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SENECA'S OEDIPUS AS DRAMA

SENECA AND SOPHOCLES ON THE OEDIPUS LEGEND

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

Galen Hayes Graham, A.B., M.A.

* * * * *

The Ohio State University

1977

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INTRODUCTION

For the past two centuries classical scholarship has almost entirely refused to consider the plays of Lucius Annaeus Seneca as either drama or tragedy. In fact, there has been very little agreement among scholars concerning such basic questions about the plays as their form, their mode (if any) of presentation, the date of their composition, or the purpose for which they were written. The plays of Seneca have been judged to be rhetorical exercises, philosophic diatribes, poetic "purple patches," or arbitrary collections of non-related episodes.

Those few who have defended Seneca's dramaturgy feel constrained at the same time to credit him with some new form of drama. Léon Herrman was moved by what he felt was Seneca's deep psychological insights into his characters and saw in the plays the beginnings of an entirely new genre of psychological drama. C. J. Herington, in perhaps the most important article on the plays written in the last twenty years, found Senecan tragedy

2. L. Herrmann, Le Théâtre de Sénèque (Paris, 1924), page 331.
peculiarly religious in tone and otherwise unique:

... they represent an art form almost without parallel in antique literature, a truly religious drama... Yet in one most important respect these tragedies differ from almost all other great tragedies of the Western world: they do not doubt to the very end, they leave no ultimate questions open... Our latest ancient tragedies, those of Seneca seem ... to mark the beginning of the reverse process, the transition from free inquiry to an era of religion.3

As praiseworthy as these efforts to rescue Senecan tragedy may be, they actually reconfirm the suspicion that Senecan tragedy is a literary aberration which has little to do with its Greek and Roman precursors. The defenders of the plays stress Seneca's modernity at the price of granting him a place in the history of dramatic literature. The underlying assumption in all of Senecan scholarship is that his plays have only an incidental relationship to their Greek models, and should they be compared with the works of Aeschylus, Sophocles, or Euripides they would prove to be both structurally and intellectually inferior.4

It will be my contention that Seneca's plays are neither strange nor dramatically meaningless. He assuredly is different from Greek playwrights, but not exclusively in such ways as his


rhetorical style or aphoristic thought. As any dramatist does, he creates his own world in his works, a world perhaps less problematic than that of the Greeks, but one that is certainly more pessimistic and terrifying. Seneca's plays show what people do to one another and the resultant suffering which displays the futility of man's aspiration. Seneca possesses a sensitivity to man as a victim of fate and his own passions — a sensitivity, which may be clouded by rhetoric and sententiae, but which serves as the basis of the action in the plays and of Seneca's motivation in writing them.

The plays are also dramatic vehicles for Seneca's vision of life. This is merely saying of Seneca what we would say of any playwright, but is an assumption which is conspicuously absent in the criticism of the plays. There is also a hesitancy to see this vision as a tragic one and to view the plays as tragedies. In this respect we should look at our intellectual and emotional responses to Senecan drama, and ask if these plays engage our sympathy for the suffering we see in them and our terror when we realize that this suffering is an inevitable part of our existence. The plays do indeed arouse our "pity and fear" and they do this through the drama of human actions and feelings.

Criticism which views the plays as philosophy-in-verse or which concerns itself exclusively with their stageability can not deal effectively with their tragic or emotional impact. To try to understand this impact it is necessary to lay aside the unanswerable questions about the Roman stage in the first century A.D. and instead return to the methods of criticism which have illuminated Greek tragedy and which can help us understand Senecan tragedy. We must consider the structure of the plot, the portrayal of character, dramatic tension, the function of the chorus, and the poet's concern with (among other things) fate and individual responsibility. If we do this we may not find Seneca to be a great or always even a very good dramatist, but at least we will be able to approach the plays in terms of the literary genre in which they were written without resorting to esoteric theories.

Senecan tragedy is not difficult to understand. On the contrary, the issues which Seneca raises in the plays are obvious: the dangers of rampant emotions, the problem of fate, man's capacity for violence, his reaction to his moral and physical destruction, his loss of self respect and independence. These issues are neither vague nor trite; they make up the substance of even the greatest tragedies. That they have not been discussed in terms of Seneca's dramatic technique is less an indication of Seneca's shallowness than it is of our unwillingness to consider seriously his drama as drama.
Before we can analyze Senecan tragedy in terms of its dramatic and tragic qualities it will be necessary to survey certain interpretations of the plays which have had considerable influence on Senecan scholarship. These interpretations have all shed some light upon the nature of Senecan tragedy, but individually they do not explain the form of the plays or the author's intention in writing them. In discussing these approaches to the plays I will be working under the hypothesis that Seneca wrote the tragedies not in fits of rhetorical euphoria or philosophical rumination, but as an attempt to emulate if not surpass his literary predecessors. I will then proceed to analyze Seneca's Oedipus in terms of the Roman playwright's changes and innovations of his Greek model, Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus. In doing so I hope to show that Senecan drama does indeed deserve to be taken seriously as the expression of the concerns of a Stoic, a rhetorician, and an artist.

For Seneca's play I will be using Leo's edition of the tragedies (1879); for Sophocles I will use Jebb's edition (Cambridge, 1914). In order to avoid confusion I refer to Seneca's play as the Oedipus (Oed.) while Sophocles' version is always cited as Oedipus Tyrannus (O.T.).
CHAPTER I
MODERN APPROACHES TO THE PLAYS

Seneca's influence, for good or ill, on Renaissance drama has for some time been a datum of English and classical criticism:

Senecan influence on the serious drama of most of Western Europe is almost immeasurable ... In effect the Latin dramatist founded a tradition which at least until the 19th century passed through Europe in secure and undisputed triumph.

Er ist der grosse Mittler des Tragischen auf das Abendland gewesen, vor den Griechen und lange Zeit neben den Griechen; es hat ... als Ersatz für die Griechen genügt, ist von manchen über die Griechen gesellt worden und hat nicht wenige zu den Griechen hingeleitet.

The most complete study of Senecan influences on the drama of the Renaissance is H. B. Charlton's The Senecan Tradition in Renaissance Tragedy, Manchester, 1946 (first printed as the introduction to the Scottish Text Society's edition of Sir William Alexander's Poetical Works, Edinburgh, 1921). In it, Charlton traces the use of Senecan passages, characterizations, and plots from the 14th century Italian tragedy through the Jacobean period.

The accepted ideas of Senecan influences have, however, come under sharp attack by G. K. Hunter, who sees Senecan influence only as one of several strands of literary and cultural influence which helped to shape the plays of the period.

The danger of charting the change in "Seneca" as he passes through Dolce or Corrado or Garnier and so reaches England is that elements genuinely Senecan (i.e. characteristically if not uniquely present in Seneca's plays) may cease to be present at all, while elements generally characteristic of late medieval and Renaissance taste (sententiousness, a gloomy sense of overpowering rule by fortune or fate in human affairs, a morbid interest in the limits of human suffering), or indeed characteristic of tragedy as a genre (horror, blood, desolation) come to be labelled "Senecan" because Seneca also displays them and is thought responsible for the tradition (late medieval tragedy) in which they appear. The Senecan example may have provided the earliest formal model for European tragedy, but it could quickly become (in spite of this status) totally irrelevant to the day-by-day imagination of tragic playwrights.²

As sharp as the debate may be in modern scholarship, there seems to be no question that Renaissance critics considered Seneca an outstanding poet and dramatist.³ Hugo Grotius considered the Troades the "regina tragoediarum" and Scaliger did not hesitate to state "Seneca quem nullo Graecorum maiestate inferiorem existimo."⁴


⁴. For Grotius' comment see P. J. Enk, "Roman Tragedy" Neophilologus 31 (1957), page 289, note 2, where he cites the dedication of De Amsterdamische Hecuba by van den Vondel. For Scaliger see Poetic VII, 3, quoted in Herrmann, op. cit., page 560, note 2.
It is not surprising that T. S. Eliot can say that "in the Renaissance no Latin author was more highly esteemed than Seneca ... a dramatist whom Scaliger preferred to Euripides, and whom the whole of Europe delighted to honor."5

The Renaissance saw Senecan tragedy as dramatic art; there was no question about the difficulties in staging the plays or about whether they were written for production.6 The violence we find in the plays and especially Seneca's portrayal of strong characters coming to grieve with their passions and their proclivity for self-destruction struck the writers of this period as being entirely appropriate to tragedy:

... the general influence of Seneca on the writing and the original conception of the play cannot be denied, for such an influence was unavoidable at the time ... the Elizabethans came to regard Seneca as the most tragic, the most perfect of ancient writers. Senecan tragedy was dominant on the Continent; Seneca was read freely in the English schools and universities where his plays were acted, as were Latin imitations. His methods of treating tragic situations were akin to Elizabethan temperament, for the men of the time were well equipped to understand his philosophy, which held that man, the individual was more than the puppet of medieval scholasticism and was indeed, to some extent, the master of his fate. Even the fatalistic Senecan passages found a ready echo in the breasts of Englishmen already afflicted with the melancholia which sometimes turned them into practising malcontents.7


6. Ibid., page 50, where he cites productions of Seneca's plays at Trinity College, Cambridge from 1551-61.

Modern critics, as we shall see, are often perplexed by the possibility that Seneca may have been an important influence on one of the most creative periods of European dramatic writing. What the critics sometimes fail to realize is that the Renaissance did not consider Senecan tragedy to be primarily anything else but tragedy. The influence of Seneca on a particular playwright or play will remain open to debate. However, it does seem that Seneca captured the Renaissance imagination at least insofar as his characters' fatalism and capacity for violence appealed to the period's emerging concept of the individual. Far from being the "responsible child of God," man was beginning to perceive anew the terrors of existence and their unavoidability. Seneca presented man's evil and helplessness in stark, disturbing, yet thoroughly understandable terms.

Der Mensch als lebendige Energie; der Kern seiner Natur Animalität, Triebe, Affekte; das ziel seiner Formung ihre Regulierung, das ist das zentrale Interesse dieser Jahrhunderts 16 and 17.8

The latter part of the 18th and all of the 19th century witnessed a constant barrage of negative criticism of Seneca's tragedies. To a large extent this was due to the rise of Romanticism and its devotion to the sublimity of Greek culture. The Greek tragedies were viewed as an expression of the "authentic" mystical and religious longings of the Hellenic race; Seneca's secularism and

rhetorical style found few supporters among those imbued with a love of Greek culture.\footnote{For the decline of Seneca's reputation during this period, see Enk, op. cit., pages 288-290, and Giardina, G. "Due Studi sul Teatro di Seneca" Studi pubblicati dall' Instituto di Filologia Classica (Bologna) 13 (1963), pages 99-101.} One of his defenders, for a time, was Lessing. In his "Von den Trauerspielen des Seneca" (Sämtliche Schriften, 3rd edition, 1890, vol. VI, page 187) he stated 
"... lauter Fehler, in die ein schlechtes Genie niemals fallen wird ... starke Schilderung von Leidenschaften unsere Leidenschaften unmöglich ganz ruhig lassen können." Friedrich Leo would later attribute Lessing's praises (such as they were) to youthful exuberance.\footnote{F. Leo, L. Annaei Senecae Tragoediae, vol. I: (1879), page 158.}

Seneca's fall from grace was part of a larger movement which saw the decline of appreciation for Latin literature in general. This movement was given its impetus by the brothers von Schlegel:

Two men who by malicious and unjust criticism for more than a century dulled the love and admiration which Europe had cherished for Latin literature until the end of the eighteenth century, are August Wilhelm and Friedrich von Schlegel. Friedrich (1772-1829), the younger of the two brothers, condemned the whole of Latin literature in his Geschichte der alten und neuen Literatur which was published in 1815. He was of the opinion that Latin literature had neglected the old national and patriotic traditions, that it had attempted in vain to imitate certain exotic forms which, dragged from their native soil, nearly always seem cold, without strength and without life ...


This judgment, as unjust as it is crushing, was accepted as Gospel truth in Germany during the whole of the nineteenth century.\footnote{Enk, op. cit., page 286.}

Seneca was hurt by this criticism because the 19th century saw the development of the idea that his tragedies were not really tragedies at all. This was accomplished by first denying the existence of a peculiarly Roman tragedy.\footnote{D. Nisard, \textit{Etudes de moeurs et de critique sur les poètes Latins de la decadence} 4th edition (Paris, 1878) vol. I, page 92.} Seneca and his Roman predecessors were seen as mere copyists, drawing only upon Greek tragedy for their technique and art.

Seneca himself was condemned for lacking the most basic theatrical ability:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

If Senecan tragedy was neither dramatic or poetic, what was it? Schlegel's view that it was meant for rhetorical exercises or to be recited for a small group of friends of litterateurs was the one which dominated criticism for almost a century and a half. The
rhetorical theory of the purpose and origin of the plays was given further cogency by Friedrich Leo, who postulated the existence of an entire genre of rhetorical tragedy which only incidentally conformed to dramatic canons.\textsuperscript{14}

The view that Senecan tragedy was primarily rhetorical in nature resulted in two movements in the scholarship concerning the tragedies. First, it absolved Seneca to some extent from being a mere copyist of Greek plays. He comes to be seen as an example if not the originator of "declamatory drama," successful at least in integrating rhetoric and the moribund tradition of Roman tragedy.\textsuperscript{15} Secondly, it became easier to view the plays as collections of vaguely related rhetorical exercises patched together only by the loosest form of plot. This putative form of tragedy, interested as it is in set-speeches and sententiae, does not require unity of plot or character development or the logical development of scenes. The interest of the rhetorical tragedian is in the individual scene and not in consistent characterization. In this interpretation Seneca becomes something different from a playwright and his plays seem barely able to sustain the name "drama." Seneca is credited with originality, but at the cost of having his plays treated as scissors-and-paste efforts.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{14} Leo, op. cit., vol. II, pages 158-159.
\item \textsuperscript{15} H. V. Canter, "Rhetorical Elements in the Tragedies of Seneca," Illinois Studies in Language and Literature, 10 (1925), page 20, note 68.
\end{itemize}
The trend to disintegrate Senecan tragedy into its component parts was furthered by two articles which appeared in 1927. One is T. S. Eliot's "Seneca in Elizabethan Translation." He finds the plays as "admirably adapted for declamation."

Behind the dialogue of Greek drama we are always conscious of a concrete visual actuality. Behind the drama of words is the drama of action, the timbre of voice and voice, the uplifted hand or tense muscle, and the particular emotion. In the plays of Seneca, the drama is all in the word, and the word has no further reality behind it. His characters all seem to speak with the same voice, and at the top of it; they recite in turn.

Eliot's comments on the "drama in the word" inspired a method of criticizing the plays on the basis of their diction and poetic images. The most extensive of these studies is Norman Pratt's "Major Systems of Figurative Language in Senecan Melodrama" (TAPA 94, 1963, pages 199-234), in which he catalogues images such as fire, furor, storms, darkness, and so on. As valuable as this analysis is, it can lead to the conclusion that the plays do not have to be dealt with as drama at all. D. J. Mastronarde applies Pratt's "systems" as well as some of his own to Seneca's Oedipus and concludes that Senecan tragedy is "verbal paintings of almost static situations." Again we see Seneca given credit for the development of a "peculiar literary form" while at the same time

19. Ibid., page 315.
denied any interest in writing drama.

The other article published in 1927 was Otto Regenbogen's "Schmerz und Tod in den Tragödien Senecas." Regenbogen sees Seneca's primary motivation in writing the plays as his desire to portray the psychology of his characters as they are overcome by strong and violent passion. Seneca differs from Greek tragedy in his emphasis on "affektspsychologische Interesse," and structures his scenes to give the greatest play to the expression of passion. The "Affektszenen" are the basic building blocks of Senecan tragedy and are written for their own sake; Seneca was interested in psychological studies and not in dramatic unity.

The most recent development in the study of the plays is the "philosophic" interpretation which views them as either poetic lessons for the young Nero, or general treatises on the evils of passion and the victory of ratio over furor. The tragedies are seen as consistent in purpose and tone; Seneca used them to promulgate his Stoic philosophy as it is developed in his prose

20. See note 1 of this chapter.
22. T. Birt, "Was hat Seneca mit seinen Tragödien gewollt?" Neue Jahrbuch für Philologie, 27 (1911), pages 337 ff. For a list of pre-1924 work on the philosophic purposes of the plays see Herrmann, op. cit., page 241, notes 1-8.
23. Franz Egermann, "Seneca als Dichterphilosoph" Neue Jahrbücher für Antike und deutsche Bildung, 3, (1940), pages 18-36. For work on this aspect from 1922-1955 see Coffey's Lustrum article, pages 152-162 (see note 1).
works. The dramatic form of the tragedies is only incidental; it serves as a vehicle for Seneca's Stoicism much as poetry was for Lucretius' Epicureanism.24

As we have seen, there have been several ways of interpreting Senecan tragedy. In each instance questions of dramatic technique and form are clearly of secondary interest. Even those who appreciate his dramaturgy are constrained to see in Seneca a playwright working not in the context of ancient tragedy, but rather as one who was to prepare the way for genius which would follow. He is described, for example, as "an embryonic Elizabethan"25 or a proto-absurdist.26

Let us restore a concern for Seneca the dramatist in the following discussion of the various modern theories on the origins and purposes for his plays, while at the same time remembering that his tragedies may indeed be rhetorical, philosophical, and psychological. In this way we can perhaps judge the success or failure of these plays not on the basis that Seneca was a popularizer of philosophy or a decadent rhetorician (though he may have been both). Rather he should be judged in terms of what he wrote and how he wrote it. What the majority of critics since the 18th century have often


overlooked is that he wrote drama.

RHETORICAL TRAGEDY

There can be no doubt that in the first century A.D. rhetoric made its presence felt in every form of Latin literature, and that Seneca had typical rhetorical training and experience. Nor can there be any doubt that public recitations of prose and poetry, a practice begun by Asinius Pollio, enjoyed great favor during Seneca's lifetime and after. What is not certain is whether such dramatic works as tragedies were invariably recited during this period.

