethics. The interest of the Stoa in a harmonic order is supposed to be satisfied with the

thought that even evil actions and their consequences can be understood to fit intelligibly into a context determined by divine nature. Under such auspices, the perfectibility of man and society takes on the semblance of an accessible desideratum. Hence Seneca's sense, voiced at several points in the Naturales quaestiones, that a contemplation of the cosmic order helps a man to rise above what is base and to be at peace with himself. Again and again we find him saying things like "Nothing is more beautiful or more enduring or better organized than the cosmos" (I proleg. 14); or, earlier in the same section: "The full consummation of human felicity is attained when, all vice trampled under foot, the soul seeks the heights and reaches the inner recesses of nature" (tr. John Clarke).

Seneca is at his most mercurial in De vita beata, especially in chapter 8, where he develops the picture of the intelligent man who lives according to the rules of nature, and therefore happily:

hoc modo una efficitur vis ac potestas concors sibi et ratio illa certa nascetur non dissidens nec haesitan in opinionibus comprehensionibusque nec in persuasione, quae cum se disposit et partibus suis consentit et, ut ita dicam, concinuit, summum bonum tetigit.

In this manner [sc. by imitating the self-reliance and solidarity of the mundus and of the rector universi deus ] there comes into being one controlling power in harmony with itself, a confident intelligence unswayed and unhesitating in its views and perceptions and invulnerable to temptation. When it has taken up its position and ordered its forces and, as it were, rings true, it has achieved its highest good.

(VB 8.5)

The perfectionist optimism of this mood fuels a more abstract utopianism. In De providentia 2.1, we read:

nihil accidere bono viro mali potest; non miscentur contraria.

A good man cannot have any bad happen to him; contraries do not mix.

Seneca knows that the bonus of this platitude belongs to a zero-class; like Hecuba's erroneous calculus of the divisibility of mankind (cf. above, p. 116), Seneca's distinction between good and bad has its justification only in its context—that is, as a stratagem of consolation or circumscribed persuasion. But the context is an insecure foundation for the assurance of the mood. For within a brief space of the same treatise, Seneca says, first, that

boni viri . . . non trahuntur a fortuna, sequuntur illam et aequant gradus. Si scissent, antecessissent.

Good men . . . are not pulled along by fortune; they follow her and accommodate their steps to her. If they had known, they would have preceded her.

(5.4)

and

grande consolatium est cum universo rapi.

It is a great consolation to be caught up in the movement of the universe.

(5.8)

It won't do to say that the difference is between fortuna and universum . The words sequuntur and aequant demonstrate that in the former case as well as in the latter we are dealing with the basic Stoic prescript of "living in harmony." But Seneca appears uncertain whether the harmony is to be sought actively or passively; whether we should allow ourselves to be moved and indeed propelled by the rhythm of the universe, or whether we are to seek out ways of insinuating ourselves and our conduct into that rhythm, a procedure that might well produce unforeseen ripples in that harmony. More than a hint of the risk is shadowed in the lines addressed by the nurse to Hippolytus:

proinde vitae sequere naturam ducem:

urbem frequenta, civium coetum cole.

Thus follow nature as you shape your life:

Go into town, mix with the citizens!

(Phae 481–82)

We are very close here to the worldly melancholy of Pier Hein's jingle:
The road to wisdom?—Well, it's plain
And simple to express:
Err
and err
and err again
but less
and less
and less.18

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The third choral essay of Thyestes (546–622) clearly exposes the difficulties inherent in the demand to arrange one's life in conformity with nature. The essay sets out in praise of true pietas and true amor:
nulla vis maior pietate vera est.
No force is greater than true affection.
(Thy 549)

Significantly, however, the chorus spends more time detailing the troubled state temporarily remedied by the arrival of harmony, and at the end concludes with lines quoted before, to the effect that there is a constant vying of trouble and calm:
dolor ac voluptas
invicem cedunt; brevior voluptas.
Despair and Joy, each in turn,
Depart; Joy leaves the sooner.
(Thy 596–97)

It is of some interest that amor and pietas have in the progress of the essay been changed into their corporeal-aesthetic analogue, voluptas, in the teeth of the mainstream Stoic effort to keep the moral and the emotional faculties distinct. More important, the soft credo of the impregnability of virtue has been given up for the hard admission that in the world as we know it, pleasure, or joy, or happiness (if this is how we may translate voluptas) is invariably victimized. If it is true, as Seneca says in one of his consolations, that quidquid optimum homini est, id extra humanam potentiam iacet,
Whatever is best for a man, lies beyond his power,
(Helv. 8.4)

then nature, or the mundus, or whatever designation we want to use of the context in which we live, carries an intolerable burden. And that burden is both inexhaustible and morally ambivalent. As the chorus of Thyestes, horrified by the messenger's report, asks:
an ultra maius aut atrocius
natura recipit?
Is nature capable of even
Greater horrors?
the messenger replies:

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sceleris hunc finem putas?
grados est.
You think no worse is possible?
This is the prelude.
(Thy 745–47)

In the plays, natura tends to be brought in along with the idea of overthrowing its laws; vertere is the verb usually associated with it. As the ghost of Thyestes says:
versa natura est retro:
avo parentem, pro nefas, patri virum,
gnatis nepotes miscui—nocti diem.
Nature has been subverted:
I have worked damnable confusion, so
Father equals his father and both the son,
Grandsons turn into sons, and day turns night.5
(Aga 34–36)

How should we explain this enormous gulf between the routine command to live in harmony with nature, and the vulnerability, and indeed potential monstrousness, of that nature? Strictly speaking, it makes no sense to distinguish between a natural order and an overturned order; there is, in Seneca's frightening world, no uninfected, unimpaired nature to be inverted. The formulation versa natura est is dictated by the need of language to describe change and process as starting from a standard position.

In Senecan drama, and not only there but also in his essays and letters, men and women reveal themselves to us as sensing bodies, visceral aggregates, constantly in touch with the impulses of a materially conceived environment. The environment is not restricted to the immediate setting of the action. It is a structure of layered levels. Above the locale where
the agent is at home or has strayed, we find the successive strata of cosmic mobility, such as the winds, the constellations, and finally the perpetually changing divinities, while below one's feet the subterranean phenomena, which Seneca scrutinizes in the *Naturales quaestiones*, contribute their own dynamism. The "sympathetic," biochemical, perhaps ultimately alchemical, discovery that everything is part of one body, whose inner tensions generate ever-new configurations, enables Seneca to dramatize men and women in the cross fire of their habitat, and at the same time to picture the habitat as colored by human dynamics. Human beings and their world are constantly working on each other under the auspices of *contagio* and *krasis*. Together they form the complex known as "nature."[9]

The Stoic moralist knows that there is no such thing as a limited or moderate flaw. The most negligible frailty is inevitably transformed into gross peccability.[10] All vices are equal.[6]

The resonance of ethical relations vetoes the quarantine of a merely venial fault. In the fuller and more integrated sphere of experience, in which ethics and physicality mesh, the contagion is compounded. The close proximity and virtual interchangeability of imperfection and agitation and malady and vice is explored in *Epistle* 75 (esp. 11–12). In that context Seneca labors to keep the sickness (*morbus*) of the soul distinct from passion (*adeuctus*). But the reader senses, and other prose texts verify, that Seneca is here fighting a rearguard action against Stoic radicalism. The preamble of the Fury's speech to the ghost of Tantalus at the beginning of *Thyestes* is an exemplary text for the inescapable link between passion and transgression:

*certetur omni scelere et alterna vice*
*stringatur ensis; nec sit iratum modus*
*pudorve, mentes caecus instiget furor,*
*rabies parentum duret et longum nefas*
*eat in nepotes; nec vacet cuquam vetus*
*odisse crimem; semper oriatur novum,*
*nec unum in uno, dumque punitur scelus,*
*crescat.*

Be drawn the deadly sword
To every crime upraised, by every hand;

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Of angry passions let there be no end,
No shame of strife; let blinded fury's sting
Prick on their souls; seared by their breath of rage
May parents' hearts grow hard, and endless crime
To children's children draw their impious trail.
No time be given to hate their former crimes;
But let the new in quick succession rise,
Not one alone in each; and may their crimes,
Even while they suffer punishments, increase.