Some tragedies were recited, as we learn from Tactius' Dialogue 2.1 and 11.2, where the works of Curiatus Maternus are mentioned as being recited by the author. On the other hand Pomponius Secundus, a contemporary of Seneca, seems to have presented his plays on stage (Tacitus Ann. 11.13 and Pliny Epist. 7.17.11), while Nero both staged theatrical productions (Suetonius Nero 11) and recited them (Suet. Nero 38 and Tactius Ann. 15.39).


28. For Pollio see Seneca Rhetor Controversiae 4, praef. 2; for recitatio see Kennedy, loc. cit., and Herrmann, op. cit., page 60, notes 2-8 where he cites, among other articles, F. Orlando Le Letture pubbliche in Roma imperiale (Florence, 1907).
Quintilian, although he does not directly discuss the stageability or plays, does say in his *Institutio Cratoria* (10.1.98) that Varius' *Thyestes*, produced under Augustus, was the equal of any Greek tragedy and that Pomponius was the best tragedian among his contemporaries.

The evidence is conflicting. Perhaps if any of Pomponius' work had survived we might be able to determine if tragedy in the first century was staged or recited. However, even if it were to contain long soliloquies and asides such as we find them in Seneca, that would hardly be evidence that they were written for recitation. Seneca himself is mute on the question of recited tragedy, and although we have no record that any of his plays were ever performed we likewise have no record that they ever were recited.

Despite the lack of hard evidence it remains a commonplace of Senecan criticism that the tragedies were recited and not staged. This in turn has influenced scholars to hypothesize the existence of a genre of "rhetorical tragedy" which was written for the express purposes of being recited in the salons of Rome.29 It is still common to hear of the "invasion" of rhetoric into Senecan tragedy and descriptions of them as "a special kind of declamatory drama."30

29. See above, pages 11-12.

The difficulty with using the term "rhetorical" to describe the tragedies of Seneca is that it can be a not very useful term in describing Latin literature written after the Augustan period. Rhetoric becomes in the first century A.D. the basis of higher education, and it is impossible to find any literature in this period which is not rhetorical to a greater or less degree. The difficulty is compounded when talking about such an intrinsically forensic form of literature as drama, in which dialogue, asides, and set speeches are the *sine qua non* of dramatic movement and action. To say that Senecan tragedy is rhetorical is, in a sense, saying that it has something in common with Greek tragedy and drama of all periods: it is deeply concerned with the spoken word.

On the other hand, Senecan tragedy is certainly more rhetorical than other ancient tragedies. Seneca makes extensive use of rhetorical figures of speech and his characters' speeches are more declamatory in tone. Perhaps we might say that Seneca is more consciously rhetorical than the dramatists who came before him. This is certainly due to his training and to the "introspective and subjective"\textsuperscript{31} nature of his drama. The characters of Senecan tragedy are not only isolated but they also openly struggle with their emotions, their sense of guilt, and their moral failures. Their efforts to identify their ethical positions and to communicate them, as futile as they may be, give numerous opportunities for

\textsuperscript{32} H. V. Canter, op. cit., pages 55-56.
rhetorical exposition. Medea drives herself into a frenzy of hate (Medea 397-425), Oedipus expresses his dark forebodings (Oedipus 1-81), Andromache and Ulysses verbally duel for the life of Astyanax (Troades 524-813); the list goes on. In fact it is not far wrong to say that rhetoric infuses almost every line of Senecan tragedy; Canter, in his analysis of the plays, hardly leaves any lines out of the category "rhetorical:"

The tragedies of Seneca, in which the feelings move regularly at extremes, were without a doubt written with a view to giving the actor or declaimer suitable material for energetic declamation.  

Senecan tragedy is profoundly if not totally rhetorical, and studying the plays from the standpoint of their rhetoric is legitimate and necessary as Leo, Canter and others have shown. However, the use of the term "rhetorical" does not permit the critic to ignore the moral and philosophic issues in the plays, the relationship of the plays to their literary and dramatic sources, or their dramatic structure.

Let us assume for a moment that the plays are rhetorical in another sense: that they were written for recitation. This would of course eliminate the debate over whether the plays were staged. But what effect would this assumption have on our interpretation of Seneca's tragedies? How would we discuss or understand differently the plays' conflicts and pathos if we knew

32. H. V. Canter, op. cit., pages 55-56.
they were recited? How would we react differently to the blinding of Oedipus or the deaths of Astyanax or Polyxena in a recited tragedy?

I suggest that whether the plays were recited or acted, our reaction intellectually and emotionally would be the same. In the first place, recitation can be a powerful dramatic medium:

Practical experiment in the tape recording of scenes from the Phaedra convinced me, and I believe would convince anyone else who tried it, that Senecan dramatic verse is designed, no less than the verse of Marlowe or Racine, for its effect on the ear, not on the eye; and that effect is shattering. Retranslated, even by amateurs into the sound-medium, the long speeches almost of themselves generated passion, the verbal epigrams (dull on paper) acquired a cutting edge, the texture and forward movement of the scenes were restored. That the verse was intended for speaking, then, I have no doubt; and if that can be admitted, the conclusion inevitably follows that it was intended for speaking by different voices for different parts...... If that point is conceded, then Senecan tragedies are, for essential purposes, true drama, and to be treated as such by the critic. Whether they were accompanied by action ... whether there was a raised stage, scenery, masks -- these are marginal and antiquarian questions, insoluble on our available evidence.33

Secondly, dramatic literature has the power of making an impact on its audience without any type of formal presentation. Aristotle realized that tragedy has an effect even on someone reading a play:


34. Poetics, 1462 a 11; see also 1450 b 18 and 1453 b 4.
An example of the problems one can encounter with too narrow a view of "rhetorical tragedy" is a monograph by Otto Zwierlein, "Die Rezitationsdramen Senecas" (Beiträge zur Philologie 20, 1966, ed. R. Merkelbach). Zwierlein attempts to prove the existence of a separate genre of tragica rhetorica. The analysis centers around the "bühnenfremde Character des Senecas-Tragödien" and the "Geschichte des Bühnenfremde Dramas."35

To prove the unstageability of Seneca's plays Zwierlein discusses several problems: long absences of characters, descriptions of stage activity by characters, discrepancies in time, long asides, "bühnenfremde Greuelszenen," and the irrelevance of some scenes and characters. These clearly offended the author's sense of what a drama should be, but they tell us nothing about the plays' stageability. B. Walker, in a review of Zwierlein's monograph,37 rightly asks if he ever attended the theater; if he did he would presumably know that there is hardly a play in existence which cannot be staged no matter how much it might not conform to what is generally accepted as good theater. Walker goes on to cite some evidence for stage performances in Imperial times

35. Pages 13-125.

36. Pages 126-166.

(see above, pages 16-17) and mentions some modern productions of Senecan tragedy, the best known of which was the 1967 adaptation of the _Oedipus_ by the National Theatre in London. Walker concludes that "a comparative study of both Seneca's predecessors and his descendants and the small evidence we possess about Roman theatrical history make performance seem entirely possible."

Seneca is far from being the perfect dramatist, of course. What is not often mentioned, however, is that some Greek tragedies exhibit Seneca's theatrical shortcomings. "Greuelszenen" is a good example. Certainly no one would presume to say that Prometheus' crucifixion or Philoctetes' howls of pain are anything other than scenes of violence and horror. Similarly, if we condemn the lack of unity of Seneca's _Troades_, what can we make of the long absences of Ajax or Antigone in Sophocles' plays? While we must be ready to say that Seneca may not have written plays with the tightest plots or with very much stage action, at the same time we must not suppose that these plays could not have been staged under any circumstances.

Zwierlein's second thesis, that there existed a definite genre of rhetorical tragedy originating in Hellenistic times, depends to a large extent on accepting Seneca as part of that development. His early evidence centers around the _Exagoge_ of Ezechial and the philosophic "drama" of Diogenes of Sinope, neither of which seems to have exerted any influence on Republican tragedy. Zwierlein does demonstrate the existence of _recitatio_ in Imperial Rome, but the evidence does not prove conclusively that Seneca's
plays were recited or that they were of a different literary genre from Greek or Republican tragedy. The best critic of his approach is Zwierlein himself:

Wir stehen somit am Ende unserer Untersuchung vor einem merkwürdigen Paradoxen: die mächtige Wirking die Seneca jahrhundertelang auf wirkliche Bühnen dramatiker ausgeübt hat, ist ausgegangen von einem Dichter, der selbst seine Werke für die Rezitation bestimmt hatte.38

The extent of Seneca's "Mächtige Wirking" certainly remains hotly debated, as we have seen, but it certainly is no paradox to those who read Seneca's tragedies as just what they appear to be: dramatic literature influenced by rhetoric and not the reverse.

**SENECA AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DRAMA**

In 1924 León Herrmann had defended Seneca's plays on a dramatic and psychological basis:

Il n'a pas traduit ou adapté les tragédies grecques: il a cherché avant tout à être original et personnel... Il a cherché à faire passer leurs sujets, leur action dans ses tragédies, mais en donnant à celles-ci une orientation nouvelle. Ce n'est pas la rhétorique qu'il a cherché à y ajouter ... c'est la psychologie ... Sénèque a essayé de donner à ses œuvres une profondeur psychologique plus grande que celle des tragédies de tous ses devanciers, y compris les Grecs. Il a voulu créer un genre nouveau, la tragédie, purement dramatique et psychologique.39

For Herrmann it was this originality in portraying the characters' emotional and psychological tensions that made Seneca a creative

38. Page 166.

force in the history of the theater. In *Schmerz und Tod* Regenbogen expanded on these ideas and indeed decided that it was the portrayal of "Affekt" which accounted for the play's influence on subsequent drama. What Lessing had identified in the plays as "starke Schilderung von Leidenschaften" was the key to understanding Seneca's appeal, especially in the Renaissance, where "Affekt" was important in tragic theory:

... docet affectus poeta per actiones, ut bonos amplectamur atque imitetur ad agendum malos aspernemur ad abstinendum ... Est igitur actio docendi modus; affectus quem docemur ad agendum; quare erit actio quasi exemplar aut instrumentum in fabula; affectus vero finis. 40

Regenbogen saw Seneca's popularity during the Renaissance as directly related to its concern with man's character, nature, and passions; Seneca's preoccupation with furor and its effects struck a responsive chord with playwrights probing the limits of man's endurance and capacity to inflict evil. 41 Regenbogen's thoughts on Senecan influence and the reasons for it are compelling. On the other hand, his analysis of passion and suffering leads him to conclude that the various scenes in the plays of Seneca are independent and self-contained *exempla* dealing with "Affect." These *Einzelszenen* have only incidental relevance to the rest of the play; the *Ablauf der*


41. See Note 11.
Handlung was of secondary importance to Seneca: "mit der Durchführung der Affektszene, die Selbstzweck ist das Interess erschöpft." 42

Regenbogen's work has exerted considerable influence on Senecan scholarship. As we shall see below, scholars who view the plays as philosophy stress the role of Affekt in the plays and Seneca's warnings about its destructiveness. Schmerz und Tod established Seneca's excellence as a portrayer of human emotions; it is generally accepted that Seneca's plays "represent a landmark in the development of psychological drama." 43

Although Regenbogen admired Herrmann's analysis of Seneca's originality 44 his article influenced others who denied the tragedies the artistic and dramatic unity Herrmann had shown. Turning the discussions of the tragedies into the areas of Affekt and especially Einzelszenen inevitably removed the need for dealing with the plays as dramas which possess theme, characterization, and plot. 45 Regenbogen was confronted with the anomaly of Senecan influence on later drama, an influence caused by the seemingly undramatic tragedies. He solved this problem by putting Seneca at the head of a new literary

42. Regenbogen, op. cit., page 435.


44. Regenbogen, op. cit., page 413, note 13.

development, Affektsdramen, which was concerned with the presentation of intense and inevitably destructive emotions. Seneca's reasons for writing the plays thus become psychological and not dramatic.

There is no question that Seneca's characters are more introspective and perhaps more self-conscious than their Greek counterparts. Whether we attribute this to Senecan dramaturgy or to Stoic interest in furor and its effects or to rhetorical interest in soliloquies and set speeches, it remains only quantitatively different from Greek tragedy. Regenbogen was plainly wrong when he suggested that Greek tragedy did not possess affektspsychologische Interesse.\footnote{Regenbogen, op. cit., page 436.} Schmerz und Tod are no less important in Aeschylus' Agamemnon or Euripides' Bacchae than in a Senecan play. There are in fact no tragedies in which suffering and death do not play a major part. Similarly, all tragedy is "psychological" because it deals with people and their responses to terrifying situations. To say that Seneca wrote works in which he presents stark portrayals of furor and its effects in a way is to say that he wrote on a subject which has captivated all tragedians.

The problem, then, is that while Affektsdramen does accurately describe Senecan tragedy, it is a descriptive term which must be used with caution, for it does not completely describe them.
Regenbogen's article was extremely important because it analyzed the extent of Seneca's interest in the psychological dimension of his characters. However, it is necessary to keep in mind that interest in psychology does not preclude concern with the philosophical and moral issues the plays raise. Seneca's sensitivity to the effects of the conflicts and tensions which we find in the plays should be viewed in the context of the dramatic situation he creates. He does not present psychological portraits for their own sake, but rather he uses them to involve his audience further in the tragedy confronting his characters.

PHILOSOPHIC INTERPRETATIONS

Increased interest in the role of Stoic philosophy in Seneca's plays went hand-in-hand with the development of the theory of Affektsdramen. Affekt was seen as the result of an unbalanced soul devoid of ratio; the plays can be viewed as collections of Stoic aphorisms and exempla of philosophical fortitude in the face of uncontrollable passion.

Critics had seen Stoic philosophy in the plays for some time, but it was not until the 1930's and 40's that philosophy was used to explain the purpose for writing the tragedies. One of

47. Herrmann, op. cit., page 244, notes 1-7.
the first extensive statements of this view was Franz Egermann's "Seneca als Dichterphilosoph." Egermann poses the question why a politician and member of a philosophic school that disliked tragedy would write plays. His answer is that we should not draw too great a distinction among Seneca the statesman, the poet, and the philosopher; Stoicism permeated his thought and literary output. Egermann proceeds to cite Seneca's pedagogical efforts with Nero, the didactic element in his prose works, and his fondness for ethical and moral exempla as indications that the plays were meant to teach philosophy. Seneca's plays are metrische Darstellung der Affekte von Menschen and constitute a Stoic warning on passion. Hercules in the Hercules Oetaeus is the archetype of the Stoic sapiens; he is die verkörperte Virtus. His deification stands as the ultimate victory of ratio: Die apotheose des Heracles ist Sinnbild für den von Seneca vertretenen stoischen Gedanken.

Ulrich Knoche applied some of Egermann's ideas about the

48. Neue Jahrbücher für Antike und deutsche Bildung III (115) (1940), pages 18-36; reprinted in Senecas Tragödien (Wege der For-

49. Egermann, op. cit., pages 34 and 37.

50. Ibid., page 42.

51. Ibid., page 46.

52. Ibid., page 46.
philosophic basis of the plays to Seneca's Thyestes. Knoche points to Seneca's remarks on the power of drama to re-enforce philosophic teachings (Epist. 8.8 and 108.8) and asserts that the plays were written to encourage the audience in their pursuit of wisdom while making them strong with ethical Heilslehre.

Nur in diesem Sinne will Senecas Tragödie den Hörer "erregen"; sie wendet sich nicht an seinem Affekt oder an seine Leidenschaften, sondern sie spricht zu einem besseren emotionalen Teil ..., der als heilsame Kraft den Geist auf ein gutes Ziel zu richten vermag.

Berthe Marti, in "Seneca's Tragedies; a New Interpretation" sees the Senecan tragic corpus as "philosophical propaganda plays" which were meant to be read together. She considers the order of MS.E (Hercules Furens, Troades, Phoenissae, Medea, Phaedra, Oedipus, Agamemnon, Thyestes, Hercules Oetaeus) to be the arrangement of the playwright. The two Hercules plays frame the group, while the Troades and Phoenissae are concerned with life, death, and duty; Medea and Phaedra with uncontrolled passion; Agamemnon, Thyestes, and Oedipus with ethics and the question of free will and retribution. The Hercules Oetaeus, with its apotheosis of the Stoic hero, resolves the contradictions and problematic conclusions of the other plays. Ms. Marti points out some parallels between the plays and the prose works. The Troades.

54. Ibid., page 64.
55. TAPA 76 (1945), pages 216-245.
for example, can be related to Seneca's contempt of life (Epist. 32.3) and pain (Epist. 13.4), while the Medea and Phaedra show the dangers of passion which occupied a large place in the prose works (Epist. 116.3 and De Ira).

In response to Marti's article Norman Pratt wrote "The Stoic Base of Senecan Tragedy" in which he disputed her use of MS.E, but otherwise accepted the view of the philosophic purpose of the plays. Pratt also draws a distinction between the Greek and Senecan understanding of evil; for the Greeks it was a pervasive aspect of nature, while Seneca saw it as primarily an external force caused by passion and the deterioration of character. Pratt sees the primary purpose of Stoicism as the creation of a strong soul protected against suffering, and also draws parallels to the prose works (Epist. 9.3; 71.26; 91.15). The emotional intensity and violence in the plays have a Stoic purpose: evil and suffering are good tests for the spirit (De Prov. 1.6; 3.2; 4.2). Even contemplating pain and death can be an enlightening and joyful experience (Epist. 23.4-5). The battle between ratio and furor physically takes place before us in the plays.

All of these scholars have contributed in making the modern reader more aware of the philosophical influences on the tragedies. It is doubtful that Seneca, whom Quintilian called

56. TAPA 79 (1948), page 1-11.
the *egregius insectator vitiorum* (X.1.29), would not have interjected Stoic philosophy into the tragedies; he did not cease to be a philosopher while he was writing the plays. The question these scholars' work has raised is whether Seneca's primary purpose in writing the tragedies was philosophic -- whether the plays are "philosophical propaganda."

If the tragedies are seen to be collections of individual lines and scenes it is much easier to find philosophic purposes behind various speeches and odes. Yet if the tragedies are considered dramatic wholes, then the philosophic interpretation becomes more tenuous. The most obvious objection is that virtually all of the plays are embodiments of the antithesis of Stoic virtue. Some minor characters, such as Astyanax and Polyxena in the *Troades*, might indeed seem to possess Stoic virtues. But figures such as these constitute only a very small number of roles, and in any event pale in comparison with the extended portrayals of such furores as those of Medea, Atreus, Phaedra, and so on. A solution to this problem is to accept the authenticity of the *Hercules Oetaeus* and to make it the culminating work of the Senecan dramatic corpus. Marti is entirely correct in saying that it is difficult to reconcile the pessimism of the rest of the plays with the "fundamental optimism" of Stoic doctrine unless they form a group which is pointing to the climax of the *Hercules Oetaeus.*

57. Marti, op. cit., page 220.
The difficulties with this solution are, first, the question of the authenticity of the Hercules Oetaeus and, secondly, the dangers inherent in using one play as a tool to explain the difficulties in the others. Even if the Hercules Oetaeus were authentically Senecan and even if a chronology for the plays could be established (which it cannot be), the question remains whether we are justified in using the Hercules Oetaeus to resolve the anomalies we find in, say, the Medea. There may be thematic, poetic, and philosophic carry-overs in a writer's work, yet there is point beyond which we should not lump works together which may have been written at different times and under different conditions. The apotheosis of Hercules may be an uplifting and encouraging passage, but it tells us nothing about Oedipus' angst or Atreus' cruelty or the despair of the survivors of Troy.

In fact, the Senecan tragic corpus offers very little of the "fundamental optimism" which is prevalent in Seneca's prose works, especially the Epistulae ad Lucilium. In the letters we see emphasized man's divine nature (41.1-2; 31.5), his ability to improve (90.1-2; 94.29), the beauty of a noble death (70.13-21; 61), the freedom from fear which the study of philosophy provides (37.3-4). Of course the Epistulae are an exhortatio to lead a life of reason in accord with nature, and we expect the positive

tone. Still, we might ask where in the plays we see the victory of reason, the nobility of man, or freedom from fear. The philosopher writing poetry ought to use it to stir the audience to virtue:

Facile est auditorem concitare ad cupidinm recti; omnibus enim natura fundamenta dedit sememque virtutem... cum inritatot accessit, tunc illa anima bona veluti soluta excitatur. Non vides, quemadmodum theatra consonent, quotiens aliqua dicta sunt, quae publice adgnoscimus et consense vera esse testamur?... Ad hos versus ille sordidissimus plaudit et vitii suis fieri convicium gaudet; quanto magis hoc iudicas evenire, cum a philosopho ista dicuntur, cum salutaribus praeeptis versus inseruntur, efficacius eadem illa demissuri in animum imperitorum?59

Quam multi poetae dicunt, quae philosophis aut dicta sunt aut dicenda! Non adtingam tragicos nec togatas nostras. Habent enim hae quoque aliquid severitatis et sunt inter comediae ac tragediae mediae...60

Seneca may accomplish a philosophic purpose in the tragedies by holding up the protagonists as negative exempla: characters whose violence and instability ought to serve as a warning to the audience. Seneca does sometimes use exempla of invidious characters in his prose works, such as Maecenas (Epist. 114) and the intemperate Alexander (Epist. 83.22). Otherwise he shows a marked preference for positive re-enforcement of his teachings. In the Epistulae especially we are confronted with heroes and heroines who can encourage us by their virtue: the unbribable Fabricius (120.6) Cato

59. Epistulae 108.8-9; for these and subsequent quotations from the Epistulae I use O. Hense's second edition).

60. Ibid., 8.8.
and Socrates in the face of death (98.11-12; 104.22-31), the fidelity of Ulysses and Penelope (88.7-8). If models are to be offered, they ought to be noble ones for the Stoic:

Aliquam habeat animus, quem vereatur, cuius auctoritate etiam secretum suum sanctius faciat... O felicem, qui sic aliquem vereri potest, ut ad memoriam quoque, eius se conponat atque ordinet! Qui sic aliquem vereri potest, cito erit verendus. Elige itaque Catonem. Si hic tibi videtur nimis rigidus, elige remissioris animi virum Laelium... Opus est, inquam, aliquo, ad quem mores nostri se ipsi exigant; nisi ad regulam prava non corriges.61

Those who consider Senecan tragedy as peculiarly philosophic poetry have never satisfactorily explained the selection of subjects from Greek tragedy, except to say that they are meant to precede the Hercules Oetaeus. If Seneca was primarily interested in philosophical propaganda he could have easily selected plots which could be interpreted in Stoic terms. If he was primarily interested in showing furor and the Stoic sapiens overcoming it he could have selected the Prometheus, the Ajax, or the Philoctetes. Instead we find him using myths which, if anything, emphasize violence and crime. Even in these myths which he did use, Seneca had ample room to introduce an inspiring Stoic character who could stand up to the passions which surrounded him and even face death bravely and with a tranquil soul. Thyestes and Oedipus could have been just this type of sapiens instead of the vengeful and tormented characters we

61. Ibid., 11.9-10.
see in the Senecan plays.

Seneca's tragedies are philosophical, but they do not represent an effort by the author to propagandize his beliefs or to expand on his philosophic doctrines. His plays dwell on the effects of crime, violence, and passion; they are terrifying to read and almost always present man at his worst. I doubt that this is in a significant way a Stoic perspective. The tragedies of Seneca do not lessen the audience's fear of death and suffering, enhance the nobility of suffering, or provide evidence for man's divine nature. They produce the opposite effect: they are somber statements of man's cruelty, cowardice, and insecurity. The reader or listener may look upon the plays as object lessons; passion should be controlled, kings should be just, and vengeance should be tempered with mercy. However, Stoicism was more than a collection of aphorisms. It was a composed and optimistic outlook on life, destiny, and death -- an outlook conspicuously absent in these plays.

Seneca the philosopher was a good enough student of literature to know that the reassuring themes of wisdom and moderation were not the stuff of which tragedy was made. That required a world that was capricious, passionate, and otherwise not in harmony with nature. This is exactly the world we find in Senecan tragedy, and it is one which must have been as disturbing to the Stoics of Neronian Rome as it is to us. Whatever these plays may be, they are not philosophical propaganda. Seneca the tragedian relegated
that to its most appropriate and obvious medium -- prose.

**DRAMATIC INTERPRETATIONS**

The term "drama" implies theatricality, and it is this aspect of Senecan tragedy which most of the critics have denied. The most complete apology for Seneca as a dramatist is Herrmann's *Le Théâtre de Séneque* (Paris, 1924). Herrmann examined the internal and external evidence and became convinced that they were both stageable and intellectually compelling drama. He found Seneca to be worthy of comparison with other, more famous dramatists:

> Les personnages anonymes aux-mêmes sont soigneusement individualisés! Certes, tous les caractères ont des points communs et ils portent tous l'empreinte de leur créateur, mais que de variété pourtant... La puissance créatrice de Seneque est incontestable et, si ses personnages ne sont pas aussi variés que ceux d'un Shakespeare, ils le sont autant que ceux de notre Corneille.62

Herrmann exhaustively discusses the sources of the tragedies, the possible purposes of composition, characterization, moral issues in the plays, and their Nachleben.

Despite his work, Herrmann failed to generate much interest in studying the tragedies as dramas. In 1927 T. S. Eliot presented an interesting interpretation of the plays in which he found them to be dramatic but not intended for the theater:

> ... the plays are admirably adapted for declamation before an imperial highbrow audience of crude sensibility but considerable sophistication in the ingenuities of the language ... 

we need not look too closely into the conditions of the age which produced no genuine drama, but which allowed this curious freak of non-theatrical drama. The theatre is a gift which has not been vouchsafed to every race...

To Eliot Seneca was a fair poet who could write good declamatory passages, but his plays remain "curious freaks" in the sense that they have the appearance of drama but are unstageable.

After Eliot's influential but destructive remarks there were still efforts to establish some principle of dramatic unity for the tragedies. Wolf Steidle tried to find unity in the plot of the Troades by applying the notion of crescendo; the increasing anxiety and tension in the play hold it together despite the lack of a strong protagonist. Gerhard Müller divided the plays of Seneca into Fatumsdramen and Leidensdramen. The Oedipus, Troades, and Hercules Furens were unified by their preoccupation with fate, while the Phoenissae, Phaedra, Medea, and Thyestes all deal primarily with pain and suffering.

Dealing with the plays as drama has the potential being the most enlightening approach to the plays, if for no other reason than it takes into account their form and the literary

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64. Wolf Steidle, "Zu Senecas Troerinnen" Philologus 94 (1941), pages 266-284; reprinted in Wege der Forschung, pages 210-229.

65. Gerhard, Müller, "Senecas Oedipus als Drama", Hermes 81 (1953), pages 447-464; reprinted in Wege der Forschung, pages 376-401. Müller found the Agamemnon to possess qualities of both types of drama.
tradition in which they were written. At the same time the student of the tragedies must remember that although the tradition of tragedy goes back to fifth-century Greece, Seneca did not hesitate to change his models and create entirely new interpretations of the dramatic myths. Keeping in mind both Seneca's obvious debts to earlier tragedy and his originality, we should allow his plays to speak to us in their own peculiarly dramatic terms. In doing so we may find they do not have much to tell us, but at least we will begin to understand them for what they are rather than for what we want them to be.

Up to this point I have used the terms "drama" and "tragedy" interchangeably when referring to Seneca's plays. "Drama" is a more or less neutral term used to describe a broad range of theatrical works. "Tragedy" on the other hand is a specific type of drama and poses several problems, the most important of which for our purposes is whether Seneca's plays can properly be called tragedies. While they certainly follow the conventions of tragedy set down by the Greek playwrights, many critics have preferred to define the plays as something other than tragedy. They are labelled "religious drama" or "philosophical drama" or "tragedies of blood." The fact that they possess the form of tragedy clearly does not convince many critics that they are authentic representatives of that genre.

Senecan tragedy, however, also seems to possess the philosophical dimension usually associated with tragedy. This dimension
is enunciated in Walter Kaufmann's general definition of tragedy:

Tragedy is a form of literature that presents a symbolic action as performed by actors and moves into the center immense human suffering, in such a way that it brings to our minds our own forgotten and repressed sorrows as well as those of our kin and humanity, releasing us with some sense that suffering is universal -- not a mere accident in our experience, that courage and endurance in suffering or nobility in despair are admirable -- not ridiculous -- and usually also that fates worse than our own can be experienced as exhilarating.66

On the basis of this description, Senecan tragedy has two things in common with tragedies of other periods and by other writers. First, these plays deal with people and their actions. Second, they achieve their emotional impact on the audience by presenting scenes and descriptions of intense or unbearable suffering. These may seem to be basic if not simplistic propositions to make concerning such a vast and rich form of literature. Yet it is these two premises which have consistently been denied the plays of Seneca. His characters are said to have no character or consistency; they are philosophic exempla or fashioned from rhetorical cardboard. The suffering we witness in the plays does not touch those who read the plays as philosophy or psychological sketches. It is only when we consider them as dramatic wholes which express consistently tragic situations that permits the plays to produce their emotional effect on us. In the world of Senecan tragedy man suffers because he cannot control the baseness of his nature;

once it becomes corrupt, as it inevitably does, the results will be catastrophic for himself and those around him. It is man's inescapable surrender to himself that confronts Seneca's characters and makes them the object of both our terror and our sympathy. This tragic perspective is not that found in Greek tragedy, but it is one which Seneca portrays with the severest consistency and a uniquely dramatic intensity.
CHAPTER II

THE SOURCES OF SENECAN'S OEDIPUS

The problems surrounding the question of the sources of Senecan tragedy are almost endless. For a play such as Seneca's Thyestes, which has no surviving Greek or Latin prototype, it is almost impossible to determine what in the play owes its creation to Seneca himself or what he borrowed from his literary predecessors. Even critics who analyze Senecan tragedies which have surviving Greek models cannot agree on what elements of the plays are purely Senecan or ultimately derivative.

The most complete treatment of Seneca's sources is to be found in Herrmann's Le Théâtre de Sénèque. Herrmann discusses several theories on sources for the plays, notably Ribbeck's belief that Seneca drew primarily on early Republican tragedy and Leo's that Seneca used Greek models while being influenced by Roman rhetoric.¹ Herrmann himself came to the safe, if some ways unsatisfying, conclusion that Seneca used both Greek and

Latin plays as sources while altering them with his own vision and purpose:

Ainsi apparaissent jusque dans l'adoption de certains sujets, à l'exclusion d'autres, les goûts personnels de Sénèque pour les sujets généraux, complexes mouvementés et violents et principalement pour les sujets permettant une étude psychologique approfondie...Nous emprunterons à Summers l'expression de "mosaïque" (patchwork), qu'il applique à Hercule sur l'Oeta, et nous dirons que tout le théâtre de Sénèque serait une mosaïque faite de morceaux pris indistinctement chez les Grecs anciens ou hellénistiques, les Latins archaïques ou modernes.2

If we possessed even one reasonably complete Republican tragedy we would be in a much better position to judge Seneca's dependence on his Latin predecessors and their use of Greek originals. As it is we have only scanty remains of Republican tragedy, which Wilamowitz off-handedly termed "barbarischen Uebersetzungen."3 Seneca was certainly familiar with the tragedies of his Roman predecessors, especially Accius,4 but their impact on the composition on Seneca's Thyestes, Agamemnon, Hercules Furans, Troades, and Medea, is uncertain.

2. Herrmann, op. cit., pages 253 and 257.


There are, however, two plays from the Senecan corpus which seem not to owe anything to earlier Roman playwrights, at least on the basis of surviving play titles: the Phaedra and the Oedipus. Of the over 90 titles we possess of the five Republican tragedians who wrote for the stage (Livius, Naevius, Ennius, Pacuvius, and Accius) none can be interpreted as adaptations or translations of Euripides' Hippolytus or Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus. The reason often given for the Roman avoidance of these two myths is their distaste for incesta conubia et flagitiosus novercae amor. This is a possible explanation, but if it is true then it seems strange that Accius for one did not scruple to write on other parts of the Theban cycle (Antigone, Phoenissae) nor did Ennius hesitate to write a Thyestes and a Medea Exsul in which presumably the grotesque crimes present in those myths were presented on stage.

The only attempt to write an Oedipus in Latin before Seneca was that of Julius Caesar (Suetonius, Divus Julius 56). This work which was attributed to Caesar's youth and its publication, as Suetonius tells us, was forbidden by Augustus. It may have been a translation of Sophocles' play, and in any event there is no reason to suppose that Seneca knew the work or used it.


in any way.\footnote{Herrmann, op. cit., pages 248 and 295, note 6.}

Seneca's dramatic sources for his \textit{Oedipus} come exclusively from Greek playwrights, at least as far as we can judge from what is left to us. Apart from Sophocles, Aeschylus, and Euripides, as many as ten other Greek dramatists may have written \textit{Oedipus} plays.\footnote{Herrmann, op. cit., page 295; R. C. Jebb, \textit{Sophocles - The Plays and Fragments; The Oedipus Tyrannus} (Cambridge, 1914), (reprinted 1966, A. M. Hakkert, Amsterdam), page xxxiii, note 1.} The only significant fragments which survive apart from Sophocles' play are three lines from Aeschylus and about forty complete lines from Euripides.\footnote{A. Nauck, \textit{Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta} Teubner, (Leipzig, 1856), Aeschylus frag. 167, Euripides fragments 544-561. For more recent discussions of the fragments of Aeschylus and Euripides see the appendix by Hugh Lloyd-Jones of the 1971 reprinting of the \textit{Loeb Aeschylus}, vol. II, pages 437-438, and C. Austin's \textit{Nova Fragmenta Euripidea in Papyris Reperta} de Gruyter & Co. (Berlin, 1968), pages 59-65.}

It is questionable whether any other \textit{Oedipus} play existed in its entirety in Seneca's era apart from that of Sophocles. If another play did exist it was possibly Euripides' \textit{Oedipus}, and some commentators have felt that Seneca used Euripides' version whenever he diverged from the \textit{Oedipus Tyrannus}.\footnote{Herrmann, op. cit., page 296, note 2. See especially W. Braun, "Der Oedipus des Seneca ...." \textit{Rheinisches Museum} n. f. 22 (1867), pages 245 ff.} The surviving

\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{Herrmann, op. cit., pages 248 and 295, note 6.}
\item \footnote{Herrmann, op. cit., page 295; R. C. Jebb, \textit{Sophocles - The Plays and Fragments; The Oedipus Tyrannus} (Cambridge, 1914), (reprinted 1966, A. M. Hakkert, Amsterdam), page xxxiii, note 1.}
\item \footnote{A. Nauck, \textit{Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta} Teubner, (Leipzig, 1856), Aeschylus frag. 167, Euripides fragments 544-561. For more recent discussions of the fragments of Aeschylus and Euripides see the appendix by Hugh Lloyd-Jones of the 1971 reprinting of the \textit{Loeb Aeschylus}, vol. II, pages 437-438, and C. Austin's \textit{Nova Fragmenta Euripidea in Papyris Reperta} de Gruyter & Co. (Berlin, 1968), pages 59-65.}
\item \footnote{Herrmann, op. cit., page 296, note 2. See especially W. Braun, "Der Oedipus des Seneca ...." \textit{Rheinisches Museum} n. f. 22 (1867), pages 245 ff.}
\end{itemize}
fragments of the Euripidean play all come from grammarians and anthologists (especially Stobaeus), and it is unclear what their sources were or when Euripides' Oedipus was last read in its entirety. 11

We know very little about Euripides' handling of the Oedipus story. In his Phoenissae we see Jocasta has survived the discovery of her true relationship with Oedipus and that he has been imprisoned by his sons in Thebes (lines 1-87). Later in this play Oedipus is exiled from the city only after his two sons have killed each other (lines 1540 ff.). There is no reason to assume, however, that Euripides would feel constrained to handle consistently a myth in two separate plays produced at two different times; while the Phoenissae is a late play, there is no sure way to date his Oedipus. 12 The one aspect of the plot of Euripides' Oedipus which is fairly certain is that Oedipus is blinded by the retainers of Laius. We learn this from a scholium on line 61 of the Phoenissae which contains a fragment of Euripides' play

11. L. D. Reynolds and N. G. Wilson, Scribes and Scholars (Oxford, 1968), pages 45-47; W. S. Barrett, Euripides' Hippolytus (Oxford, 1964), pages 51-52. A selection of Euripides' plays which include the ones which have come down to us may have been made in the second century A. D.