(*Thy* 25–32)

All the key words are there: *scelus, ira, furor, rabies, nefas, crimen, odisse*. They are fused in a spirit of precipitancy; one metamorphoses into another in an irresistible rush of malign enlargement, with dire social consequences (32–48) and an eventual infection of the cosmos (48–51). With all this as background—the Fury uses imperatives and jussives, but we understand that what are being presented are the natural expectancies in a sinful world, where *libido* is triumphant (46)—the particular offenses of Thyestes and Atreus appear merely normal and unsurprising. The tyrant divines in his heart and in his convulsed innards that his misdeeds can, and must, dislodge whole armies of tempests and portents, and that, conversely, the displacement or collapse of the zodiac, so often conjured up in the dramas, will stir up and destroy his own life. But the tyrant is not the only one faced with the incalculable consequences of his nature. The slightest stir of emotion, even with decent figures like Andromache in *Troades* or Hippolytus in *Phaedra*, must—and that is the tragic gain of the doctrine of *sumpatheia*—generate wholesale perdition. In Senecan drama, and the same insights press for recognition also in the essays and letters, there is no room for prudent men or women who manage to dissociate themselves from external ferment, just as there is no room for a nature that is untouched by the turmoils of the human condition.

The ideal of the Stoic saint who stands off by himself or who harmonizes his being with that of the larger world is just that, an ideal, and a blind one at that, in the light of what Stoic science tells Stoic ethics. It is an ideal conceivable only in terms of a partial understanding of
what Stoic cosmology mandates. *Epistle* 85, the document in which Seneca turns on the moderates and rebukes them for their belief that the *prudens* and *imperturbatus* (= *beatus*) is not entirely without some such affections as sadness, serves as a temporary hardening on the part of an author who elsewhere adopts a more tolerant pose, and who in his dramas turns up the full pitch of affective realism. Hercules' prayer for peace and regularity (*HF* 926ff.), that is, for the proper functioning of a lawful nature, is our best evidence for the abortiveness of the hope. As we know from Amphitryon (918–19), Hercules utters the prayer without first cleansing his hands of the blood of Lycus. This smallish ritual reminder is the palpable dramatic means of suggesting the inevitability of pollution, given the frailty of man. The prayer is barely ended before Hercules begins to register the irregularities (939ff.), and the *impossibilia* are for once made possible: the onset of darkness at noon and the dislocation and re-animalization of the constellation Leo. Amphitryon surmises that Hercules is imagining these horrors. But is not Hercules' vision more authentic than that of Amphitryon? His deeds prove his authority. In any case it is significant that Hercules first experiences his *furor* in the guise of cosmic convulsions. He describes and lives through a war of the heavens, with himself at the center of it, both seemingly disengaged and, more profoundly, its unmistakable and deeply responsible source. The natural consequence of a Stoic concern with the power of *contagio* is, as we have already seen, the prominence of the theme of sickness. Under the rubric of Stoic science, it does not matter whether the sickness is mental or physical. Seneca uses the language of sickness to talk about virtue and vice: 

*serpunt enim vitia et in proximum quemque transsiliunt et contactu nocent.* 

The vices creep along and cross over to anyone within reach and damage him with their touch. He continues: try to have contact with healthy people, that is, the wise. 

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*Ubi enim istum invenies, quem tot saeculis quaerimus? pro optimo est minime malus.* 

Where will you find him for whom we have been looking throughout the centuries? In his place we are content with the one least bad. 

(*TA* 7.3–4) 

There is an incongruity here. On the one hand, you may wish to protect yourself against vice by associating with virtuous people; on the other, the best we can hope for is the people who are least vicious. But vice is infectious, so we cannot really protect ourselves. The conclusion is implicit, but unassailable. The linkage of sickness and vice usually prompts a language of compulsion and rapidity: vice is quick, crime precipitous: 

*Rapienda Crebus in malis praeceps via est.* 

The path of sin is headlong and abrupt. 

(*Aga* 154) 

The canons of *tonos* and *krasis*, the corporealism, the tenet that cause and effect are action and being acted upon, compel a radical linguistic dynamism and the substitution of violence and speed for more abstract characterizations. 

The language in which sickness is reported and described always pays its dues to the sufferings of the body and to the material decomposition of which the sickness is a local symptom. More than any Roman literary models upon which Seneca might have relied, *Epistle* 78, on diseases and pains, comes close to the acknowledgment that all human life is a vale of sickness, or, as the astonishing condolence in the *Consolatio ad Marciam* 11.1 has it: 

*Tota fiebilis vita est. . . . mortalis nata es, mortalesque peperisti. putre ipsa fluidumque corpus et causis repetita sperasti ram inbecilla materia solida et aeterna gestasse?* 

All of life is lamentable. . . . You are born destined to die; you have given birth to children so destined. Had you hoped, a body corrupt and fluid and buffeted by chance, to bear solid and lasting matter out of weak? 

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Montaigne or the Manichaean could not have put this more bleakly.
The grounding in sympathy further makes for an automatic surge of exponentiality. Just as in other contexts Seneca favors the emotional effect of increment and amplification, so disease is not permitted to run on an even keel. In the words of Donne: “Diseases themselves hold consultations, and conspire how they may multiply, and join with one another, and exalt one another’s force so” (Devotions, 7th meditation). Everything in the world in which we live pulls together to augment the sicknesses that are our lot. In Oedipus the ghost of Laius considers, but fruitlessly rejects, the alliance of what we would today call air pollution with the criminality of his son (631–33) and promises to the citizens an end to their suffering of

\[ \text{Destruction, Pestilence and Death, Distress, Disease, Despair} \]

(652)

if he, the father, can force the son into a cramped and lingering exile. His last line clinches the picture of an errant sinner whose condition is worsened by the hostility of the space in which he is condemned to move:

eripite terras, auferam caelum pater.

Deny him the land: I’ll take away his heaven.

(658)

Vice and crime and sickness know no natural limit; progressive compounding is their God-given mission.

Mittor ut dirus vapor
tellure rupta vel gravem populis luem
sparsura pestis?
Do you have me come
like deadly vapor from the shattered earth
Or like the plague, poisoning the nations?

(Thy 87–89)

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The ghost of Tantalus compares his arrival to the eruption of a volcanic vapor or to the coming of a plague, speaking of the latter as attacking, not men or natives or some similar select body, but populi, whole nations. All the means of amplificatio that Quintilian lists (8.4.3) are copiously employed. Note Quintilian’s mechanism of congeries in Oedipus’s lines from Phoenissae:

me fugio, fugio conscium sclerum omnium
pectus, manumque hanc fugio et hoc caelum et deos
et dira fugio scelera quae feci innocens.
Myself I flee, I flee my heart conscious
Of all my crimes; I flee this hand, this sky,
These gods; I flee those heinous crimes that, guiltless,
I have done.

(Phoe 216–18)

The whole speech in which these lines occur reveals both inwardness and an awareness of linkage between the man and the cosmos. The conceit of the possibility of flight—from his own body, from the environment, and from his crimes—merely accentuates the tenacity of the bonds. The graduation from the human body to the cosmic body, from the microcosm to the macrocosm, is itself an example of Quintilian’s amplificatory devices of incrementum and comparatio. Epistle 95, the principal text about the insufficiency of precepts, contains a paragraph (19) that implements the devices with a vengeance:

vide, quantum rerum per unam gulam transiturum permiscat luxuria, terrarum marisque vastatrix. necesse est itaque inter se ram diversa dissidente et hausta male digerantur alius allo nitentibus. nec mirum, quod inconstans variissque ex discordi cibo morbus est et illa ex contrariis naturae partibus in eundem compulsa redundant. See how large a quantity of stuffs designed to pass through one gullet luxury, the despoiler of lands and seas, mixes together. It is inevitable that, in their diversity, they disagree and, once swallowed, strain in different directions and are poorly digested. It is not surprising that the consequence of food at odds with itself is an unsettled condition of ill-health, and that materials forced together from disparate parts of nature refuse to stay put.

In passages like these Seneca comes close to saying that, on all levels of the life we know, there is no health that is not subject to disease and therefore effectively and incrementally diseased.

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At Phaedra 144 the nurse compares her mistress with Pasiphae and finds her worse:

nam monstra fato, moribus sceleria imputes.

Horrors chalk up to fate, crimes to human nature.

This is a disjunction that Senecan drama as a whole does not validate. Nurses and retainers have the mission of laying the groundwork for the truth by temporizing with the
kinds of adages that fit more comfortably into the neat maneuvers of consolations and exhortations. The distinction between *monstrum* and *sceclus* is moot, because *monstrum* is merely a cosmic augmentation of *sceclus*, and *mores* and *fatum* are two comparable ways, even in doctrinaire Stoicism, of talking about the same nexus of causes. Phaedra, in her own choices and dependence, demonstrates the interchangeability of the terms, and the easy ascent from chance peccadillo to universal upheaval. Hotspur's lighthearted commentary is like that of Phaedra's nurse; he wishes to deny all connection between heavenly portents and human experience:

Diseased nature oftentimes breaks forth
In strange eruptions; oft the teeming earth
Is with a kind of colic pinched and vexed
By the imprisoning of unruly wind
Within her womb, which, for enlargement striving,
Shakes the old beldame earth and topples down
Steeples and mossgrown towers.
*(1 Henry IV 3.1.27–33)*

Glendower is furious at this, and insists:

at my birth
The front of heaven was full of fiery shapes,
The goats ran from the mountains, and the herds
Were strangely clamorous to the frightened fields.
*(3.1.37–40)*

Glendower's linking of cosmic imbalance with human incident and his sense that that human event (an ominous birth?) is made to reverberate exponentially in a cosmic echo chamber are in tune with many passages in the *Naturales quæstiones* and, of course, in Senecan drama. For that drama does not content itself with deriving well-defined social or civic consequences from a specific error of judgment or a flaw of character. It does not deal with consequences, but with identities, the identities of error and crime and sickness and passion; and it achieves

its special power by accumulating the identities in a rising curve of terror and despair.

In *De beneficis* Seneca draws a picture of the social setting in which good deeds are to be attempted:

Non expectant uno loco vitia, sed mobilia et inter se dissidentia tumulantur, pellunt invicem fuganturque: ceterum idem semper de nobis pronuntiandi de beebimus, malos esse nos, malos fuisse, invitus adiciem et futuros esse.

The expectation is not to find vices in one location only; they are quickfooted, hot in pursuit and in flight, as their mutual hostility embroils them with one another. Ultimately we must always pronounce the same judgment about ourselves: that we are bad, have been bad, and, I will add against my wishes, will be bad.
*(Ben. 1.10.3)*

In such an environment, surely, belief in good deeds must turn out to be as utopian as all of Seneca's dogged assurances about the feasibility of virtue and wisdom. In a world of physicality and *krasis*, sickness is the norm, and its special mode is aggravation, not relief. There is no gainsaying Alexander of Aphrodisias who summarizes the consequences of what he regards as the Stoic creed as follows:

They must agree that man is of all animate beings naturally the worst ...; for if men are the only ones who have virtue and vice, and virtue is good, and the other bad, ... (and if) the majority of men are bad, or rather one or another is fabled to be good, like some wondrous being, rarer than the phoenix of the Ethiopians, but in fact all are bad and act equally badly toward one another ... and (if) all who are not wise are mad, how can we avoid the conclusion that man is the most miserable of all creatures, and that he has iniquity and madness bound up with him by birth and fate?
*(De fato 28.199.11, tr. Bruns)*

Enumerare omnes fatorum vias longum est. hoc unum scio: omnia mortalia opera mortalitate damnata sunt; inter peritura vivimus.

It would take too long to tabulate all the ways of the fates. I do know this: all mortal works stand under the curse of mortality; we live among beings destined to die.

Seneca writes on the occasion of the news of the burning of Lyon (*Ep. 91.12*). But then (13) he catches himself: perhaps Lyon was burnt in order to be reborn for a better fate?

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Deprivation often creates room for a more splendid fortune.

The combustion of the city reminds him of the idea of the conflagration of the world. Some reference has been made to this above, but it must now be brought into the picture on its own.

The Stoic schematization divides world history into immense ages, each of which is terminated by a catastrophe. This happens when the corporeal continuum ceases to allow
even momentary consolidations and the whole natural order is reduced to, or exalted into,

homogeneity, after which a new beginning is made. Catastrophe, by fire or inundation, the total dominance of the pneuma in its fiery or fluid state, may be regarded, as it was in the Empedoclean paradigm, as the triumph of harmony or Love over the puny efforts of formative nature and Prometheus man. Or the word may be given its modern sense, and signal the total destruction of everything that makes life worth living. In Seneca's writings, both prose and dramatic, catastrophe is a pervasive memory and fear, a thought that colors all thinking about the constitution of the cosmos. It is as if nature in all its functions had catastrophe embedded in it. A proper vision of that nature can only be an apocalyptic one. It casts its shadow over even the most sanguine homilies of consolation and encouragement. In the drama, its imperatives are at the heart of the tragic mood.

Cornutus, in chapter 17 of his Summary of Greek Mythology, a Stoic document roughly contemporary with Seneca's works, says that the elements are held in tension, and that without this tension the world would collapse in flood or conflagration. Our fragments tell us that from Zeno onward, there was talk of ekpyrosis, conflagration, and palingenesia, regeneration (SVF 1.107, 2.596, 2.1064, and passim). How early katalysesmos, inundation, was added as an alternative materialization of the Weltumbruch is now impossible to tell. But we have already had occasion to discuss the mutual implication of fire and moisture as the material (and vulnerable) avatars of the pneuma. It is, therefore, not unlikely that both versions of the catastrophe were available to Stoic writers from the beginning, especially since Plato, in his account of the breaks in world history, had put the major emphasis on great floods (Laws 677a).

Some of Chrysippus's successors came to have doubts about the doctrine of periodic catastrophes, but it remained part of the mainstream of Stoic teaching. The cosmos, it could be argued, is everlasting, but it is wrenched by intermittent crises during which it reverts to its simplest form of pure pneuma or soul, prior to rebuilding its varied somatic constitution. In the course of the period of conflagration, one must conclude, the two kinds of fire, the atechnon, destructive, and the technikon, productive, are subtly re-balanced so as to transform the catastrophe into regeneration.

The last four chapters of book 3 of Naturales quaestiones are entirely devoted to the final destruction, which Seneca thinks of as a diluvium. He contrasts the quickness and ease of the inundation with the snail's pace of the regeneration:

nihil difficile naturae est, utique ubi in finem sum improerat. . . . momento fit cinis, diu Silva.
Nothing is difficult for Nature, especially where she hastens toward her end. . . . Ashes are produced in a second; trees take a long time to grow.

He proceeds to describe in detail the progressive deterioration and liquefaction of nature and the human world. The deluge is compared to a conflagration; both set in when God decides that the old must give way and a better world begin. Just as a young man already has the seeds of future senescence within him, so the origo mundi harbors the seeds of its own annihilation. At the end of the inundation, new land and a new human civilization emerge; but

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...
emphasizing more cheerful themes. Stoicism would not have been able to set itself up as an ecumenical philosophy if its advocates had not also tendered the other side of the picture, the belief in the power of reason and in the regularities of nature and the achievability of wisdom and the periodic rebirth of all that is good. But as we scan the writings of the Roman Stoics and watch out for the telltale signs of a deep pessimism, a kind of rogue Stoicism, gnawing away at the strained assertions of a grim confidence, we are not disappointed. To a tragedian, needless to say, this aspect of the Stoic conception of natural history could not be more welcome.\(^{[22]}\)

The too huge bias of the world hath sway'd
Her back-part upwards, and with that she bravery
The hemisphere . . .
(Montsury in Bussy D’Ambois 5.1.163ff.)