12. U. Wilamowitz, Analecta Euripidea (1875), page 156, where he dates the play after 425. For the dates of the Phoenissae and Oedipus see also A. Lesky, A History of Greek Literature, Crowell Co. (New York, 1965), pages 392-393.
This scholium is a comment on a line from the Phoenissae which tells of Oedipus' self-binding. It is clear that at least in this respect the Oedipus of Euripides differed from Sophocles' play, from his own Phoenissae and from Seneca's treatment.\(^\text{13}\)

The evidence for Seneca's use of Euripides as a source for his own Oedipus is thus rather poor. There is no evidence to indicate that Euripides' version survived in a reasonably complete form during the Imperial period, and the one fairly certain part of Euripides' plot, namely the blinding of Oedipus by someone other than himself, had no effect on Seneca. There is also no evidence for supposing that Seneca's divergences from Sophocles, especially in the scenes of extispicium and necromancy (lines 302-399 and 530-658) owe anything to Euripides. Considering this, along with the extreme unlikelihood of Seneca's use of minor Greek dramatists and the

absence of an *Oedipus* among the preserved titles of Republican tragedies, we can assume that the dramatic source for this Senecan play was primarily and very probably exclusively Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

We may still ask the question why Seneca chose a legend which had not previously been used in Roman drama. There have been several attempts to answer this question. One assumes both the lack of taste of Seneca's audience and his desire to pander to it; his audience wanted nothing but pathos and horror and Seneca was happy to select stories which would satisfy them:

... he goes farther than any Roman predecessor in selecting topics which they had rejected, in the special kind of pathos employed, in multiplication of cruelty and vengeance, in dwelling upon the shocking and the horrible, and in the vivid portrayals of the violent effects of such wild passions as despair, torment, hatred, rage, and revenge. ...\(14\)

... The very selection of models shows a desire to deal with subjects calculated to stimulate jaded and brutalized sensibilities. Two of them, Phaedra and Oedipus, were chosen by Seneca for the very reason for which they had been avoided by the older dramatists, namely, that they turned on incest ...\(15\)

This approach to answering the question is totally unsatisfactory. We know very little about Seneca's audience, but he seems to have written for one which could recognize his numerous literary and geographic allusions. How "brutalized" their sensibilities were

\(\text{14. Canter, op. cit., page 22.}\)

\(\text{15. M. S. Dimsdale, } A \text{ History of Latin Literature, (1915), page 402.}\)
remains a fiction of modern criticism which is often ready to
denigrate the aesthetic capacities of a Roman vis-a-vis Greek
audience. Furthermore, the fact that Seneca used legends which
dealt with incest tells us nothing about the tastes of his audience.
The Greeks, after all, dealt with the very same legends extensively
and with others which included virtually every form of crime and
vice. To write a tragedy in antiquity which was devoid of
"the shocking and the horrible" was an impossibility. We may in­
deed find Seneca's detailed description of Oedipus' blinding to
be extravagant or dramatically unnecessary or even pathological,
but that surely tells us more about our tastes than it does about
why he would select a legend which had apparently never been
attempted by a dramatist of his country.

Another explanation for Seneca's selection of subjects
is that he saw the plays as useful pedagogical tools in his tutor­
ing of Nero.16 Of course the difficulty with this interpretation
is the impossibility of dating the plays.17 If Seneca was moved by
contemporary events to write his tragedies, then for the Oedipus
he may as well have been inspired by Caligula's incestuous re­
lations with his sisters and the rumors that he killed or at
least wanted to kill his great-uncle Tiberius (Suetonius Caligula


17. M. Coffey, "Seneca, Tragedies" Lustrum N.S. 1-2
(1957), page 150: "In general the tragedies may have belonged to
any stage in Seneca's literary career." See note 1 - Introduction.
24 and 12). With no compelling method to date the tragedies we cannot say convincingly that they are the product of any particular period or event.

The most obvious, and in many ways the best, answer to the question of Seneca's choice of the Oedipus legend is that he wished to attempt for the first time in Roman literary history a version of Sophocles' masterpiece. This was a bold, perhaps audacious effort on his part to challenge one of the Greek masters, to have his work compared and criticized not on the basis of his Roman predecessors, but in direct juxtaposition with a Greek original. Seneca's literary audience certainly must have been familiar with Sophocles' play, and would be able to appreciate Seneca's additions and deletions, his guilt-ridden protagonist, his introduction of Laius' ghost, and perhaps even the compression and stream-lining of the Sophoclean plot. The Oedipus is the work of a dramatist who is finished experimenting with the more or less standard themes of his literary tradition and who has the confidence in his ability to re-interpret one of the great works of the genre of tragedy. The play represents Seneca's most complete vision of the tragic, and his most careful handling of a source. Let us hypothesize that it was written with the hope that it would be compared with the Oedipus Tyannus, and that Seneca is writing for
an audience fully acquainted with the Greek prototype. In that case, it is necessary to analyze the play not in isolation, but as a new treatment of the Sophoclean version. In this way we can obtain the clearest understanding of Seneca's strengths and shortcomings as a dramatist and perhaps more precisely understand what is "Senecan" about Senecan tragedy.

18. Even such a sympathetic critic as C. J. Herington (op. cit., pages 194-195) feels that the relation between Seneca and the Greeks is "best ignored."
The prologue of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* consists of the first 150 lines of the play and can be divided into two roughly equal parts. Lines 1-77 deal with Oedipus' inquiry about the presence of the suppliants at his palace, their description of the ravages of the plague, and their plea for him to help the suffering city. Oedipus assures them of his concern and tells of the mission of Creon to Delphi. There is a short passage (lines 78-86) where the arrival of Creon is announced, and the rest of the prologue presents Oedipus' interrogation of Creon, his intention to pursue the investigation of Laius' murder, and a final short prayer by the priest of Zeus. The action of the Sophoclean prologue moves forward at almost break-neck speed; the audience sees not only the present condition of Thebes under the plague but also is informed about a critically important past event, the murder of Laius. The rapidity with which Oedipus questions Creon and resolves to take action indicates a man both confident in his judgments and deeply concerned with the welfare of his people and himself.
The most striking aspect of the entire prologue is the dominating position of Oedipus himself. He considers it his responsibility to hear personally the reasons for lamentation (lines 6-7) and he is quick to remind his τέκνα of his own pre-eminence:

ο Πάτες Κλέονος Οδύπονος καλούμενος (line 8). He orders the priest to speak and he promises in advance that he will give whatever aid is necessary (lines 11-12).

Oedipus is no less renowned and powerful in the eyes of the priest and suppliants. As far as they are concerned only Oedipus is able to end the disaster of the ολοκλήρον, just as he saved the city from the curse of the Sphinx (lines 31-39). The priest of course is careful not to equate Oedipus' power with that of the gods (lines 31-32), but this does not stop him from describing the king as αὐτός ὁ πρῶτος (line 33) and κράτιστον πᾶσιν Οδύπον κάρα (line 40). The priest begs the "best of men" to raise the state from its present death by the pestilence (line 46).

In Oedipus' reply (lines 58-77) we find that he has known all along the reason for the suppliants' presence, though at the very outset he seemed to be ignorant of the reasons behind their mourning (lines 1-3). He tells them that he feels their anguish and suffering more acutely because he is moved to mourn for the entire city (lines 63-64). He has already deliberated on a course of action and put it into effect (lines 67, 73-75). He has already sent Creon to Delphi to seek a remedy for the plague and is
impatiently awaiting his return.

Creon enters and the tempo of the prologue quickens.

Oedipus' curiosity is piqued by Creon's rather gnomic statement which nevertheless offers some hope: he is bearing from Delphi an ἐσθέλην φήμην. The king does not bother to dismiss the suppliants in his haste to hear the words of the oracle, which Creon gives with concision:

In lines 99-131 Oedipus asks Creon eight pointed questions to which Creon gives equally pointed answers.\(^1\)

Oedipus wants to know how the city will be purified, who must be banished, where the guilty party is\(^2\), where the murder took place, the number of witnesses, what the witness saw, whether there was a possibility of a conspiracy, and the reason for no

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2. On Oedipus' intuitive knowledge that there was only one murderer, see Norman Partt Dramatic Suspense in Seneca and in his Greek Precursors, (Princeton, 1939), page 101, note 230.
full investigation. Oedipus immediately announces his own investigation to uncover the killer. He does this not only to save Thebes but also to ensure his personal safety; the murderer of Laius may still pose a threat to him (lines 137-141). Finally Oedipus tells the suppliants to go and assures them that he will take personal charge of the search for the source of the pollution. The priest then leads them away while praying that Apollo may come as their savior and νόσου παστήρος (lines 149-150).

The qualities of Oedipus as they appear in the prologue, his curiosity, confidence, intelligence, impatience and concern for the safety of his people and himself all have an ironic function in Sophocles' play: taken together these qualities push Oedipus towards the terrible truth of his true identity. Nonetheless Oedipus appears at the beginning of the play as an ideal ruler who will come to grief only through a surfeit of his own excellence. He is no puppet of the gods or fate:

... what fascinates us is the spectacle of a man freely choosing, from the highest motives, a series of actions which lead to his own ruin. Oedipus might have left the plague to take its own course; but pity for the sufferings of his people compelled him to consult Delphi. When Apollo's word came back, he might still have left the murder of Laius un-investigated; but piety and justice required him to act... the immediate cause of Oedipus' ruin is not "Fate" or "the god" -- no oracle said that he must discover the truth-- and still less does it lie in his own weakness; what causes

his ruin is his own strength and courage, his loyalty to Thebes, and his loyalty to the truth...4

Oedipus is clearly a very great man. The hero worthy of the great purpose with which he unknowingly cooperates to produce the demonstration; his action, which must complement the prophecy in order to fulfill it and which is solely responsible for the discovery of that fulfillment, is magnificent action.5

What we must not forget, however, is that fate does have an important if not critical part in the Oedipus Tyrannus. Oedipus' free will and active participation in discovering the truth do nothing to change his past, and it is his past which destroys him. He has already fulfilled the prophecy and, as magnificent as his actions are, there is no way for him to avoid the parricide and incest. Nor can he avoid the discovery of those crimes; it is not possible for him to postpone the search for Laius' killer not only because of his love for his people but also because of that element of his character which virtually compels him to search for the truth:

The discovery of his identity is a free action in the present, yet it reveals an action in the past which is completed, irrevocable ... Oedipus is a supremely active and intelligent man, as Knox has shown so well, but the paradox is that this active intelligence is already fixed in destruction and all that his intelligence can do is to discover that it is fixed, and how it came to be so.6

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Oedipus is then the agent of his destruction while at the same time his actions are circumscribed to an extent by his past. Sophocles, however, is careful not to emphasize Oedipus as "victim of fate"; the Oedipus Tyrannus grips the audience precisely because its protagonist is convinced that he has eluded his destiny. We see this in the prologue by Oedipus' self-esteem (lines 8, 65-67, 76-77, 132 ff.) and by the swift beginning of his search. There too we perceive or at least feel his "loyalty to the truth."

Oedipus' search will be a very personal one, dictated by his own intelligence and by his fear of ignorance; it is impossible for him not to push on. The audience senses this tension between the dictates of fate and Oedipus' character, and comes to understand that they work in harmony:

The presentation of the self-discovery as heroic action increases the tension created by the contrary pulls of our acceptance of divine omniscience on the one hand and our admiration for Oedipus on the other... so we will and do not will that he should discover the truth and destroy himself; we will it because if he gives up the search, if he turns his back on action, intelligence, and clarity by failing to resolve the riddle of his own identity, he destroys himself in any case, by ceasing to be Oedipus.7

The audience is thus caught up in the same dilemma that faces the ruler of Thebes. Only he has the will and the ability to pursue the investigation to its ultimate conclusions, and in doing so he

willingly accepts the responsibilities of being true to himself and to his understanding of his position as a political leader. The qualities which enable him to pursue the often difficult and confusing search for the truth are delineated in Sophocles' prologue: they are the qualities of a great man and a great king.

The prologue of Seneca's Oedipus can also be considered as being made up of two distinct parts. In the first (lines 1-80) Oedipus expresses his fears of the oracle of Apollo, his feelings of responsibility for causing the plague, the effects of the pestilence on Thebes, and finally contemplates leaving the city. The second part of the prologue (lines 81-109) deals with Jocasta's words of encouragement and Oedipus' resolve to stay and seek a solution to the disease. Unlike Sophocles' play there are no suppliants present, nor does Creon appear just yet to bring news or answer questions. For three-quarters of the prologue in the Latin play we see Oedipus in isolation, reviewing his thoughts on the plague and its significance for him.

Seneca's Oedipus is not a man of action. He is, if anything, quite unsure of what he should do. When he does make the decision to flee Thebes (lines 77-81) it only takes Jocasta's brief homily on courage to make him abandon that plan and decide to stay. Furthermore, he is confused about the source of his misery and the source of his salvation: he imputes both to Apollo. He is both threatened and accused by that god.
Thalamos parentis Phoebus et diros toros
nato minatur impia incestos face ...
inter ruinas urbis et semper novis
deflenda lacrimis funera ac populi struem
incolumis asto — scilicet Phoebi reus.
(lines 20-21, 32-34)

Yet by the end of the prologue he is less sure that this is so, or perhaps he has chosen to forget his earlier fears: 8

una iam superest salus,
si quam salutis Phoebus ostendit viam.
(lines 108-109)

The prologue does more than show a hesitant or confused Oedipus. We see that he also has dark premonitions of his own guilt. The prophecy of his parricide and incest burdens him at the very beginning of the play (lines 15-21); it has already caused him to flee one kingdom: hic me paternis expulit regnis timor (line 22).

The fact that he has been spared from the disease which is consuming Thebes only re-enforces his fear that the oracle is saving him for some more terrible suffering:

Iam iam aliquid in nos fata moliri parant;
nam quid rear quod ista Cadmeae lues
infesta genti, strage tam late edita,
mihi parcit uni? cui resevamur malo?
(lines 28-31)

The malum Oedipus fears certainly is the fulfillment of the oracle. He believes in the power of prophecy even though he is ignorant of

8. W. Schetter, "Die Prologszene zu Senecas Oedipus", Der altsprache Unterricht 11 (1968), pages 23-49, reprinted in Wege der Forschung, pages 403-422; see page 422 for comments on Oedipus' paradoxical reliance on Apollo.
the fact that he has already brought it to pass. Here he is con-
vinced that he will kill his father and lie with his mother, and it
is this anticipatory fear which so distracts him. After he recites
the horrors of the plague (lines 37-70) he makes a stunning con-
nection: it is his crimes which have brought Thebes down:

..... sperne letali manu
      contacta regna, linque lacrimas, funera,
      tabifica caeli vitia quae tecum invehis.
      (lines 77-79)

Oedipus reaches this conclusion entirely on his own; he does not
need Creon's message or augury to tell him what he intuitively knows
and feels. Perhaps describing his connection of his crimes and the
plague as the result of an entirely intellectual process is not
entirely accurate. He is, after all, sure of his guilt and afraid
of its consequences. It is only natural for him to seek evidence
that supports his emotional conviction that he is indeed infaustus.
The plague offers such evidence and Oedipus is quick to accept it.

Seneca, as we have seen, has been praised for the psycholog­
ical insights he presents in his tragedies. It is important to
understand, however, that the passions and anguish of his characters
are more than just described. They affect the universe in which
those characters exist. The world of Seneca's tragedies, as C. J
Herington puts it, is one world which is totally involved in the
spreading infection of furor begun in the characters' souls:

An essential preliminary to the understanding of Seneca is the realization that, however eclectic he is, he is still Stoic enough by habit to draw little or no distinction between spiritual, moral, and material realities.... Not only is it (i.e. the passions, anger, lust, and fear) the nearest and ultimate danger, the fifth column within every man's citadel, but its effects are contagious: they extend from the individual across the body politic... and in time can reach out and destroy not only the earth, but the fabric of the universe, stars and all.10

Oedipus does not "project" his fears on nature;11 the Titan *dubius* and *maestus iubar* of lines 1-2 are not conjured visions any more than the plague. They are the natural result of Oedipus' crimes in a world which feels and reacts to the perturbations of the human soul. Oedipus at the start of the play is not engaging in morbid fantasies. He understands how the world works as well as his responsibility for the aberrations he sees. Far from being gratuitous, Oedipus' fears are real and indeed palpable. He has only to open his eyes to see his guilt: *fecimus caelum nocens* (line 36).

Sophoclean influence on the prologue of Seneca's *Oedipus* is not very extensive. Seneca has not missed the opportunity to inject irony, but it is not as pervasive or frequent as in Sophocles. Seneca's *Oedipus* thinks he knows who his real parents are (lines 12-13), and, as in Sophocles, this will prove to be the major hindrance in his acceptance of the truth. Later, Seneca has Jocasta enter on the heels of Oedipus' thoughts of fleeing *ad parentes*


11. Mastronarde, op. cit., page 293.
(line 81), whereupon he immediately calls him coniunx. The collocation of these words by the two characters reminds us how far from the truth they are.

The one part of the prologue which is inspired by Sophocles is the description of the plague. From Sophocles' rather brief description (lines 22-30 of the Oedipus Tyrannus) Seneca has picked up the metaphor of the plague as πυρφόρος ὄξος. He proceeds to describe the plague of his Oedipus in terms of fire.\textsuperscript{12}

The heat of fever is augmented by the weather:

Non aura gelido lenis afflatu fovet
anhela flammis corda, non Zephyri leves
spirant, sed ignes auget aestiferi canis
Titan.....