In the plays, the presentiment of cosmic catastrophe is ever available to shape the despair of speakers and choruses alike. Its favorite variant is the collapse of the celestial order, though other versions abound. The fourth chorus of *Thyestes* (789ff.) offers an exemplary rendition of the ruin of the world. Following the messenger’s account of the slaughter, boiling, and eating of the children, the chorus addresses itself to Jupiter and Apollo: day has turned to night prematurely and permanently; is this caused by a new insurrection of the Giants? All stellar normalcy will be abandoned. These complaints are developed with a great display of mythological and astronomical learning. The third and longest section, on the dislodging of the constellations, is cast in the future tense. It is not only the future of apocalypse but, which is the same thing, the future of (scientific) necessity: seeing the enormity of the present crimes, the collapse of the world is inevitable. The chorus’s last lines are also their last utterance in the play, anticipating the gruesome climax of the action between Atreus and Thyestes:

| Nos e tanto visi populo     |
| digni, prereret quos everso |
| cardine mundus?             |
| in nos aetas ultima venit?  |
| o nos dura sorte creatos,   |
| seu perdidimus solem miseri,|
| sive expulimus!             |
| abeant quaestus, discede, timor: |
| vitae est avidus quisquis non vult |
| mundo secum pereunte mori. |
| Have we, above all men, been chosen |
| To crash beneath a world dislodged? |
| Is this the final moment of our age? |
| Pity the fate that gave us life, |
| Only to lose the sun, or banish it ourselves. |
| But cease, complaints, and leave us, fear! |
| Eager for life is he who does not wish |
| To die as the world around him perishes. |
| (Thy 875–84) |

It is one of the ironies of the conjuring up of the cosmic cataclysm that the speakers pretend they have the option of surviving the general collapse. In the Hippocratic literature, a vision of celestial disorder is marked down as evidence of insanity.\(^{[23]}\) In the fictive world of the drama, the inflamed rehearsal of the ancient myths transforms madness into commonplace. Each play is, in its way, a dramatization of the final catastrophe, and the actors identify themselves and their speech with that dread reality.\(^{[24]}\)

We started this section with a reference to the burning of Lyon. In *De beneficiis* (7.27) Seneca finds in the sacking of a city a true image of our existence. In *Troades* 14–21 the physical horrors of Troy’s collapse, climaxing in the billowing of the black smoke, are invoked by Hecuba in a speech redolent of the apocalyptic mood informing even this, Seneca’s most Aristotelian play. But echoes of catastrophe are found in a multitude of settings and landscapes. In the second chorus of *Hercules Furens* (533ff. and 554ff.) the cessation of life is caught in the counterpoint of two worlds, one frozen and one melting. Theseus’s description of the entrance to the underworld and the immediate realm beyond it, with its ecology of compressed ventilation (662ff.), combines features of Cocteau and Ovid into a grand design of
barrenness. But the prominence of fire, burning, and heat throughout the play is more important.

When Hercules wakes up from his murder-induced blackout, he wants to burn himself (1216ff.). Unless you give me my arms, he says to Theseus (1285ff.), I will use my body to engineer an environmental death that will lead to the collapse of the whole world. The stages of the tirade lead us from conflagration to entombment to the tumbling down of the gods from heaven. Possessed by an exorbitant awareness of the might of his own body even in death, Heracles threatens to convert himself into the lever that will dislodge the center of the universe. Earlier (955ff.), in his madness, the overreacher has stated that he has conquered the earth, the sea, and the underworld; now he must conquer the heavens. He is another Titan, come to battle the gods. The compound effect of these visions of the ruin of the universe is gently anticlimactic. Redde arma, Amphitryon says: “Give him his arms,” that is, take Hercules back to where he was before his madness launched him on the road to threatened catastrophe, let him be an ordinary hero of the old, conventional kind. The Stoic science of passion has no room for such a creature, and so the play ends with a whimper, disengaged from further links with the Stoic outlook on what the rule of the sword must lead to. In the follow-up to Hercules Furens, analogous to the position of Oedipus in Colonus vis-à-vis Oedipus Rex in Sophocles’ career, the story ends differently. The third chorus of Hercules Oetaeus (103 1ff.) contrasts the song of Orpheus about the lawfulness and the regularities of the universe with the chorus’s own prediction: Orpheus was wrong; the world will go under. The burning of Hercules, now riotously apostrophized, is the hero’s strident, if unwilling, reenactment of universal ekpyrosis.

Elsewhere the liquid alternative is given the nod. In Agamemnon, Eurybates’ bravura report of the great storm (421–578) carries the central message that the gods, pace the pieties of the second chorus (310–407), are not benign.[25] The report, the longest in Seneca’s dramatic oeuvre—contrast Aeschylus’s storm of thirteen lines (Agam. 648–60)—comes at a time when we are looking forward to a meeting between Clytemnestra and Agamemnon, a meeting that is long delayed and in the end held to a very few lines, as if Seneca wanted to outdo even Aeschylus’s surprising curtailment of Agamemnon’s appearance. Earlier (p. 114) I ventured to see in the violence of the storm an analogue or reformulation of the turbulence in Clytemnestra’s shifting heart. Now, coming at the passage from a different angle, it transpires that its signals of cosmic cataclysm are unmistakable, and that this helps to draw Clytemnestra into the vortex beyond her limited station at court. Because the report is unusually revealing, it will be helpful to present a sequential summary of its parts.

First Eurybates details the preparations and the start of the journey home. The winds are mild, the rowing is easier; after a stiffer breeze comes up, the rowing ceases. Twice in this section the narrator dwells on the act of seeing; the sailors take delight in looking back toward the, denuded shore of Troy (435–36 and 444–45). The men aboard exchange memories of the war; dolphins perform their cheerful dances around the ships. Once more the eyes of the sailors are turned back (455–59): the sight of land turns uncertain, and only the smoke over Troy remains as a small smudge on the horizon. The day ends; the setting sun is blocked out by a spreading cloud. With the coming of night, there is a roaring and a swelling; the moon and the stars disappear. The winds are in contention with one another; the surf contends with the winds; the sea contends with itself. The sailors cannot see because of the darkness (491–94); in this gloom lightning bolts provide a measure of relief. The contention of winds and seas translates itself to the units of the navy; ships ram and break each other and are sucked down into the deep. Those that continue afloat, their rigging laid low, turn into sites of fear and paralysis. The men envy those who died at Troy, including the Trojan defenders, and in their invocations of the gods they lower themselves (or begin to restore their moral standing) by pleading on behalf of the Trojan prisoners on board. But the gods turn a deaf ear to their prayers. Pallas attacks with her father’s thunderbolt; twice she strikes the remarkably resistant Ajax, son of Oeoleus, who becomes charged with the radiance of lightning and distributes the blinding luminescence all over the sea. A hateful vessel briefly filled with the shining power of the goddess, he delivers himself of a gloating speech, claiming to have defeated sea and fire and
heaven and Pallas herself, just as earlier he had vanquished not only the Trojans but the gods standing by their side. But as he challenges Jupiter to oppose him, Neptune dislodges him and hurls him into the sea. Those who yet survive are faced with a final, man-made obstacle. Nauplius, the father of Palamedes, who had been stoned to death by Greek trickery, sets misleading flares as the ships approach Euboea. Further units of the fleet are run up on the rocks or scattered. Only the dawn brings a subsidence of the horror, and
postquam litatum est Illo, Phoebus redit
et damna noctis tristis ostendit dies.
The recompense for Ilium complete,
Phoebus returns, and daylight shows the losses
Of the funeral night.
(Aga 577–78)

As the light of day, and natural sight, return, the disaster is interpreted as a sacramental offering, a libation, on behalf of Troy. Eurybates, a herald and thus a man of international sympathies, is the proper person to propose such an interpretation, which helps Clytaemnestra, for

the moment, to acquiesce in her husband's return, itself further delayed, with dire consequences for Clytaemnestra's mood, by the arrival of Cassandra and her retinue.