(lines 37-40)

The fire of the disease inexorably leads to the burning of the bodies and even dries the tears for the dead:

quin ipsa tanti pervicax clades mali
siccavit oculos, quodque in extremis solet
periere lacrimae. portat hunc aeger parens
supremum ad ignem.....

arsisse satis est; pars quota in cineres abit?
(lines 57-60, 67)

The description of the plague is more than a literary expansion, however. It is both an indictment of Oedipus' guilt and a result of it. As such, it contains allusions to Oedipus' ultimate discovery of the truth. Foreshadowing of events is a technique which is usually

\textsuperscript{12} Mastronarde, op. cit. page 296 ff.
talked about in terms of the *extispicium* and necromancy of the play's later scenes. Yet there are examples of it here in the prologue. The *funesta pestis* binds family relationships in an unnatural and terrible way, just as Oedipus has confounded nature with his parricide and incest:

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    sed omnis aetas pariter et sexus ruit,
    iuvenesque senibus iungit et natis patres
    funesta pestis, una fax thalamos cremat
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(lines 53-55)

The grief-stricken mother who brings her children to the pyre may pre-figure Jocast's grief and suicide; she will indeed later be a *mater amens* (line 60). Oedipus himself will have no more success over the sickness of his soul than the citizens of Thebes have over the plague. The futility of his efforts to stop the approaching disaster parallels that of the citizens who try to help the sick:

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    dest terra tumulis, iam rogos silvae negant.
    non vota, non ars ulla correptos levant.
    cadunt medentes, morbus auxilium trahit.
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(lines 68-70)

Jocasta's comments to Oedipus are important for several reasons. First, they interrupt Oedipus' thoughts on flight. It is necessary, of course, to keep Oedipus in Thebes despite his premonitions and desire to spare the city further suffering. Second, Jocasta's encouragement to Oedipus to face fate *certo gradu* helps her husband regain some confidence in handling the situation. He has just considered returning to the people he thinks are his true parents, and while this may save Thebes it means for Oedipus the certain fulfillment of the prophecy. He has answered the
question he posed previously, *Quisquamme regno gaudet?* (line 6), and in fact no longer sees himself as king at all. He is the *infaustus hospes* who has brought calamity to his hosts. Jocasta's appeal to his manhood, *haud est virile terga Fortunae dare* (line 86), causes Oedipus to think back on his past courage and intelligence. He denies to his wife that he would be afraid of Mars or the *feros Gigantas* (lines 90-91), and he proceeds to recount his victory over the Sphinx (lines 92-102).

It is in this reply of Oedipus to his wife that we get our only glimpse of what we might call the Sophoclean conception of the protagonist. For a moment Seneca's Oedipus is an intelligent, forceful leader who is confident of himself and his actions. Oedipus recalls how personal a victory the defeat of the Sphinx was. I faced the bloody jaws, he remembers (*tuli cruentos rictus*), I asked the riddle (*carmen poposci*), I solved the terrible riddle (*triste carmen....solvi*). If we expect much of a change on the part of Oedipus we are immediately disappointed. While recalling the Sphinx may give him another possible cause for the plague, it also reminds him that his chance for a noble death is past and that his victory was ineffectual:

\[ Quid sera mortis vota nunc demens facis? \]
\[ licuit perire. laudis hoc pretium tibi \]
\[ sceptrum et peremptae Sphingis haec merces datur. \]

(lines 103-195)

The *laudis pretium* proved to be an inescapable curse, the Sceptrum indeed is a *fallax bonum* (line 6). Oedipus' only recourse now is to
the god whom he fears and cannot trust. The prologue ends with the king's enigmatic hope in *una salus*. He may think that it rests in Creon's return, although we are given no hint that this has occurred to him. The audience knows that relief from the plague will come only with the destruction of the king, and, given Oedipus' fears of his own responsibility, it is entirely possible that he also knows that "salvation" is somehow bound to the fulfillment of the prophecy.

The main criticism of the prologue of Seneca's *Oedipus* is that the king is too aware of the truth, and that this knowledge is not dramatically useful. If the *Oedipus* were merely an attempt to translate or copy the Greek play this objection would indeed be valid. Oedipus' prescience, however, is part not only of a new interpretation of the central character but also of a new interpretation of the Oedipus legend.

In the prologue of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* Oedipus is portrayed as starting on the road from ignorance to knowledge. The first words from his lips are a question, and as the prologue continues we see a character proud of his intelligence and curiosity, and one who puts his intelligence to work to find a remedy for the

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suffering of his people. It still takes considerable time for Oedipus to put all the pieces of the puzzle together, primarily because of the false assumptions he makes about his birth and parentage. Consequently he ignores the accusation of Teiresias (lines 350 ff.), and he makes no connection with the oracles of his past and his present situation until Jocasta recalls the circumstances of Laius' death at line 707. He then recounts his flight from Corinth (lines 771 ff.) and becomes more relentless in his investigation until he finally solves the mystery at line 1182.

Seneca's Oedipus fits together the pieces of the puzzle from the very beginning. The oracle of Apollo is an ever-present reality for him; he understands its power and he is sure that it will come to pass. Cui reservamur malo? is a question whose answer Oedipus knows and fears. He is able to interpret correctly his own physical health amidst the disease; it is only saving him for a fate even worse than the one which his moral sickness has unleashed on his people. Unlike Sophocles' character he does not need Creon to tell him that the plague has been sent as a punishment. His only surprise there may be that he does not seem to be the cause of it.

Knowledge is a terrible burden for Seneca's Oedipus, a burden which he could not bear if it were not for Jocasta's words at lines 81-86. She causes him to recall his past accomplishments

and, more important, she gives him the opportunity to transfer the blame for the plague to the Sphinx. This is absolutely essential if Oedipus is to rule out his own death or escape and begin his search. Oedipus is too close to the truth at the start of the play; it is Jocasta's function to lead him away from it.

The movement of the Senecan prologue, then, is from knowledge to ignorance, from the painful perception of the truth to the false hopes of self-delusion. Far from pursuing or standing up to fate Oedipus tries to avoid it. Whether we attribute this to a weakness in his character or to furor, it marks a significant departure from Sophocles. Seneca's character is the hunter who loses his prey, the investigator who misunderstands the clues, the man who tries to avoid discovering his origins instead of seeking them. In Seneca the "riddle" of Oedipus is solved even before the play starts. What we are presented with is a character too terrified to accept the solution. The realization that Seneca has presented such a different conception of the protagonist has come as a disappointment to those who prefer an Oedipus of "magnificent action." In Seneca's Oedipus man has no scope for heroic action simply because the attacks on him originate in his own soul; Oedipus is the source of his fears. The Roman dramatist has

15. Schetter, op. cit., page 405, where he describes Oedipus and fate as "gleichrangige Gegenspieler."

brought to the foreground Oedipus' anticipation of crime and guilt and the anxieties which that anticipation produces. The belief that he has not yet committed any crime is no solace to Oedipus. He knows that fate will win, and he carries that knowledge with him during the rest of the play.

The question now to be considered is whether the prologue of the Senecan play represents merely a "static situation." Admittedly there is virtually no stage action and there is nothing to compare with the exchanges we find in Sophocles' prologue. Yet, as I have attempted to show, the drama in Seneca takes place in the confines of the characters' souls. We may call the conflicts in Oedipus "psychological" as Herrmann and others do, or we may label this presentation of emotional instability and the effects of passion Affektsdramen as Regenbogen did. But whatever words we use to describe this peculiarly introspective form of drama, we must not assume that Seneca's "guilt-ridden creation" is not to be taken as part of a serious statement on the nature of man and the evil man creates. The drama of Oedipus may begin in his own imagination, but it will ultimately involve the entire universe.


THE FIRST CHORUS

The parodos of the Oedipus Tyrannus (lines 151-215) is sung by the chorus of Theban elders. It consists of their prayers to various gods for the safety of the city and an end to the plague.

The first strophe shows that the old men do not share Creon's belief that the news from the oracle is good (lines 87-88). Although the chorus is presumably following the instructions of the priest to pray to Zeus (lines 149-150), it is still terrified by what the god of the oracle may have in store for them; they need more information:

...... ἐκτεταμαι, φοβεραν φρένα δεσματι πάλλων,
λήτε ἄλλας Παιάν, ἀμφι σοι ἄρωμένος τί μοι ἢ νέον
ἡ περιτελλομέναις Ἱώραις πάλιν ἠξανύσεις χρέος.

(lines 153-156)

In the antistrophe (lines 159-166) the chorus calls upon Athena, Artemis, and Phoebus as their τρισοῦ ἀλεξύμοροι to drive the "fiery pest" from the city, φλόγα πῆματος (line 166).

The second strophe and antistrophe deal with the effects of the plague in terms similar to those expressed by the priest at line 22 ff. The chorus, unlike Oedipus, are sure that no ψυντύδος ξυχος is able to combat it. Otherwise the effects on the city are the same as those described by the priest: barrenness of the land and women, and death. Sterility is emphasized not only because it is ironically counterpoised to the perverse fecundity of the Theban royal house, but also because it was seen...
The sterility reaches even those things which have already begun to grow: the blossoming flowers are literally nipped in the bud, and the women bring forth still-born babies. It is these still-born or deformed children who make up the νηλέα γένεσια of the second antistrophe. Here we see the even more terrible picture of the corpses rotting ἄνοιχτως. Their lack of proper burials would be the source of even greater pollution were they not the still-born offspring of the stricken women of the previous strophe.

The antistrophe ends with those struck hardest by the barrenness and death, the ἄλοχος and the πολικαὶ ματέρες raising their lamentations. It is not by accident that this part of the ode ends with a prayer to Artemis, the goddess of childbirth.

It is in the third strophe (lines 190-202) that the chorus finally identifies what they perceive to be the bringer of the plague: Ares. He comes not as the god of war (line 190), but as the fiery destroyer of the land. The image of the plague as fire

19. Vickers, op. cit., pages 246-248 and 513, he cites among others, passages from Hesiod (Works and Days 240-245) Herodotus (6.139) and Pausanius (7.19.2; 8.23.7; 9.8.1).

20. R. C. Jebb, op. cit., notes on lines 25ff and note on line 173.

is carefully developed by Sophocles. Ares is the \( \nu \nu \phi \phi \rho \rho \sigma \zeta \zeta \) of line 27, whose pestilence causes life to speed away 
\( \kappa \rho \varepsilon \zeta \zeta \zeta \sigma \sigma \sigma \omega \nu \ \nu \mu \alpha \mu \kappa \xi \zeta \zeta \tau \omega \nu \ \nu \rho \rho \sigma \zeta \) (line 175), and who attacks 
(line 191). The association with the plague as fire certainly refers to the fever of the victims, and to a lesser extent it suggests that Ares the Destroyer brings a barrenness which, in its destruction of the flocks and crops, resembles a drought. The chorus begs that the bringer of this fire be sent off to the quenching \( \delta \alpha \lambda \mu \omicron \nu \ \nu \mu \varphi \rho \rho \rho \xi \tau \omega \zeta \omega \varsigma \) or better yet the \( \theta \rho \varsigma \kappa \iota \omicron \nu \ \nu \kappa \omicron \lambda \zeta \omega \varsigma \nu \alpha \) otherwise he will continue to destroy the city (lines 198-199). If Ares does not leave, the chorus prays to Zeus to "fight fire with fire" and blast him with an even greater form of fire, the lightening bolt:

\[
\text{τὸν, ὃ τὰν πυρὸς ῥων}
\text{ἀστραπῶν, κρατὴ νέμων,}
\text{ὁ Ζεῦ πάτερ, ὑπὸ σφί φθόσον κεραυνῆ.}
\]

(lines 200-203)

This idea of fighting the evil fire with the benign fire is continued in the third antistrophe (lines 203-215). The chorus asks that Apollo send his arrows against the enemy and that Artemis send forth her \( \nu \nu \phi \phi \rho \rho \rho \sigma \zeta \gamma \lambda \lambda \) (lines 206-207). They also call on the ancient protector of Thebes, Βάκχος,

22. Note that the chorus describes the plague as a φλόγα πῆματος at line 166.
to come forward as an ally with his ἀληγοῦτ' ἀγλαώπι (lines 213-214).

This parodos, then, serves to expand on some themes begun in the prologue. We receive a more detailed picture of the plague and the suffering it causes, and we understand who the "fire-bearing" god of the prologue really is. The main function of this ode, however, is to seek divine help for the city. Oedipus is nowhere mentioned, and the semi-divine status the priest and suppliants have imputed to Oedipus by their prayers to him makes no impression on the chorus. Oedipus, who has heard the end of the ode, seeks to re-assert his unique status as the protector of Thebes by stating that his words will answer their prayers (lines 216 ff.). He is, of course, aware of their presence, and addresses his curse on the murderer to them in the following scene. The chorus will continue to play an important role in the play; it is the chorus, for example, who first mention the possibility of consulting Teiresias (though Oedipus has already sent for him) and who react so forcefully to Jocasta's disrespect towards the god's oracle. They are always present and ready to react to the various revelations and to the impact of the truth on Jocasta and Oedipus.

23. Knox, op. cit., page 159, note 3
24. Ibid., pages 159-160.
The choruses in Senecan Tragedy have markedly less personality and less involvement in the plot than those in Greek tragedy. This is not to say that they have no function whatsoever, for not only do they periodically interact with the characters (as in the Troades) but they often had reflection on the dramatic situation and on the spreading evil which is so characteristic of Seneca's plays. His choruses nonetheless lead rather shadowy existences and often appear as true spectators to the action rather than as participants.

Inasmuch as the choruses in Seneca lack strophic structure, it may be convenient to divide this and subsequent odes according to the various subjects they deal with. The first choral ode of the Oedipus can be divided into five parts:

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25. For an examination of attitudes towards Senecan choruses and bibliographies on various aspects of the odes see two fairly recent dissertations: A. R. Dewey The Chorus in Senecan Tragedy exclusive of the Hercules Oetaeus and Octavia (Columbia, 1968) and J. D. Bishop The Choral Odes of Seneca; Theme and Development (Pennsylvania, 1964). Bishop, far from finding the odes irrelevant, theorizes that they are actually more important than the rest of the play: "The odes... transcend to a supervisory, an inductive level from which they let into the action the principles within which the play's meaning develops, from which they supervise the directions in which the action proceeds, and from which they induce the tragedy, its ramifications, and its teachings." (page 44) Bishop seems to suppose that the characters in the plays are exempla of the ideas put forth in the odes. However, tragedy is not "induced" from above, but is bound up in the situations and characterizations the dramatist presents. Bishop does not analyze the Oedipus.
I. Lines 110-131; the race of Bacchus is dying

II. Lines 133-159; the plague destroys both animals and vegetation

III. Lines 160-179; the underworld has unleashed its monsters on Thebes

IV. Lines 180-196; the symptoms of the plague and the citizens' vain efforts to survive

V. Lines 197-201; the dead fill even the shrines of the gods.

The ode does not tell us exactly who makes up the chorus, but we can assume that they are old men of Thebes as in Sophocles. They are clearly very concerned with the suffering of the city:

Occidis, Cadmi generosa proles,
urbe cum tota...

stirpis invictae genus interimus,
labimur saevo rapiente fato...

(lines 110-111, 124-125)

They have no intention to call on Apollo, as Oedipus has just done (line 109), nor do they call on any other god for help except Bacchus. They recount Thebes' ancient associations with that god (line 113-122); their trust is obviously in the greatness of the past, while the future portends only continued disaster: ducitur semper nova pompa Morti (line 125).

The second and fourth parts of the chorus deal with the effects of the plague, and these two sections should be discussed together. They recount the particulars of the results of the

plague which were first mentioned in lines 37-70; crops die in the field (lines 154-159), and the plague brings with it heat and fever (lines 181-186). The ode emphasizes the effects on the flocks (lines 133 ff.) and with specific symptoms on humans (lines 180 ff.). The reasons for this emphasis may be that Seneca depended very little in this chorus on the Sophoclean treatment. Seneca's sources for the description of the plague were probably Lucretius (VI 1138-1286), Vergil (Georgics III 440-517), and Ovid (Metamorphoses VII 517-613). In all three accounts the plague produces fever and is characterized by heat and dryness, and bodies are so numerous that they must be left exposed (Oedipus, lines 180-188 and 127-132). In Lucretius and Ovid those who try to help are themselves struck down (Oedipus, line 70), while the crush of dead bodies forces the survivors to steal wood for the cremations or merely toss the bodies on others' funeral pyres (Oedipus 64-70).


30. Lucr. VI, 1238-1245; Met. VII 561-566.

31. Lucr. VI, 1280-1286; Met. VII 608-613.
on efficacious sacrifices are thwarted by the sickness of the sacrificial animals and by their lack of healthy blood (Oedipus 134-141). In all three of the accounts the victims flock to wells or streams in a vain effort to quench their thirst (Oedipus 194-196), and the disease infects the air (Oedipus 44-47). Vergil identifies the sickness as sacer ignis, or erysipelas (Georgics III 566) just as Seneca does at lines 187-188; sacer ignis pascitur artus.

Although Seneca has borrowed freely in his description of the effects of the plague, he still uses them both as symbols of Oedipus' own sickness and as an indictment of his crimes. Seneca repeatedly shows how nature is affected by what Oedipus has done, and nature reacts more universally and more violently than in Sophocles. The darkening of the skies, the wide-spread destruction of domestic and wild animals, and the ominous events at the sacrifices are not rhetorical hyperbole or meant to merely create an "atmosphere" of horror. They are physical manifestations of the condition of Oedipus' soul, as well as punishment for what he does not yet know he has done. What is truly unusual about Seneca's description is its omission of the effects of the plague on Thebes' women. While Sophocles emphasizes the


33. Lucr. VI, 1172-2278, 1264-1266; Georgics III, 544-555; Met. VII, 567-571.

34. Lucr. VI, 1138-1143; Georgics III, 546-547; Met. VII 528-532.
sterility of women and the death of the new-born, Seneca does not mention this aspect of the plague at all. This is all the more surprising in light of the emphasis which will later be placed on the perverse fertility of Oedipus' sexual relations with his mother. It may be that in this respect Seneca is staying close to his Latin models which similarly do not treat the subject of human sterility.