The storm sequence of Agamemnon, with its violent play of fire and water and its melancholy notices of the feebleness of sight (the dramatic equivalent of reason), is the most emphatic illustration of our claim that the catastrophe of cosmic conflagration and inundation is deeply embedded in the structure and mood of Senecan drama. Only the great messenger speech announcing Hippolytus's undoing (Phaedra 1000–1114) comes close to it in its sounding of the apocalyptic overtones of the threat of the deep.[26] There, the storm from which the death-bringing monster emerges is entirely the sea's, without the help of sky or winds, aimed not at ships but at land. The tidal wave and the apparition put all to flight, save Hippolytus, who prepares to fight them but is undone, in a series of segmental stills, by his own horses. The monster, a huge bull with a tail borrowed from Vergil's Scylla, is accorded a minutely particularized portrayal (1035–49), whose details might strike us as comical if we were not reminded of other apocalyptic beasts from the water, behemoth and leviathan, and their messages from another god who has the power to destroy and create. The beast is both bull and dragon, a specimen of *krasis* whose dire unity can, in obedience to the linearity of speech, be suggested only in agglutinative fashion. The sculptured meticulousness of the description of the monster, with its varied pigmentation and its hybridization of land and sea, adds its own force to a scene that enacts a world out of joint and hastening toward dissolution.

Finally, we might mention a special development of the *topos* of celestial disarray that Seneca builds into Thyestes (789–884): the retrogression of the sun. The chorus addresses Sol: Why have you left your path? and follows this up with a monumental inventory of astronomical debacles. On several other occasions Seneca brings in the motif of darkness at noon as an orchestration of tragic catastrophe.

Here the dramatist has the chorus catalogue all the particularities of such a cosmic upheaval. The *Götterdämmerungpsychologie* is supported by a host of questions and predictions about what the reversal of the sun will mean for the rest of creation, particularly for the signs of the zodiac. The invocation of the sun, the father of all, is located between the description and the dramatization of the ghastly meal. It is a choral reaction to the viciousness of Atreus's sacrifice, and serves to hold the climax before it is capped by the presentation of Thyestes devouring the flesh of his children. Taken by itself, the choral essay may be regarded as a particularly grating species of "learned" verse, of the kind of poster art that propels itself at needless length on a minimum of artistic inspiration. At a later point in this essay I hope to be able to show what the motivating factors of such a procedure are. Here it is worth pointing to the mythological antecedents that lie behind this version of the *topos* of the solar reversal.[27]

As we know from other versions of the sun's change of course, it was an important part of at least one strain of the tale of the sons of Pelops, where it may have been associated in some fashion with the dynastic talisman of the golden ram. It is referred to in three of Euripides' plays (*Electra* 726ff., *Iphigenia Taur.* 816, *Orestes* 1001ff.). Scholars differ on the
role the reversal played in the tradition of the quarrel between Atreus and Thyestes, and whether the reversal was conceived as a temporary portent, cancelled when the fraternal quarrel came to an end, or whether it initiated the present trajectory of the sun, which prior to that event had always risen in the west. That even the ancients were confused about the nature and the purpose of the reversal in the legend of the Pelopids is clear from the scholia, and from treatments of the story in the handbook of mythology that goes under the name of Apollodorus (Epit. 2.12) and in Philonous's sixth-century commentary on Aristotle's Meteorologica 345a13ff. A scholion on Euripides' Orestes 812 informs us that in Sophocles' lost Thyestes the sun retrogressed out of disgust at the grisly banquet, and it is hard to resist the conclusion that in this case Seneca followed in Sopho-

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cles' footsteps. Ovid's virtuoso drama of the fall of Phaethon (Metam. 2.161–271), itself based on a number of famous models, includes an upheaval of the constellations and a conflagration of the earth, especially the mountains and the water courses, and of the whole cosmos. Ovid's Sun-god is not so much reversed as temporarily driven off course. But from Aristotle (op. cit.) we know that the so-called Pythagoreans explained the origin of the Milky Way as the path taken by a star that fell on the occasion of Phaethon's mishap. Summing up, we may say that ancient traditions about the sun changing its course were closely linked to notions about the possibility of a Weltumbruch, that Seneca avails himself of this link in featuring the motif, and that it strengthens the part ekpyrosis plays in the mood and the texture of his plays.

Both the golden ram and the retrogression of the sun have been called portents or prodigia, unnatural and counternatural events or apparitions boding disaster. Could it not be argued that the well-attested Roman fascination with prodigia is sufficient to explain Seneca's partiality to the disturbing materials discussed in this chapter? Does not Ovid's accomplished manipulation of monstra point in the same direction? Among the prodigia Julius Obsequens, probably in the fourth century of our era, compiled from his reading of Livy, we note a hail of stones, torches falling from the sky, heaven and the sea in flames, fire-breathing bulls, a two-headed pig, a three-headed ass, a five-legged horse, a horse-legged sheep, an elephant-headed boy, a celestial chorus, and multitudinous other monstra. The scrambling together of cosmic disturbances with minor biological freaks is significant. Seneca has little interest in the smallish sports of nature with which Roman priests liked to busy themselves. One or two further differences might be noted. Prodigia, as understood in the public lan-

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gUAGE of Roman religious life, were thought to antedate, to threaten, a misfortune still in the future. More important, the omen could be averted; it was the task of the priests to recognize the meaning of the signal and to carry out an expiation or lustration to neutralize the threatened effect. True, in the popular consciousness such neutralization, in bonum vertere, was probably looked upon as unlikely. The superstition that certain signs are inevitably followed by the calamities they herald is deeply rooted in human thought, both primitive and sophisticated. It is the sequentiality, the temporal relation between omen and ruin, that constitutes the chief difference between superstition and the fear of prodigia, on the one hand, and Seneca's dramaturgy of cosmic sickness, on the other. It is significant that at about the time when prodigia ceased to have a standing in public policy, Cicero (De divin. 2.58) attempted to provide non-religious explanations for what others regarded as prodigia. Bloodied images of the gods, for instance, do not presage anything, he argues, but are one symptom of the contagio terrena, of the natural proclivity of terrestrial nature to mix it up. Thus Cicero breaks the sequential code and insists on the autonomy and parity of all such phenomena. If they are symptoms, they do not foreshadow, but combine with other symptoms to reflect the existence of a larger condition of frailty and indisposition. Cicero's allowance for a pathology of nature is undeveloped. Ovid develops it further, with special and, in part, humorous emphasis on the transmogrifications an integrated, but labile, nature makes possible. Seneca's dramatic work offers the most generous exploitation of these insights, buttressed by the Stoic belief in a world both compacted and fluid, bearing within it the seeds of its destruction.
Chapter Seven
The Rage to Embrace Nature

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

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

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

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troops and clothing and lines of descent to Aeschylus’s roll calls of barbarian leaders in *Persae* and beyond, the device of the inventory, both choral and monologic, had served a variety of purposes. But in the earlier traditions the catalogue had been, if not incidental, at least sufficiently isolated to be savored in its place, as a move of retardation or climaxing. In Seneca no such specialization is in evidence. Senecan dramatic language realizes itself most fully in the catalogue. One might go so far as to say that the catalogue is the principal building material of the drama.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Some catalogues are severely limited dimensionally and in their field of speculation. The drama of the collapse of the zodiac (Thy 844ff.) lists, in unrelenting sequence, the various disorderly motions of fully fifteen constellations and their major stars. More typically, verticality and horizontality are, in obedience to krasis, combined into compound structures. Astronomy and mythology, history and meteorology, anatomy and apocalypse support one another.\[18\] Jointly they form ensembles of references cited by the Senecan enumerator, or engulfing him in the moments when he feels himself going under. The Stoic tragedian, building his characters into an imposing network of environmental causes and restraints, has that network express itself in vast tallies of personal and contextual associations. On several occasions, for instance, Seneca pictures somber groves in which the portrayal of human trepidation or villainy is enlivened with catalogues of trees. Oedipus 530ff. names cypress, oak, laurel, linden, myrtle, alder, and pine to anticipate the horrified response of the woods and the whole earth to the success of the necromancy, itself liberally endowed with catalogues enumerating the legendary troops of hell (585ff.). The cursed copse in which Atreus is reported to be performing his heinous business (Thy 650ff.) is similarly alive with a particularized awareness of the data of the environment. Elsewhere Seneca chronicles great maritime undertakings, in which history, mythology, geography, and meteorology combine to form aggregate scenarios.\[19\]

In his *Epistles* Seneca

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

licet vastum traieceris mare, licet, ut ait Vergilius noster, "terraeque urbesque recedant": sequentur te quocumque perveneris vita.