The third section of the ode tells of the release of various inhabitants of the infernal region. Seneca may have expanded Vergil's account of the menace from hell:

saevit et in lucem Strygiis emissa tenebris
pallida Tisiphone Morbos agit ante Metumque
inque dies avidum surgens caput altius effert.

(Georgics III, 551-553)

rupere Erebi claustra profundi
turba sororum face Tartarea
Phlegethonque suam mutat ripam;
miscuit undis Styga Sidoniis.
Mors atra avidos oris hiatus
pandit et omnes explicat alas...

(Oedipus, 160-165)

Seneca begins appropriately enough with the image of fire (face Tartarea), and follows with a fascinating litany of creatures: Death is a voracious bird-like monster, Charon is exhausted by rowing the dead across the river (lines 166-170), and Cerberus is roaming through Thebes (lines 171-173). Then we have a description of some of the effects of the invasion of the underworld: earthquakes, apparitions, Dirce flowing with blood, and strange

---

35. One of the apparitions is, as we shall see, Laius.
noises in the night (lines 173-179). Although these nether powers do not reappear until the necromancy scene (lines 530 ff.), it is clear from this passage that Oedipus is just as threatened by the underworld as by Apollo and his oracle. Oedipus makes no mention of the inhabitants of hell until he discovers the truth and realizes that his flouting of nature makes him worthy to be enrolled among their numbers:

```
dehisce, tellus, tuque tenebrarum potens,  
in Tartara ima, rector umbrarum, rape  
retro reversas generis ac stirpis vices.  
```

(lines 868-870)

The last part of the chorus consists of five lines which describe the desire of the people to die and thus gain release from their sufferings. It also describes the gods who both are willing to grant death and indeed seem to demand it:

```
prostrata iacet turba per aras  
oratque mori - solum hoc faciles  
tribuere dei; delubra petunt,  
haut ut voto numina placent,  
sed iuvat ipsos satiare deos.  
```

(lines 197-201)

The view that the gods do not or cannot help the victims of plague had found its way into earlier Latin descriptions. Lucretius, who of course was convinced of the gods' lack of interest in human affairs, presents a similar scene:

```
omnia denique sancta deum delubra replerat  
corporibus Mors examinis, onerataque passim  
cuncta cadaveribus caelestum templa manebant,  
hospitibus loca quae complerant aedituentes.  
nec iam religio divom nec numina magni  
pendebantur enim...  
```

(VI 1272-1277)
Ovid likewise tells of the uselessness of seeking divine help:

\[
\text{templa vides contra gradibus sublimia longis?}
\]
\[
\text{Iuppiter illa tenet. quis non altaribus illis}
\]
\[
\text{inrita tura dedit? quotiens pro coniuge coniunx}
\]
\[
\text{pro gnato genitor dum verba precantia dicit,}
\]
\[
\text{non exoratis animam finivit in aris,}
\]
\[
\text{inque manu turis pars inconsumpta reperta est ...}
\]
\[
\text{ante sacros vidi proiecta cadavera postes,}
\]
\[
\text{ante ipsas, quo mors foret invidiosior aras.}
\]
\[
\text{(Met. VII 587-592, 602-603)}
\]

In Seneca the gods not only do not offer any help, but they actually demand corpses as offerings. The *faciles dei* are willing to allow death and are not loathe to have their shrines glutted with bodies. The enormity of Oedipus' crimes has already corrupted the physical world of nature and overturned the underworld. Now even the gods turn into perversions of their usual nature: they offer death instead of hope, their temples are the sights of grisly, if useless human sacrifice. The *dira novi facies leti* (line 180) is terrible because the people of Thebes, like Oedipus himself, can turn to neither heaven nor hell for help.
 CHAPTER IV

ACTS II AND III OF SENeca'S OEDIPUS

The second act of the Oedipus (lines 202-402), and the third act (lines 509-708), and the choral ode which separates them (lines 403-508) for the most part owe little to the Oedipus Tyrannus. The most obvious Senecan inventions are the scenes of extispicium and necromancy. Critics have called these two scenes undramatic, overblown, and otherwise superfluous additions to the drama.¹ I believe that these passages, far from being gratuitous insertions, do fulfill important functions for Seneca's conception of the Oedipus legend and for his interpretation of it.

However before treating the extispicium and necromancy, it is important to note that even in the second and third acts of his play Seneca does retain scenes from the Sophoclean play. He does not translate or paraphrase these scenes, but rather he reshapes the material he found in the Greek play in terms of his new characterization of Oedipus and the new themes he has

introduced already in the prologue and first chorus. The sections of these acts which Seneca has adapted from Sophocles are the arrival and questioning of Creon, Oedipus' curse on the slayer of Laius, and Oedipus' accusations against Creon.

SENECA'S USE OF SOPHOCLEAN MATERIAL

Sophocles has Creon return in the prologue of the Oedipus Tyrannus, and there too he presents his interrogation (lines 108-131). When he has the information he needs, Oedipus promises to renew the investigation into the death of the former king (lines 132 ff.). He is of course confident of results and indicates that the search will be conducted by himself personally: ὃς πᾶν ἐμοῦ ὅρασοντος (line 145).

Seneca, on the other hand, shows Oedipus in virtual isolation in his prologue, a "gebrochener ängstlicher König" who wrestles with his own feelings of guilt. In the Latin play, as we have seen, there is relatively little emphasis on the way in which Oedipus finds the truth; he is confronted with it at the outset. What we will see is not Oedipus' hard and sometimes frustrating search for his origins, but rather the effects of the parricide and incest as Oedipus realizes that his

fears are already realities. The problem for Seneca's Oedipus is not whether or not he will fulfill the oracle, but when; his discovery is merely that he has already done what he fears most.

This fundamental difference in Seneca's portrayal of the king makes itself apparent in the questioning of Creon and Oedipus' curse on the murderer (lines 202-273). Oedipus continues to be oppressed by unnamed fears even before he hears the new response from the oracle:

horrore quatori, fata quo vergant timens,
trepidumque gemino pectus affectu labat;
ubi laeta duris mixta in ambiguo iacent,
incertus animus scire cum cupiat timet.
(lines 206-209)

Unlike Sophocles' Creon, who seems confident of the good outcome of the words of the oracle (Oedipus Tyrannus 87-88), Seneca's messenger is infected with forebodings very much like his king: response dubia sorte perplexa iacent...ambage flexa Delphico mos est deo arcana tegere (lines 212, 214-215). Oedipus commands him to speak and Creon concisely tells how the gravis et ater vapor can be lifted from Thebes:

Caedem expiari regiam exilio deus,
et interemptum Laium ulcisci iubet.
non ante caelo lucidus curret dies
haustusque tutos aetheris puri dabit.
(lines 217-220)

Seneca's Creon does not "beat around the bush"; whereas in Sophocles Creon only divulges the entire oracle under stringent cross examination (lines 95-111), here he tells all in four concise lines. There is no need for Seneca to develop the theme of Oedipus'
inquisitiveness or intelligence; we have the feeling that his king would, if possible, want to remain ignorant. But Seneca's Oedipus is no fool -- he knows that the oracle must be obeyed and directly asks Creon who the killer is.

Creon, however, does not answer directly. Instead he tells of his frightening journey to the oracle at Delphi (frigidus sanguis coit - line 224) and quotes the words of the god verbatim. It is apparent that he has left something out of his earlier report, namely that the murderer has committed incest with his mother:

\[
\text{turpis maternos iterum revolutus in ortus.} \\
\text{(line 238)}
\]

This bit of information is not part of Creon's report in Sophocles, but its presence here makes no impression on Seneca's character; Oedipus ignores what must be a clear connection between the murderer and his own destiny to sleep with his mother (see lines 20-21). He immediately promises to take appropriate action, and we see the influence of Oedipus Tyrannus, lines 137-141, in Oedipus' awareness of the politically practical purpose for finding the criminal:

\[
\text{regi tuenda maxime regum est salus;} \\
\text{curat peremptum nemo quem incolumem timet.} \\
\text{(lines 242-243)}
\]

Creon senses a criticism in these words and points out that a majör timor prevented a proper investigation at the time of the killing: the Sphinx (O.T. 130-131). Mention of the Sphinx
draws no direct comment from Oedipus; as in Sophocles the interrogation ends at this point. In both plays the mere mention of the monster was enough to cause a recollection of the glory of the king's victory (O.T., 35-39; Oedipus, 92-102). This is especially important for Seneca's king, because as we have seen, it is the remembrance of his triumph which at least temporarily brought him out of his torpor in the prologue. Here too, at line 247, Oedipus confidently begins to take action in the form of his pronouncement on the punishment of the killer of Laius only after his previous success is mentioned.

The curse that Oedipus does pronounce in lines 247-273 is based partially on the one found in Sophocles. This scene in the Greek play consists of an introduction to the proclamation (lines 216-223), Oedipus' call for Theban citizens to come forward with information (lines 224-232), the punishments for the murderer, whoever he may be (lines 233-254), a statement of Oedipus on his sense of obligation to the late ruler (lines 255-268), and finally a curse for continued barrenness for those who disobey the king's order and blessings for those who comply (lines 269-275).

Sophocles fills this speech with a great deal of irony. Oedipus will, of course, later receive the very punishment he proposes for the criminal: he will become a social outcast.3

3. See Vickers, op. cit., Chapter 3 for the horror with which the Greek viewed separation from the family and social unit.
Furthermore he states he was not involved in the affair at the outset (line 220), that he is seeking the criminal for his own well being (line 257 ff.), and that he pursues the inquiry because he has married the late king's wife and would have married their daughter if there had been one (lines 259-263). Even the sterility he pronounces as a punishment on those who will not cooperate is an ironic reference to his ill-omened fertility and that of his parents.

The Senecan version contains an invocation to the gods (lines 247-257), the decree of punishment on the killer (lines 264-267), and a final prayer to Apollo to witness his action and to keep his presumed parents safe (line 268-273). The first part of the punishment closely resembles that found in Sophocles (lines 257-259), but Oedipus decrees an even more terrible one:

\[
\begin{align*}
thalamis pudendis doleat et prole impia; 
hic et parentem dextera perimat sua, 
faciatque (num quid gravius optari potest?) 
quidquid ego fugi... 
\end{align*}
\]

(lines 260-263)

As an attempt at irony this addition to the punishment found in Sophocles is frankly neither subtle nor necessary. It does serve, however, to keep before us Oedipus' fear of parricide and incest, a fear which constantly impinges on his actions and words. It is necessary for Oedipus to think of an appropriate fate for the

4. Knox, op. cit., page 115, where he discusses the verbal irony in this speech.
murderer of Laius, and mere exile certainly was not the punishment it was to fifth century Greece. He knows that the very worst thing one can wish on another person (*num quid gravius optari potest?*); he has had to live with it for some time. This is not a particularly imaginative way for Seneca to emphasize the ramifications and importance of Oedipus' crimes; it certainly is not as creative in doing so as the following scenes of haruspicy and necromancy. Yet Seneca is not here interested in irony so much as he is in maintaining the level of Oedipus' anxiety and fear. The emotional level of the *Oedipus* does not vary much throughout, for Oedipus never feels that he has really avoided his destiny. Even his indictment of the killer in these lines is implicitly a self-indictment.

It is interesting to notice that Oedipus is much more frightened at the prospect of incest than of parricide.5 We have seen his disgust at incest in the prologue (lines 16-21), and in the present passage he states that nothing worse can be desired as a punishment. In this decree he also places incest ahead of parricide as punishment, and the climax of the prayer to Apollo in his hope the Merope may know only the Polybi faces. This greater anxiety over incest continues, as we shall see later in the play, and may be a factor in Seneca's decision to have Jocasta confront her son after his blinding.

5. Thummer, op. cit., page 173.
After Oedipus finishes the decree, he asks Creon about the location of the murder (lines 274-275). It is almost as if he is picking up the line of questioning which he left off at line 245. If this is so, then we might look at the intervening lines dealing with the king's decree as a spur of the moment reaction to the mentioning of the Sphinx and to Oedipus' sense of responsibility. In the prologue we have seen Oedipus change direction very quickly after Jocasta's interjection, and later we will see him suddenly send Creon off (lines 399-400) and just as suddenly assume the presence of a plot against him (lines 667-670). These abrupt changes, as unmotivated as they seem, are actually the results of Oedipus' state of mind as it was presented in the prologue. He jumps from one mood to another, not on the basis of careful thought and reflection, but because of the distraction caused by his fears.

cuncta expavesco meque non credo mihi....
horrore quatio, fata quo vergant timens, trepidumque gemino pectus affectu labat.... (lines 27, 206-207)

Creon's response to the king's question about the place of the murder is modelled on Oedipus Tyrannus 711-725. There it is Jocasta who tells of the place where the three roads met almost incidentally as she tries to prove to her husband that the oracles are incorrect. The reference to the triple crossing makes Oedipus immediately recall an incident from his past; from that point on the Greek protagonist conducts his search with greater intensity. It is necessary for him to interview the survivor of the murder of Laius
to see if he was possibly involved (O.T. 765, 836-871).

In Seneca the killing of Laius really is of minimal im-
portance. Later it will take only Jocasta's physical description
of Laius and the fact that he was accompanied by one man to lead
Oedipus to the conclusion that he was the killer (lines 773-782).
In the following scene the questioning of Phorbas deals only with
the possibility that Oedipus has married his mother. In Seneca
there are no survivors of the killing to identify anybody, and his
Oedipus calls the earth to swallow him up only upon discovering
that he has married his mother (lines 869-870).

Seneca consequently underplays the evidence surrounding
the parricide. It is necessary for Oedipus to know the place of
the incident, but he finds out on his own (lines 768-772) and it
does not prove to be the key to unravelling the mystery. This is
why, perhaps, Seneca has introduced this bit of evidence here
while having Oedipus make no comment on it. As soon as Creon
finishes he notices that Teiresias is approaching with his
daughter, and the scene of extispicium begins.

The last Sophoclean part of Acts II and III is the
conflict of Oedipus and Creon (lines 659-708). The pertinent
passages in the Oedipus Tyrannus are lines 378-462, where Oedipus
charges Teiresias with collusion with Creon and makes light of his
prophetic powers, and lines 513-677, where Oedipus confronts Creon
who avows his lack of interest in the throne. Jocasta finally
intervenes and Creon leaves in disgust.
Seneca conflates the Sophoclean version for two reasons. First, whereas Oedipus' conflict with the seer begins in the Greek play the development of the theme of questioning the validity of the oracles, such a theme has no relevance for Seneca. His Oedipus rather too firmly believes the oracles; he supposes that Creon is lying when he reports the results of the necromancy. Seneca's Jocasta raises no doubts about the oracles as she does in Sophocles (O.T. 847 ff., 945 ff.), nor does the Senecan chorus ever consider the consequences of prophecy's failure as it does in the Oedipus Tyrannus (lines 897 ff.). Secondly, Sophocles uses Oedipus' conflicts with Teiresias and Creon to show further the king's suspiciousness, his anger, and his nervousness about his position as tyrannos. In Seneca these traits are not much emphasized, and when they are (as in the interrogation of Phorbas) they are only incidental to the characterization of Oedipus.

The overriding element in the conflict of Oedipus and Creon in Seneca is the fear on the part of the king. It is fear, first of all, that he has already fulfilled the oracle:

\[
\text{et ossa et artus gelidus invasit tremor;}
\]
\[
\text{quidquid timebam facere fecisse arguor}
\]
(lines 659-660)

This concern is hardly surprising inasmuch as he has heard via Creon the charge of Laius. However, he rules this out at once

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because his parents are safe and the killing of the king happened long before he came to Thebes. Oedipus then considers whether a deus Thebis gravis oppresses the land or whether Teiresias is lying. He characteristically makes the wrong choice. Teiresias may have made up the particulars of the necromancy, but it is Creon who brings word of it and who will take all of the blame. Creon's reply at lines 671-675 and 687-693 are inspired by Oedipus Tyrannus 583-602: Creon is perfectly happy with his position, which has none of the perils of kingship, and in fact has some unique benefits:

solutus onere regio regni bonis
fruor domusque civium coetu viget,
nect ulla vicibus surgit alternis dies
qua non propinqui munera ad nostros lares
sceptri redunent...
(lines 687-691)

Oedipus will not accept such reasoning; lack of interest in ruling only masks real ambition:

certissima est regnare cupienti via
laudare modica et otium ac somnum loqui.
ab inquieto saepe simulatur quies.
(lines 682-684)

The king is worried about a coup and is sure that Creon is involved. When the latter protests his innocence Oedipus states that fear itself guards the kingdom: regna custodit metus (line 704).

8. Note that he mentions his innocence from incest first: line 661.
Creon rejoins with an indictment of his own on the king's abuse of power and its effects:

\[ \text{qui sceptri duro saevus imperio regit,} \\
\text{timet timentes; metus in auctorem redit.} \]  
(lines 705-706)

This strikes home; Oedipus does not have to be reminded what it is to be afraid. He peremptorily orders Creon to be locked up (lines 707-708). What becomes of Creon remains a mystery in this play. He does not, as in Sophocles, reappear at the end to pronounce banishment. Seneca's protagonist will exit as he entered: alone. He will decree his own punishment and will receive neither chastisement from his uncle/brother or solace from his children/sisters.

Seneca uses Sophoclean material in Acts II and III, but as we have seen he freely expands or contracts sections from the Greek play, as well as transposing others. He does all this in an entirely consistent manner which conforms to the changes from Oedipus Tyrannus which were indicated in the prologue. The dynamics of Seneca's dramatization take place in the confines of Oedipus' awareness of his destiny. The situations and characters in the play are all portrayed as participating in this awareness. The oracle of Apollo as related by Creon will not let him forget who he is, and even the punishment he proposes for the murderer is couched in terms of his own self-understanding: \text{metus in auctorem redit.}
Not all of the assaults on Oedipus come from himself, however. The universe is watching him and has already, through the plague, registered its disgust. He has not accepted the verdict of nature, and continues to cling to the last vestiges of self-delusion. These vestiges must be torn away; he needs an even more explicit testimony of his disease. He will receive it through the ordeal of extispicium and the raising of the dead.