Though you manage to cross a vast ocean, though, in the words of the great Vergil, "lands and cities vanish in the distance," your vices will accompany you wherever you stop.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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ogy teaches us, was not to be its beneficiary. The mood of Hercules is more persuasive than that of Theseus.

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

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

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

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verse that closes itself off to the sectarian bidding to live in harmony. Just before the catalogue of criminals in Hades begins, there is a transitional maxim:
The rhythm of Theseus's exposition matches the rhythm of Hercules' story: the quiet detailing of the antechambers and of the judges is analogous to the quiet calm of Hercules' return, before the convulsions of his madness set in. The conquest of Cerberus is the mythological and magical equivalent of the killing of Lycus and, more important, an index of Hercules' murderous nature.

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

Brandish your sacred staffs; and with your hands, 
God-driven, tear your sons—in Thebes no crime 
Is greater than a mother's love. 
(Oed 628–30)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

\[ \text{nobis prius} \]
\[ \text{insaniendum est: Iuno, cur nondum furis?} \]
\[ \text{but we must lead} \]
\[ \text{The round of madness. Juno, where is your rage?} \]
\[ (HF 108–9) \]
In the course of her inspection of all the forces of turmoil located both in the world at large—earth, sea, air, hell, and heaven—and in Hercules' heroic bosom, which are needed to bring about the fall of her enemy, Juno comes to realize that she is Hercules' clone, and that by activating what is disruptive within her she can ignite the desired process. There is no better passage in Seneca to illustrate the reciprocity, the irrationality, and the transferability of passion. By the same token, the formal use of the mythological inventory gives it the freighted power, the lumbering grandeur, that the Stoic tragedian, like the Stoic comedian, embraces.

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

\[\text{quid plura canam? vincit saevas} \]
\[\text{cura novercas.} \]
No need of more examples; the pain of love

Debts the hate of stepmothers.

*Phae* 356–57

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

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

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

\[\text{fraterque quisquis incolit caelum meus} \]
\[\text{non ex noverca frater.} \]
And any brother of mine who lives in heaven

Not born of Juno.

*HF* 907–8

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

\[\text{love meque dignas} \]
\[\text{prayers} \]
\[\text{worthy of Jove and me} \]

*HF* 926–27

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

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

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

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

In the light of the importance of this species of rhetoric, the rhetoric of enumeration rather than the rhetoric of confession, in the texts, it is not improper to speak of Senecan drama as one kind of epic drama. The propensity to take stock by means of catalogues and serial elaborations marks a special way of looking at what matters in life. To be sure, that way of looking is very foreign to the purview of the Greek epic poet, who had virtually no interest in the manifold macrocosm shrouding the hero. But the paratactic rhythm of enumeration, the tendency to run the motor before starting to drive and keep on driving, the stylization of the verbal body through formulas and iteration: in all these and similar respects the procedure of the Senecan dramatist shares more with the epic bard than with the writer of action drama. That Seneca has some inventories that are less compelling than oth-

ers; that on occasion he can mislead his audience by throwing in details that fail to promote the larger causes he favors, cannot be denied. But unless its intrinsic need of the catalogue, and the latter’s broad usefulness, are recognized, a true appreciation of the value of Senecan drama is beyond our grasp.

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

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

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

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

sustines tantum nefas gestare, Tellus? non ad infernem Styga te nosque mergis rupta et ingenti via ad chaos inane regna cum rege abripis? non tota ab imo tecta convelliens solo vertis Mycenas? stare circa Tantalum uteque iam debimus: hinc compagibus et hinc revulsis, si quid infra Tartara est avosque nostros, hoc tuam immani sinu demite valiern, nosque defossos tege Acheronte toto. noxiae supra caput animae vangentur nostrum et ardentis freto Phlegethon harenas igneus totas agens

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

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

As Hieronimo, in The Spanish Tragedy, imagines grief to spread outward and to color the world at large, only to be stopped by the heavenly walls where Justice and Revenge are imprisoned, so Thyestes, after recognizing the severed heads of his children, immediately launches into an oration rebuking the earth for not swallowing him (Thy
This is dramatically and psychologically acceptable. It is also symptomatic of a sensibility that takes refuge from painful privacies in a longer view and thus, as it were by dissociation, confirms the larger unities. It can take the form of accusing a god or the gods for their share in the disaster, a move that is vastly more common in Senecan tragedy than in its Greek predecessors. It can take the shape of a general disinclination on the part of heroes and heroines to talk about themselves in the first person. "Was't Hamlet wronged Laertes? Never Hamlet ..." gains some of its third-person clarity from its nature as an enthymeme, but the Senecan depersonalization has something to do with it also. In general, Shakespeare does not favor this particular legacy. It is instructive to compare a passage from Thyestes with one from Richard III, a play that is, of course, in some ways heir to the Senecan tradition. First the Shakespearean example. Richard says:

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

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

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

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

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

ture, after the summons of aid or endorsement from the larger world has, predictably,

come to naught:

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

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

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

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

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

Next we find what is perhaps the most frequent syntactical move, the exclamatory question (1006–7, 1020), often in the negative (1007-11), professing the surprise or resentment of the speaker at the failure of the world to have noticed his distress or to have moved in sympathy with it. Series of questions bundled together are a common occurrence in Greek choruses (for example, Eur. Hipp. 141–60), but their frequency in the speeches of individuals is a Roman innovation. The exclamatory question may also appear in the form of a pure exclamation: shame upon the external powers for not responding in condign fashion! The response hoped for is one of resonance or companionship in destruction. Finally, though less commonly, this dissatisfaction may be voiced in the form of future indicatives, predictions against hope that the powers will, in the end, respond fittingly after all.

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

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

Euripides' Hekabe (Hec. 68ff.) invokes Zeus's lightning, Night, Earth, and the gods of the nether regions. The appeals are combined with references to the queen's own feelings; they form a comment on her dream of Polydorus, and a request to save him. By the same token, a series of interrogatives and exclamations (154–76), constituting Hekabe's response to the news that Polyxena will be sacrificed, and addressed, first, to herself, and then to potential helpers, to her Trojan companions in trouble, her aged foot, and Polyxena, clearly move within a narrow radius. The cries, objurgations, and appeals of Sophocles' Heracles (Trach. 983ff.), perhaps the model for Hercules Oetaeus 1131ff., are self-referential, and
integrated into the dramatic action, in a way that the later writer's are not.[23] An appeal to the powers of heaven and earth, like those of Prometheus (Aesch. *Prom. *88ff., 1091ff.), is a climactic indication of the speaker's momentary sense of abandonment. But, like its peers in other Greek plays, it tends to be brief and unadorned. And there are always those on the Greek stage who are ready to find fault with a language that is excessive. As the Euripidean Theseus (*Hipp. *916ff., 925ff.) challenges mankind, complaining that there is no reliable index to separate the just from the unjust, Hippolytus criticizes his interrogative and exclamatory extravagancies (934–35), with no allowance for the substantial amount of plain argumentation embedded in Theseus's utterance.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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lesson that fixity is eroded in a drama answering to *sumpatheia*. The referential grammar
signals the inevitable lack of stability, *das Zerrissene*, in the lifeforce of the agent. Stoic
psychology and Stoic science meet, as they should, on the common ground of the proposition
that a passionate soul is at odds with itself. Euripides furnished the tools for dramatizing
internal conflict, including, on occasion, the hero's or, more likely, heroine's apostrophe of her
(or his) spirit or heart. Seneca universalizes the tendency and builds it into the cosmic
panorama of his *Schreirhetorik*. [30]

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

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

(1Med 40–55)

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

*istam terram defossam premat,*
gravisque tellus impio capiti incubet.
Let her be plunged deep in the ground,
*And may the earth crush down her villainous head!*

(*Phae* 1279–80)

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

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

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

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

Seneca does not give us the progression from beginning to middle to end. His prologues preempt the plot; his choruses are only in the rarest cases organized with a view to what comes before and after; and he permits himself revealing inversions, as when the raging Hercules desires first to storm heaven and afterwards to take the Mycenaean fortress: a proteron husteron that makes no sense as a structural unit. It is discontinuities and inversions like these, and the disregard of action per se, that have facilitated the traditional view that Seneca did not mean his dramas to be performed. What more plausible proposal than to say that these plays are to be savored as lyric poems, as moving pictures for the imagination, rather than as staged dramas, inasmuch as a staged drama (so the conventional wisdom holds) depends on an orderly and compelling chain of purpose and action. It need hardly be pointed out, at this point in the twentieth century, that the modern experience of drama has dealt a death blow to this legacy of Aristotelian functionalism and nineteenth-century realism.

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

That the hero wishes nature to experience the same turbulence that he suffers in himself is symptomatic of the purpose of the outward glance. Greek heroes and choruses seek from the cosmic powers cited the assurance they have fleetingly surrendered. Whether marked as prayers or as laments, the Greek invocations are mechanisms of contemplation and of composure. The established cadences of choral inventories, often listing cult centers and cult areas, generate a mood of certitude. Preferably they constitute the troughs between dramatic climaxes. In entreatng the far-flung potencies of their world, including the vengeful demons of the underworld, a Senecan Hercules or Oedipus, or a Juno, can no longer hope for the recourse the cry is designed to elicit. Nature is no more reliable, no more powerful, than the agent who appeals to it. In a sense, these appeals are now superfluous, or tautological. The imperatives and subjunctives might equally well be indicatives, descriptive rather than incantatory. For after all the world cannot do other than conspire with the shattered human life. This the hero knows, or divines. But the modal constructions are demanded by the tragic vision of loss. Seneca is unthinkable without the menacing fervor, the enervating length of the inventory, and the extraordinary surge of expressive means, with its imperatives and the subjunctives and anaphoras that mark the abortiveness of the appeals. The syntax of the vain
hope of salvation is a kind of atavism, underscoring the impression of turbulence by the factitiousness of the ritual gesture. In his impotence the speaker takes refuge with an equally impotent nature. The congeries of futilities sharpens the impression of a tragedy that is cosmic as well as personal.

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

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

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

Not that this should cause much surprise. The art of the simile in Seneca derives from the conventions of the epic. At *Troades* 794ff., for instance, Andromache, talking to Astyanax just before he is taken from her, compares his position in relation to Ulixes and herself to that of a calf pressing against its mother to escape the fangs of a lion. This Olympian expansiveness, making Andromache into an epic poet rather than a frantic mother, is characteristic of the medium. In his capacity as his own messenger, every major Senecan character tends to be both lamenter, introspector, essayist, and epic poet. Ulixes is, in this respect, a more narrowly conceived, more purposeful agent, analogous to the nurses and retainers who seek to confine the heroes and heroines to a pacific course of action. The hallmark of his speech is argument, fortified with exhortation. He has less need for comparisons and tropes whose function it is to broaden the perspective beyond the terms of the business at hand. Choruses, on the other hand, are master employers of whole sequences of comparisons as they comment on their understanding of the dramatic situation. One of the most elaborate series of this sort is found at *Thyestes* 577–95, where the chorus of Mycenaean hymn what they conceive to be the calm after the storm by means of a long string of maritime images.

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

More than his predecessors, Seneca inundates his drama with epic similes and analogies. There are as many from inanimate nature as from the life of the animals. The winds and other meteorological phenomena are obvious candidates for exploitation. Scroop's Like an unseasonable stormy day,
Which makes the silver rivers drown their shores,
As if the world were all dissolv'd to tears;
So high above his limits swells the rage
*Of Bolingbroke.*

(Richard II 3.2.107–11)

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

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

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

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

An even more important rhetorical index of Seneca's undertaking is

his unusual handling of the old figure called ex adynatou, or more simply adynaton; in Latin, impossible. [43]
The chiefest God, first mover of that sphere,
Enchas'd with thousands ever shining lamps,
Will sooner burn the glorious frame of heaven
Than it should so conspire my overthrow.
(Marlowe, 1 Tamburlaine 4.2.8–11)

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

This reliance on the unbreakability of natural law is not entirely unknown in Seneca. A number of cautionary choruses contrast the orderly nature of the cosmos with the disorderly morals of man. More typically, however, Seneca withdraws the certainty. On the contrary, the stronger the appeal to the supposed fixity, the more alarming becomes the suspicion that a terrible irony is at work, and that the oath, hope, or imprecation is misguided from the start. The energy read into the cosmic analogue is felt to be so sweeping as to spill over and dislocate the affairs of this world. Once again, the law is destabilized by the consequences of sumpatheia and krasis. [45]

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

recited after Deianira has rushed off to die, and before the expiring Hercules is brought on stage. The chorus memorializes the rule, said to be the rule of Orpheus, that nothing lasts forever, by demonstrating what would happen if the rule were overturned. The basic scheme is the conventional one: just as it is impossible for the natural order to be subverted, so what is born, is mortal:
quod natum est, properat mori.
(HO 1099)

The impossibilia are given, not as conditionals, but in the future tense, with awed questions terminating the series.
iam, iam legibus obruts
mundo cum veniet dies,
australis polus obruet
quidquid per Libyam iacet
et sparsus Garamas tenet;
arctus polus obruet
quidquid subiacet axibus
et siccus Boreas ferit.
amissos trepidus polo
Titan excutiet diem.
caeli regia concidens
ortus atque obitus trahet
atque omnis pariter deos
perdet mors aliqua et chaos,
et mors fata novissima
in se constituet sibi.
quandt mundum capiet locus?
discendet via Tartari,
fractis ut pateat polis?
an quod dividit aethera
a terris spatium sat est
et mundi nium malis?
quae tantum capiet nefas
fati, quae superos locus?
pontum Tartara sidera
regna unus capiet tria?[42]

Soon when the day arrives on which
The laws of the world are overthrown,
The southern sky will fall upon
The vast expanse of Africa
And lock the natives into place.
The northern sky will fall upon
The lands that lie beneath the pole

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

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

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

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

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

(Phoe 313–19)
The reference to himself in the third person, the bizarre inventory of near-impossibles, their extraction from myths that have nothing to do with the tale of Oedipus, and the shock effect of the final conceit, all of these mark the passage as a further attestation that the old appeal to natural fixities has become fatefuly undermined.

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

credam prius ora Medusae
Gorgonis anguineis cincta fuisse comis,
esse canes utero sub virginis, esse Chimaeram,
a truce quae flammis separat angue leam,

haec ego cuncta prius, quam te, carissime, credam
mutatum curam deposuisse mei.