THE DIVINATION AND NECROMANCY IN THE OEDIPUS

At line 288 of the Oedipus Creon breaks off his comments on the place of Laius' murder when he notices that Teiresias is approaching, led by his daughter, Manto. His arrival comes as something of a surprise, since the king has not sent for him as is the case in the Oedipus Tyrannus (lines 287-289). It is not entirely unmotivated, however, because he has been made aware of the content of the oracle (sorte Phoebea excitus, line 288), and the seer may thus be able to offer some explanation. More important, his appearance interrupts Oedipus' questioning, which began at line 274. The king has begun to take action by pronouncing his curse on the killer and by asking questions. As has already been pointed out, it is the description of the place of Laius' murder which in Sophocles triggers Oedipus' final push to the truth. To those familiar with the Greek play Creon's words at lines 277 ff.

9. As Friedrich believed, Untersuchungen...Technik, op. cit., pages 68-69.
in the Oedipus must seem to lead in the same direction, that is, to the revelation. If Oedipus is allowed to question Creon further, after he has just heard the most important clue in the mystery, it would be virtually impossible for Seneca to maintain Oedipus' ignorance plausibly. The introduction of the prophet is certainly abrupt, but it is meant to return Oedipus to the status of passive observer. Seneca is not concerned here with exhibiting the king's keen intelligence, but rather in producing more external evidence of his guilt. It is not necessary for Seneca's Oedipus to lead the investigation or even ultimately to act as the primary solver of the mystery. He will stand condemned regardless of the role he chooses or is permitted to play in the discovery of his past.

The Senecan Teiresias does not know the meaning of the oracle when he enters. This is in sharp contrast to Sophocles' seer who does know the truth and indeed does not even want to talk to the king:

{où γὰρ ἂν δεῦρ' ἴκωσιν

ἀφεῖς μ' ἐς οἰκους' ῥάστα γὰρ τὸ σῶν τε σὺ
κάγῳ διοκοῦς τοῦτον, ἤν ἐμοὶ πίθη.}

(O.T. 318, 320-321)

Sophocles' Oedipus tries in vain to coax Teiresias into speaking (lines 322-344), and finally accuses him of having a part in a

conspiracy to kill Laius. Teiresias is stung by this charge and tells the king that he himself is not only the cause of the plague (line 353), but also that he is the murderer of the former ruler. This in turn causes Oedipus to threaten the old man as well as charge Creon with complicity in the imagined plot. He also makes light of Teiresias' prophetic powers and intelligence by taunting the old man with his failure to solve the riddle of the Sphinx. Teiresias denies the charge and foretells Oedipus' exile and blinding (lines 415-420, 449-456). As he leaves, Teiresias gives a terrible and explicit account of the king's crime:

This scene in the Greek play is filled with irony. The seer is only physically blind, whereas his prophetic powers give him true vision to see Oedipus' past and future. The intelligence which Oedipus used in solving the riddle of the Sphinx fails him in discerning the riddle of his true identity. His sarcastic reference to ὁ μηδὲν εἶδὼς Οἰδόπος is an unwittingly accurate description. He fails to notice that Teiresias charges the criminal with being ὀμοσπόρος (line 460), a word used earlier
(line 260) to describe himself.\textsuperscript{11} This scene thus increases anticipation on the part of the audience by removing any doubt about what Oedipus has done and by foreshadowing later events, especially the king's blindness and exile.

One might ask why Seneca chooses to change so drastically the role of Teiresias as he found it in Sophocles. I have mentioned already that the themes of Oedipus' intelligence and his skepticism about oracles were not particularly important to Seneca. It is also clear that in the \textit{Oedipus} Teiresias must at first be ignorant so that there can be a reason for the scenes of divination and necromancy. It will be the ghost of Laius who will interpret the oracle for Oedipus, not the prophet.\textsuperscript{12} Quite apart from these practical considerations, however, Teiresias' ignorance represents another bit of evidence about the world of the play. It is one which has been deserted by any beneficent deities\textsuperscript{13} and one in which traditional religious practices have been turned upside-down. We have seen this before in Oedipus' fear of Apollo (line 34), in the inability of the gods to help the plague-stricken city (lines 197-200), and in the fact Thebes has now been given over to the

\textsuperscript{11} Vickers, op. cit., pages 515-517.

\textsuperscript{12} M. Braginton, \textit{The Supernatural in Seneca's Tragedies} (Yale dissertation), Menasha (1933), page 63.

\textsuperscript{13} Dewey, op. cit., page 194.
hideous creatures of the underworld (lines 160-179). Even the
oracle at Delphi has taken on a bizarre aspect:¹⁴

ut sacrata templo Phoebi supplici intravi pede
et pias numen precatus rite summisi manus,
gemina Parnasi nivalis arx trucem fremitum dedit;
imminens Phoebea laurus tremuit et movit comam
ac repente sancta fontis lympha Castalii stetit.
(lines 225-229)

Teiresias' ignorance fits into the pattern of abnormality which
we have found so far in the tragedy. Unlike other seers he has
no "inner vision" and even after the divination he is completely
at a loss for a solution to the oracle (lines 390-392). Seneca
gives his Teiresias a different type of irony: here, where we
expect a startling exposition of the truth, as we find in
Sophocles, we actually see a prophet who boldly confesses his
physical and spiritual blindness:

Quod tarda fatu est lingua, quod quaerit moras
haut te quidem, magnanime, mirari addecet;
visu carenti magna pars veri latet.
(lines 293-295)

Teiresias means what he says; if we expect a double meaning to
these lines we shall be disappointed. The Senecan seers' lack
of knowledge is, I believe, carefully counter-poised to the
Sophoclean Teiresias, not only for the purpose of contrast, but
also because the prophet must be shown to be a product of a
dramatic situation in which the Olympian deities have little
power and even less concern.

¹⁴ Paratore, op. cit., page 122.
Teiresias proceeds to order Manto to prepare for the sacrifice and divination and to describe to him what happens (lines 297-302). She then places incense on the sacrificial fire, and her father asks whether the smoke rises normally or settles on the ground fluctuante fumo. Manto's report (lines 314-328) contains possible allusions to past and future events. The flame ominously changes color, from blue and yellow to blood-red (sanguinea), and finally to black (in tenebras). The pugnax ignis divides into two parts, the wine changes into blood, and the smoke gathers unnaturally around the head of Oedipus (lines 321-328). Norman Pratt has interpreted these lines: the divided flame is an allusion to the funeral pyre of Eteocles and Polyneices, while the wine-turned-blood refers to the killing of the two brothers, and the smoke around Oedipus signifies incest. These are entirely plausible explanations for these lines, especially since Seneca's audience was certainly familiar with the later story of the royal house of Thebes. There are also possible references to the brothers later in the 

15. Dewey, op. cit., page 192, note 2 where she discusses the role of the child of Teiresias in Sophocles.

16. Pratt, Dramatic Suspense ..., pages 93-95. He discusses some comments by Farnabius; for example, he supposes that line 320 is a veiled reference to the blinding of Oedipus.

17. Pratt, ibid, page 94, where he refers to the hostility of parts of the funeral fire in Tristia V 5.33-36, Lucan Bellum Civile I. 549-552, and Statius Thebaid XII 431-432.
divination scene (the two capitae of the liver), in Laius' speech (line 646), and in a choral ode (lines 749-750). The oracle previously had promised tecum bella geres, natis quoque bella relinquens (line 237). Nonetheless, it is possible to understand Manto's account of the flame and smoke in terms of Oedipus' condition. The splitting flame, the changing wine, and the spontaneous wreathing of the king's head are all evil omens as well as breaches of the laws of nature. As such, they fit into the picture of pollution and deformity which the play has presented since the prologue. Teiresias, of course, is not able to relate the portents to Oedipus directly nor does he understand fully their significance, but he is aware that they are dangerous (lines 328-331).

The signs surrounding the sacrifice and extispicium are no less forbidding. The slaying of the heifer and the bull may both prefigure the fates of Jocasta and Oedipus:

Iuvenca ferro semet imposito induit
et vulnere uno cecidit, at taurus duos
perpessus ictus huc et huc dubius ruit
animamque fessus vix reluctantem exprimit.
(lines 341-344)

So will the queen commit suicide and Oedipus strike out his eyes with two blows. The animals bleed abnormally as in the earlier

18. Mastronarde, op. cit., page 309; he sees these references as assuring "that the future will be no better."

attempt at sacrifice (lines 138-141):

   huius exiguo graves
   maculantur ictus imbre; sed versus retro
   per ora multus sanguis atque oculos redit.
   (lines 348-350)

The actual examination of the entrails is entirely a description of deformity. They shake and bleed (lines 353-355), the heart is diseased (lines 356-357), the liver is severely malformed (lines 357-365), and the other organs are not in their proper positions (lines 366-370). It is not surprising that Manto says natura versa est, even though she has not yet discovered the most monstrous portent of them all: the presence of a foetus in the virginal heifer (lines 373-376). If Seneca is continuing to use this animal as a symbol of Jocasta, then its pregnancy alludes to the unnatural and confused relationship of Jocasta and Oedipus. The extispicium ends with the murmuring of the very altar fires (lines 381-383).

Oedipus wants to know the meaning of these sacri signa terrifici. Teiresias knows the signs have all been very bad and warns the king about going on: His invidebis quibus opem quaeris malis (line 387). Oedipus still wants to learn the name of the killer, and Teiresias decides that the ghost of the dead king must be raised so that he can answer that question. It is clear that only the inhabitants of the underworld can help:

20. Pratt, op. cit., page 97-98; where he discusses the significance of the liver in haruspicy.
Teiresias tells Oedipus that it would not be right for him to attend the ghost-raising, and Creon is sent along to accompany the old man and his daughter. The scene ends with Teiresias calling on the chorus for a hymn of praise to Bacchus.

The scene of extispicium is dramatic, not in the sense that it contains a great deal of stage action or that it moves the plot forward. The drama of this scene consists of the presentation of another assault on Oedipus' hesitancy to realize that he is the source of the pollution. The conflict here is not between Oedipus and Teiresias, who has no knowledge to contribute, but rather it is between Oedipus and the forces of nature and nature's gods who are providing unmistakable evidence of his guilt. It is Oedipus' refusal to accept the accuracy of his own premonitions and of the extispicium and forthcoming necromancy which creates tensions which are more important than those surrounding the subsequent discovery of the truth. In a sense the Oedipus does present a "static situation," 21 for the protagonist does very little to pursue the truth or to take responsibility for the search.

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Nonetheless the situation does indeed develop, for Oedipus is progressively stripped of any avenue of defense or escape. The forces of nature, the gods, and his own guilt are the "actors" in this play; what we witness is their ever-increasing power over the king's rationalizations and obtuseness.

The examination of the entrails also confirms on a religious level what has already taken place in Thebes and in Oedipus' psyche. The deformities in this scene parallel the blight on Thebes as well as Oedipus' self-destructive fears. The constantly spreading sickness caused by Oedipus' crimes threatens to engulf the entire universe. Seneca's dramatic problem was to find suitable opportunities to portray the moral cancer which Oedipus' suppression of the truth fosters, its symptoms, and its effects on the king. The extispicium provided Seneca with just such an opportunity, and through its gruesomeness it leaves no doubt as to how far and how completely the contagion has spread.

At lines 401-402 Teiresias calls for a hymn to Bacchus, an ode which has no parallel in the Oedipus Tyrannus. Its presence in the Roman play has caused even the usually sympathetic Léon Herrmann to wonder if it has any relevance to the drama. Of course it functions as an interlude during which Teiresias and Creon can conduct the necromancy; nothing is going to happen until

they return. Still, we might ask why Seneca has included an ode to Bacchus which seems to express such a different mood from the scenes which surround it.

One reason that the chorus prays to Bacchus is that there are simply no other gods to turn to. Bacchus has replaced Apollo in the eyes of the chorus as the protector of the city, and they have good reason to believe this. The plague continues to spread its pollution (lines 410-412), and the demand of the oracle to drive out the killer of the old king remains unfulfilled. Most significantly, Apollo's seer has shown himself to be a poor interpreter of portents; he admitted that he was no longer able to act as the voice of the god (lines 297-298). He has given up on the usual rituals associated with Apollo in favor of those directed to the underworld. The ode is an appeal to Bacchus as the last source of traditional religious power. It is motivated both by Teiresias' words at line 402 and by the necessity to seek help from a new and, as the chorus hopes, efficacious quarter,

The ode also provides emotional relief from the grotesque events it interrupts. Up until this point in the play the tone has been uniformly somber and depressing. There is no question

24. Owen, op. cit., page 308
that Oedipus will find the murderer and the truth of his origins, but only when and under what circumstances. This ode delays what the audience knows is the inevitable catastrophe.

It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that the chorus enters an idyllic world of Thebes' mythical past. There are, as we shall see, undercurrents in the ode of the dark and violent moods present in the rest of the play. Part of the ambivalence of the ode is due to the ambivalent nature of the god whom it extolls. Bacchus is the god of fecundity and growth as well as of the destructive frenzy of the Bacchants (lines 413-417; 484-487); the god of both ecstatic release and harsh conquests over nonbelievers (lines 432-444; 467-471); the god who is born male yet looks and dresses like a woman (lines 418-421). The contradictions apparent in the god have counterparts in the figure of Oedipus, the man who is both son and husband to Jocasta, both brother and father of his children, and the savior or Thebes as well as the source of its destruction. But whereas the dichotomies in the nature of Bacchus have been resolved to produce a divinity universally loved and feared, the confusion of various familial and moral roles in Oedipus results in a monster which brings only pestilence and death. Seneca's choice of Bacchus as the recipient of this hymn is based not only on the dramatic need to change the tone of the ode, but also on the perception that the

god reflects on a supernatural plane a solution to his ambiguities which is entirely impossible for the mortal Oedipus.

For the purpose of our discussion the ode can be divided into six parts, representing four elements of the myth of Bacchus bracketed by a religious introduction and closing:

I. 403-428 : Invocation
II. 429-444 : The powers of Bacchus
III. 445-466 : Transformations
IV. 467-486 : The god's conquests
V. 487-503 : The marriage of Bacchus
VI. 504-508 : A final avowal of faith

The ode opens on a note of joy and brightness, contrasting sharply with the preceding scene. The chorus apostrophizes the Bacchants and tells them to take up two symbols of the god, nutante corymbo and Nysaeis thyrsis. Bacchus is then addressed as Lucidum caeli decus and asked to come and drive off the foul air, the portents from the underworld, and avidum fatum (lines 410-412). There follows a description of the god in his oriental garb, with his Tyria mitra and effusos crines (lines 413-417). The tone becomes more serious, however, in the following lines which refer to Juno's hatred and the transformation of the god into a woman:

27. A title more appropriately used of Apollo - see Owen, op. cit., page 308. The title appears in line 2 of the Carmen Saeculare.
qualis iratam metuens novercam  
creveras falsos imitatus artus,  
crine flaventi simulata virgo,  
lutea vestem retinente zona,  
inde tam molles placuere cultus  
et sinus laxi fluidumque syrma.

(lines 418-423)

The reference to this unnatural change in the life of the god is
one of several metamorphoses in the ode which have a broader dramatic
significance:

Metamorphosis is unnatural and recalls the monstrous Sphinx
and the physiological abnormalities of the extispicium. More­
over, transformation is the common feature of many mythological
allusions in the play, most of which are related to Bacchic
frenzy or to the Theban past or to both; serpent's teeth change
into men, Dirce into a spring, Ino and Melicertes into sea­
gods, Agave and her women into dolphins... There is a certain
horror and unhappiness in all these myths. Through the Theban
past, the Sphinx, and the deformed womb of the extispicium,
the metamorphosis-theme also reaches Jocasta and Oedipus, himself
a monster.28

Another Bacchic theme follows in the second part of the ode:
the frenzy the god can produce. The primary example of the force
of the madness sent by the god, Agave's killing Pentheus, is thor­
oughly a Theban myth, and it is not surprising that it is alluded to
here and at line 484-5.

... tibi commotae pectora matres fudere  
... comam....

... iam post laceros Pentheos artus  
thyades, oestro membra remissae,  
velut ignotum videre nefas....

(lines 439-440, 442-444)29


29. Richter's reading; Leo deletes line 439.
Now the joyous images of the thyrsis and the freeflowing hair have changed, and become symbols of violence and destruction. The killing of Pentheus is linked to the parricide of Oedipus: it is an act of violence on a family member done in ignorance of the true relationship of the participants. Furthermore, Pentheus' murder is described by a word which Manto uses when she finds the deformity in the heifer and one which applies very well to Oedipus' crimes: nefas (lines 444, 373).30

The third part of the ode deals with the transformations of Ino and Melicertes and the pirates. Neither of these is presented in a terrifying way, but they are indications of the supreme power of Bacchus. The next section gives more evidence of this by the description of his conquests of barbarian peoples. Here there is an emphasis on the various liquids associated with the worship of Bacchus:

Divite Pactolos vexit te Lydius unda
aurea torrenti deducens flumina ripa
laxavit victos arcus Geticasque sagittas
lactea Massagetes qui pocula sanguine miscet....

sacer Cithaeron sanguine undavit
Ophioniaque caede...
(lines 467-470; 484-485)

We have seen previously that the Bacchi dona turned into blood

30. I. Opelt, "Seneca's Konzeption des Tragischen" Senecas Tragödien (Wege der Forschung), pages 96-102, where nefas is discussed as an image in the play.

The element of the inherently violent nature of the god remains even in the context of this superficially joyous hymn of praise.\textsuperscript{31}

Reference to various types of water continue even more strongly in section five describing the marriage of Bacchus and Ariadne on Naxos. There Nyctelius latex spontaneously flows from the rocks and the earth produces refreshment, both very different from the dryness caused by the pestilence in Thebes:

\begin{quote}
garruli gramen secuere rivi,  
conbibit dulces humus alta sucos  
niveique lactis candidos fontes  
et mixta odoro Lesbia cum thymo.  
\end{quote}

(lines 493-496)

Nature itself is transformed under the influence of Bacchus, as men have been, and as the gods will be in the following lines. Jupiter puts aside his thunderbolt and even Apollo "lets his hair down" in Dionysian fashion.\textsuperscript{32}

\begin{quote}
solemne Phoebus carmen  
infusis humero capillis  
cantat...  
telum deposuit Iuppiter igneum  
oditque Baccho veniente fulmen.  
\end{quote}

(lines 498-500; 502-503)

Taken as a whole the ode is an impressive catalogue of the powers of Bacchus. Despite the occasional ominous undertones and the

\textsuperscript{31} Mastronarđe, op. cit., page 308.