I would rather believe
That Medusa's face was ringed with serpent locks,
That a virgin's belly trails with cubs, and that
Chimaera lives, a flaming tanglement
Of defiant snake and lioness,

All this, my friend, I would rather believe
Than that you have changed your feelings toward me.
(*Tristia* 4.7.11–20)

_Credam_, used in both movements of the figure, is the operative word. Which is the more believable truth, that his friend will stay true to him, or that the creatures of myth are endowed with unusual shapes? After all, in Ovid's poetic world mythology carries an authority that is hard to gainsay. In its fashion, Ovid's use of the _impossibile_ is just as subversive as Seneca's, though less frightening. But compare this Senecan instance. At _Phaedra_ 418ff., which is part of the nurse's prayer to Diana-Hecate-Luna to help her make Hippolytus accede to Phaedra's desires, she argues: may he fall in love, just as you will always be unclouded in the night, and as you will never be brought down by Thessalian magic, and as you will never grant your favors to a herdsman. The combina-

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...tion of mythological playfulness with the illusoriness of magic and the airy effacement of the reality of clouds has its own charm. Together these instances of counter-reality do not suffice to set up the _impossibile_ that would lend vigor to the nurse's wish. And in fact their very counter-reality is in question.

_Thyestes_ gives us a more characteristic handling of the figure:

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

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

_Thyestes_, reluctant to return to the court, but weakening before his sons' cajoling, doubts that Atreus could be favorably disposed toward him. On the surface it looks as if Thyestes were trying to say, in the old manner, that a reconciliation between his brother and himself is unthinkable. But the Stoic substance of his pronouncements, the cumulative dissolution of natural polarities, the grim joy in the apocalyptic neutralization of regularity, augur the very opposite, and one imagines that somehow, latently, we are given to understand that he clings to a paradoxical hope. The singular conceit that the Sicilian turbulence might be congealed, coming as it does within a series of images pointing in the opposite direction, compounds the overwhelming sense of disruption. Because the hero, or at least his speech, knows that nature can, and in the end must, leave its grooves and turn in upon itself, the _impossibilita_ virtually guarantee reconciliation. At the same time this reconciliation, should it come about, takes on a monstrous coloring. Thus the figure of the _impossibile_ documents the ability of _sumpatheia_ to give with one hand what it takes back with the other. It enriches the perceptions and expands consciousness, but invalidates assurance
and lays bare secret hopes and fears. The crumbling psyche communes with its surroundings, on a proposed level of parity that turns

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

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

dum terræ caelum media libratum feret
nitidusque certas mundus evolvet vices
numerisque harenis derit et solem dies,
noctem sequuntur astra, dum sicas polus
versat Arctos, flumina in pontum cadent,
nunquam meus cessabit in poenas furor
crescetque semper.

While, centrally poised, the earth will yet support
The floating heavens, and the brilliant world
Threads forth its constant seasons, and the grains
Of sand are numberless, and day is paired
With sun, and night with stars; and while the sky
Revolves the thirsting Bears, and rivers drain
Into the sea, my wrath will grow forever
And strive for punishment.

(\textit{Med} 401–7)

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

\texttt{per alta vada spatio sublime aethers, testare nullos esse, qua veheris, deos.}

Ride through the aerial spaces of the sky
And mark that, where you go, the gods are dead.

(\textit{Med} 1026–27)

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

egone ut parentis sanguine aspersam manum
fraerumque gemina caede contingam? prius
extinguet ortus, referat occasus diem,
pax ante fida nivibus et flammis erit
et Scylla Siculum lunget Ausonio latus,
priusque multo vicibus alternis fugax
Euripus unda stabit Euboica piger.

patrem abstulisti, regna, germanos, larem
patrium—quid ultra est? una res superest mihi
fratre ac parenti carior, regno ac lare:
odium tuui, quod esse cum populo mihi
commune doleo: pars quota ex illo mea est?
Am I to touch the hand soiled with the blood
My father and my brothers shed in their twin deaths?
Sooner the east will quench the day, the west
Will light it; sooner will fire and snow make peace
And Scylla join her southern shores with those
Of Italy; sooner will the alternating
Euboean current cease and stand transfixed.
You have taken from me all I cherish: my father,
My kingdom, brothers, my ancestral home.
Could you do more? One thing is left, dearer
To me than brother, father, kingdom or my home:
My hate for you, which, I regret, I have
Once again, the passionate sufferer appeals to the invariability of natural processes, in the realms of astronomy, of geography, and the play of the elements, to ratify the survival and permanence of her hatred of the tyrant, her only regret being that she has to share that hatred with the general populace. In what follows she assures Lycus of the certainty of his defeat by a god, reminding him of the miseries and cruel deaths of earlier rulers of Thebes. This is a risky proceeding, since it appears to invest him with an authority analogous to theirs. But disregarding the political awkwardness of that gambit, Megara's odium, and her resentment at having to share it, depart wildly from her traditional role as a virtuous and dignified sufferer. Seneca has recast her in the role of a hater, and a jealous hater at that. Does such a character, unstable and torn as she must be by Stoic and Senecan principles, have the moral right to call to witness the solidity of natural law? And since we know that the sanction invoked is moot, that the course of the sun is not eternally fixed and that the perpetuity of the currents of the Euripus is subject to the perils of contagio, what remains of the conventional force of the impossibile?

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

aequalis astris gradior et cunctos super
altum superbo vertice attingens polum.
nunc decora regni teneo, nunc solium patris.
dimitto superos; summa votorum attigi.
bene est, abunde est, iam sat est etiam mihi.
sed cur satis sit?

........
utinam quidem tenere fugientes deos
possem, et coactos trahere, ut ultricem dapem
omnes viderent.
My reach equals the stars, and higher yet
My head proudly abuts the lofty sky.
The royal emblems, the paternal lands are mine.
Who needs the gods? I have reached my life's desire.
It is good, yes, more than good; I have all I want.
But truly: all?

........
I wish I could retrieve the gods in flight
And force them all to view the bloody feast.
(Thy 885–935)

This is not, strictly speaking, a case of impossibilia. But the principles involved in this richly informative sequence are the same. The crimes reported have moved the chorus to announce that the world, especially the stars, are out of joint. This is a canonical declaration of the workings of sympatheia. Immediately thereafter Atreus states, pridefully, that he is now on equal footing with the stars, and in fact stands above them, with his head touching the summit of the cosmos. Such a declaration takes it for granted that the order over which he affirms his superiority, or with which he matches himself, is stable enough to serve as a basis for comparison. He proceeds to equate his cosmic eminence with his secure possession of the land of his father, but also with a summary rejection of the gods. This remarkable jumble of premises, dimensions, and emotions is bare of any logical consistency, and immediately resolves itself in an admission that perhaps all is not as it should be (890). And he proceeds to wish that the gods, whom he has just rejected, could be compelled to witness his impending act of vengeance. To any audience privileged to watch this drama, the successive steps of Atreus's speech must make it clear that his certainty of himself is a sham, that the authorities to which he appeals are equally unreliable, and that the man and his world are caught in a reciprocal web of fallibility and corruption.

Hyperbole, restlessness, arrogance, delusion, malfunction, and despair are the obligatory expressions of the relation between man and the world in which he is condemned to live, which duplicates his own being. Schreikatalog, deflection, simile, imprecation, and impossibile work together to remind us that in a drama motivated by the assumptions of Stoic science, man has lost his freedom to chart his own moral course. The Stoic scientist undoes the Stoic

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sage. Against the background of the more commonly accepted version of what Stoicism means, the conclusion is inevitable: Stoic drama, as Seneca writes it, must be tragic drama. The tragedy is fired by motives different from those at work in certain Greek and eighteenth-century plays in which the principals are given a chance to determine their own fate. Nor is the admiratio with which Renaissance theorists invest the heroes matched by the "better than average" moral standing of the agent prescribed in Aristotle's *Poetics*. But if Aeschylus's Clytaemnestra can be the principal of a tragedy, and if the subtleties of the interaction between man and his environment as drawn by Seneca can deepen our sense of risk and struggle without suggesting easy solutions to moral quandaries, the label "tragedy" cannot, I feel, be withheld.

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