\textsuperscript{32} See also Horace Epodes XV line 9 for a reference to Apollo's free-flowing hair.
danger the god represents to those who resist him, it is entirely understandable that the chorus is willing to put its trust in him. The chorus ends its hymn with six lines which function as a prayer for a return to normalcy:

Lucida dum current annosi sidera mundi,  
Oceanus clausum dum fluctibus ambiert orbem  
Lunaque dimissos dum plena recolliget ignes,  
dum matutinos praedicet Lucifer ortus  
altaque caeruleum dum Nerea nesciet Arctos,  
candida formonsi venerabimus ora Lyaei.  
(lines 503-508)

The people of Thebes have seen very little of these celestial phenomena; they have been shrouded by the squalida iubar since the beginning of the play. Their desire for the lucidum caeli decus to bring back the lucida sidera and the benign ignes of the moon is deeply felt, if doomed to frustration. The significance of lines 503-508 is clear only when one sees its origins in the corruption of the skies, a theme Seneca has carefully emphasized. The superficially Stoic tone of these lines is only a momentary retreat by the chorus into an idyllic world which will no longer witness the excesses of Thebes' rulers.

It might legitimately be said that these passages reflect the Stoic vision of an orderly universe and are intended to present the opposite of the chaos of Oedipus' world; none the less, it would be quite wrong to give these lines undue emphasis and seek a consistent attitude of Stoicism in Seneca's poetry. Despite these lines, Oedipus' world remains one of crime and chaos.... Seneca thus offers no consistent philosophical solution....33

33. Mastronarde, op. cit., page 309.
There can indeed be no philosophic "solution" to the tragedy of Oedipus because the only outcome which will restore health to the city and its skies is the removal of the cause of the crime and sickness: Oedipus. The ode to Bacchus and these last lines in particular are not part of a philosophic explanation of what has or will happen, but owe their existence to the dramatic situation at this moment in the play.

Creon returns at the conclusion of the ode, clearly worried about what he has seen (flebiles notas, line 509). Oedipus wants to know the results of the rite, but Creon is unwilling to speak, much as Teiresias is in Sophocles. The king tries at first to appeal to Creon's sense of patriotism and family loyalty (lines 512-513, 515-516). He quickly is put off by Creon's hesitancy and threatens him with the extreme punishment.

Audita fare, vel malo domitus gravi quid arma possint regis irati scies...

Mitteris Erebo vile pro cunctis caput, arcana sacri voce ni retegis tua. (lines 518-519, 521-522)

Creon continues to ask for the freedom to be silent, but the king finds danger even in muta libertas (line 525). It is only when Oedipus abruptly promises Creon that he will not be punished that the narrative begins.

The first part of the report (lines 530-568) consists of a description of the grove where Teiresias is to conjure the
spirits. The mood is very different from the preceding ode; the
grove is dark under the shade of the funereal cypress (lines 530-534),
the other trees are gnarled and decaying (lines 534-537), and the
bubbling springs and streams of the Bacchus ode are here replaced
by a stagnant swamp:

tristis sub illa, lucis et Phoebi inscius,
restagnat umor frigore aeterno rigens;
limosa pigrum circumit fontem palus.
(lines 545-547)

Teiresias appears as the opposite of the triumphant Bacchus both
in his dress (squalente cultu) and his wreath of mortifera taxus.35
Every detail serves to reenforce the unnatural and evil aspect of
the necromancy. The trees provide an artificial night for the
sacrifice whose fire is lit with the brands of funeral pyres.
Further, the sacrificial animals are dragged into the pit36 and
burned alive (vivumque... pecus line 558). Teiresias then chants
his carmen magicum and makes a libation of blood, milk, and wine.
His magic works, of course, and at once the earth shakes, groans,
and opens up:

34. For a discussion of Teiresias as magician and the
Roman interest in magic see Braginton, op. cit., pages 38, 63,
85-86.

35. Mastronarde, op. cit., pages 308-309.

36. Reading intro in line 557, after Richter.
The first to appear from hell is the vipereum genus whom Cadmus had sown from the teeth of the slain dragon. They are followed by the Erinys, Furor, Horror, Luctus, Morbus, Senectus, Metus, and Pestis.37 Manto is dumbfounded at the arrival of this congregation, but Teiresias, who presumably can see none of this, begins to call up the human shades (lines 595-598).

At lines 598-618 we see the vast numbers of the dead,38 as well as some ill-fated characters from Thebes' past. Amphion and Zethus appear, the latter clinging to the bull on which they had tied their mother to be dragged to death. Niobe is presented as now safely exulting in the number of her children, while Agave, furibunda, leads her band of Maenads. Even their victim, the mutilated Pentheus, is portrayed as savage and as intractible as he was in life. In fact all of these ghosts from the city's past are completely "unrehabilitated" by their stay in the underworld. In life they were all guilty or in some way responsible for a crime against their immediate family, and thus make up a worthy prelude

37. Dewey, op. cit., page 201 states that these personifications are the "true dramatis personae" of the play.

38. The comparison of the dead to falling leaves and birds (lines 600 ff.) is found also at Aeneid VI 309-312.
to Thebes' most recently condemned ghost - Laius. He too has sinned against his kin and the gods. Laius' futile efforts to escape the oracle (which foretold his murder at the hands of his son) by exposing the baby of Jocasta fit the pattern of Theban sin. It may be for this reason that Laius tries to hide his pudibundum caput, which prompts Teiresias to redouble his efforts to bring the shade forward.

Laius' speech (lines 626-658) is prefaced by a brief description of his appearance; as was the case with Pentheus, the picture shows the king as he was at the moment in his death:

\[
\text{stetit per artus sanguine effuso horridus}
\text{paedore foedo squalidam obiectus coman,}
\text{et ore rabido fatur...}
\] (lines 624-626)

The dead king realizes that he is part of the criminal past of the city and specifically refers to the killing of male children:

\[
\ldots o \text{Cadmi effera,}
\text{cruore semper laeta cognato domus,}
\text{vibrate thyrsos, enthea natos manu}
\text{lacerate potius...}
\] (lines 626-629)

In the legend Laius had tried to dispose of his son, but failed. In his failure he produced the maximum Thebis scelus - maternus amor (lines 629-630). That is why it is better for the house of Cadmus to continue to destroy its sons; that crime is nothing in Laius' eyes compared to incest. Once again we see the crime of incest take priority in the Oedipus over parricide; in this instance even the victim of the parricide states this is so. Of
course Laius does not ignore the fact that Oedipus is polluted by
the murder, but the main charge in Laius' indictment is that
Oedipus has caused the plague by his incest; his son has become
a monster as perversely unnatural as the Sphinx:

> sed rex cruentus, pretia qui saevae necis
>sceptra et nefandos occupat thalamos patris,
invisa proles — sed tamen peior parens
>quam natus, utero rursus infausto gravis;
>egitque in ortus semet et matri impios
>fetus regressit, quique vix mos est feris
>fratres sibi ipse genuit — implicitum malum
>magisque monstrum Sphinge perplexum sua.
>(lines 634-641)

Laius has already stated (lines 630-633) that the pestilence
is not god-sent nor a result of winds or atmospheric conditions.
It is caused by crime and specifically the crime of the rex cruentus.
The possibility that Oedipus killed his father and married his wife
in ignorance of his true relationship to them is not considered by
Laius. He speaks as if both acts were premeditated and done in
full knowledge of the truth. However it is Oedipus' ignorance
which is the crucial element of the Sophoclean version and which
Seneca has tenuously maintained so far in this play. In what way,
then, can Laius' charge of premeditation be reconciled with such
an important part of the Oedipus legend?

One answer is suggested by the late W. H. Owen, who
considers the speech of Laius an allegorization of Oedipus' own
emotional condition:
Perhaps the most astounding facet of the scene is the assumption on Laius' part (629 ff.) of wilful guilt on Oedipus' part. Viewed as realistic theater this is preposterous. We expect of Laius not ugly bloodthirstiness, but a tragic sense of shame and sorrow. Only when we recognize that the starless landscape of Hell is a psychic one and that Laius' actions are allegorical reflections of Oedipus' own guilt and fear of his father, does the scene become viable theater. Then it is very interesting theater indeed. For Hell becomes the bleak and squalid realm of the psychic deformity which tortures Oedipus; its tenants (586-594), as unmercifully grotesque as Oedipus himself; its darkness as impervious as his fear.

Oedipus stands in this scene, as he does so often in the play, as a passive defendant. Yet Seneca has perceived that the king's crimes and his terrible fear of accepting them have significant and universal ramifications. Owen's analysis is important because it shows the extent to which Seneca's world is, as Herington put it, one world: Oedipus' hell and its apparitions are tailor-made not only to reflect his personal transgressions against nature and nature's laws, but also to express the world's disgust in terms uniquely understandable to the king. This interpretation is important also, for it suggests that Laius' accusation of Oedipus' premeditation reflects an unexpressed fear of the king, namely that he may have subconsciously desired the parricide and incest.

39. Owen, op. cit., page 311
The crux of its psychology (i.e. of the play) is the paradox that fear of such intensity is tantamount to acceptance of the object feared; as the chorus' summary indicates (992-995)

\[
\text{multis ipsum metuisse nocet, multi fatum venere suum dum fata timent...}
\]

Seneca discovers it, with perhaps more acute perception, in the complex of psycho-sexual tensions which we would gather under the term "Oedipus complex." Thus the question which is a marginal concern in Sophocles' Oedipus, viz. whether Oedipus genuinely suffers from an Oedipus complex, becomes the central issue and principal symbol of Seneca's play. It is a play about this psychotic Oedipus, and by definition, therefore, fraught with abnormality.\(^40\)

It is going too far to say that the Oedipus-complex is the "principal symbol" of Seneca's Oedipus. Yet if the words of Laius are really reflections of Oedipus' personal fears, then we find that Seneca is exploring elements of the legend left untouched by the Greek dramatist.

Seneca interprets the legend of Oedipus in a different way when he deals with the figure of Laius. In the Oedipus he is not the shadowy impersonal character referred to in the Oedipus Tyrannus. He is definitely part of the Theban list of criminals and there is no need to assume that he would be filled with "shame and sorrow" any more than the incorrigible Thebans mentioned in the previous lines (609-618). Nor is his hatred based solely on a father-son conflict, for such conflicts were, if anything, quite normal for the Theban royal house (lines 626-629). Rather, Laius' relationship

\(^40\) Owen, op. cit., 308-309.
with his son is dominated by jealousy, specifically over the bed of Jocasta. In Seneca's play the dead king is presented as a cuckold who is obsessed by his wife's infidelity. This is another reason for his unwillingness to appear, and when he is forced to speak he condemns even Jocasta for willfully betraying him (paior parens line 636 ff.). Laius remains appalled at the fact that it is his son who has supplanted him, but this by itself does not explain his condemnation of his wife and her lover as sinners. Only when we perceive his sexual jealousy of her can we appreciate the motivation behind his irrational lust for vengeance:

```
et mecum Erinyn pronubam thalami traham, traham sonantes verbera, incestam domum vertam et penates impio Marte obteram. (lines 644-646)
```

The end of Laius' speech (lines 647-658) re-enforces the demand of the oracle to expel the criminal, and of course Laius can name him specifically. Laius says that when the exile leaves, the earth will come back to life and the air will again be fit to breathe (lines 650-651). He goes on to name the various evils which will accompany Oedipus when he leaves (see lines 389-94 and 1058-1060), and ominously alludes to the king's coming blindness. His last words are both a demand and a promise:

```
repet incertus viae, baculo senili triste praetemptans iter. eripite terras, auferam caelum pater. (lines 656-658)
```
These lines ostensibly refer to Oedipus' self-blinding, but they recall Oedipus' own words *fecimus caelum nocens* (line 36). The unhealthy air of Thebes has been a recurrent theme in the play, and now Laius hopes to purge the *caelum* of his son's sins (though not his sense of guilt) by providing the evidence needed to exile him. Laius does this not out of concern for the welfare of the people of the city, but to satisfy his desire for vengeance over his murderer and sexual rival.

The scenes of divination and necromancy have dramatic functions in the Oedipus; they are not insertions meant to satisfy some peculiarly Roman curiosity about magic or ghosts, or to provide "atmosphere." Both scenes give further concrete evidence about the reaction of the divinities of the upper and lower worlds to Oedipus. In doing so, these scenes show Seneca exploring parts of the legend which Sophocles did not emphasize. The dramatic purpose of the *extispicium* has already been discussed (see above, pages 102-103), and to that might be added the fact that it continues the theme of the failure of normal religious practices and

41. F. J. Miller, Seneca VIII Loeb Library, page 483; Schetter, op. cit., page 442.

42. Paratore, op. cit., pages 124, 127; Braginton, op. cit., page 44; Thummer, op. cit., page 194; for a discussion of necromancy in Roman literature see D. Vessey Statius & the Thebaid (Cambridge, 1973), pages 235-250)
those who conduct them to deal successfully with the problem of the plague. We have seen before the change in the gods as the sick flock to their temples (lines 199-201); in the divination scene this image of universal corruption is expanded and clarified. Seneca is extreme in his depiction of the ramifications of Oedipus' crimes, but it is a technique based on the knowledge that evil, once begun, is pandemic and universally destructive.

Similarly, Seneca enters new ground in the necromancy, which both re-enforces the oracle of Delphi and presents Oedipus with a startling confirmation of his own guilt. I use the word "startling" because there can be for Oedipus no more damning accusation than one from Laius. The ghost's words are so specific and so personal that they threaten to remove any possible doubt Oedipus may have about the accusations. Oedipus' only refuge and the only way he can emotionally survive in the face of such fear is to suppose that Creon has fabricated the whole report of the necromancy. He indeed does this (lines 659 ff.), not out of stupidity or because he is unusually suspicious, but because Laius' accusations are too near his own premonitions. In Seneca's hands the legend of Oedipus becomes not the story of an heroic encounter with destiny, but a study of a man who tries not to live out his nightmares.
CHAPTER V

ACT IV OF SENeca'S OEDIPUS

The third chorus of the Oedipus consists of 54 lines (lines 709-763) and deals with more stories from Thebes' past:¹

I. Opening address of Oedipus  709-712a

II. Cadmus' arrival in Thebes  712b-724

III. The story of the serpent men  725-750

IV. The story of Actaeon  751-763

The chorus, like Oedipus, has not believed the report of Creon about Laius' ghost. It explicitly absolves Oedipus from the charge of being the source of their pericula, and instead blames the verteres deum irae (lines 711-712). There is certainly enough evidence of the wrath of the gods, as we have seen in the ode to Bacchus. At this point the chorus remembers the founding of Thebes of Cadmus: Phoebus tells him to give up his search for his sister Europa and to follow a cow which will lead him to the site of a future city. Seneca's description of this myth ends with subtle touch:

¹ The myths come from Book III of Ovid's Metamorphoses.
monituque Phoebi
iussus erranti comes ire vaccae,
quam non flexerat
vomer aut tardi iuga curva plaustri,
deseruit fugas nomenque genti
inauspicata de bove tradidit.
(lines 719-724)

The cow is indeed inauspicata because it leads to the beginning of a city which will witness a steady stream of crime and punishment. Furthermore, in this play we have seen a close parallel to this animal in the haruspicy (lines 353-383), where the innupta bos, an animal which was supposedly sexually pure and thus suitable for sacrifice, was found to be corrupted and deformed. The heifer which Cadmus follows is also pure in the sense that it has never been yoked for labor. In the end, however, it will be shown that it was also an unsuitable omen for such a pious act as the founding of a city.

Lines 725-726 appear to introduce a catalogue of monstra which have played such an important part in Thebes' past:

Tempore ex illo nova monstra semper protulit tellus...

However, what we find are just two examples of monstra, the men born from the dragon's teeth and the story of Actaeon. One reason for the paucity of examples is that several of the characters from Thebes' past have already been dealt with, especially in the ode to Bacchus. Another reason may be the need to find examples which deal in some way with Oedipus' situation. From the very beginning of the ode there can be no doubt, except for the chorus, that
Oedipus himself is one of the monstra.\textsuperscript{2} This makes the ode ironic to a point, but it is a thinly veiled irony, so thinly veiled that the audience is hard pressed not to make the immediate connection between the king and the horrors of the past.\textsuperscript{3} The very form of the two examples Seneca includes in this ode serves to make the connection firmer.

The story of the anguis and its offspring (lines 726-750) is another instance of an unnatural birth, as was the case with the foetus in the virgin heifer of the haruspicy. The earth into which the teeth of the serpent are sown is described as \textit{feta ... impio partu} (line 731), and her children will later return to her embrace:

\begin{quote}
\textit{donee cecidit saeva iuventus}
\textit{genetrixque suo reddi gremio}
\textit{modo productos vidit alumnos.}
\end{quote}

(lines 745-747)

These lines recall the fact that Jocasta has given birth under evil omens and has already received her offspring back under sad circumstances. The serpent-men, the \textit{saeva iuventus}, destroy each other in a typically Theban fashion by ignoring their blood relationship. Their fratricide prefigures that of the sons of Oedipus, Eteocles

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{2} Muller, op. cit., pages 388-389.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{3} Dewey, op. cit., page 204 describes the ode as "a piece of dramatic irony in lyric form."
\end{quote}
and Polyneices, 4 but the proelia fratum in a broader sense fits into the pattern of family murder in the royal house. Cadmus himself, who precipitates the killing among the children of the serpent, is a wanderer terrified by prodigies: horret tantis advena Monstris (line 743). Thus he is a symbol of Oedipus who will come to Thebes as an advena and who will also indirectly start a war between brothers.

The allusions to Oedipus and his family continue in the description of the fate of Actaeon, the grandson of Cadmus, who was turned into a stag after he saw Diana bathing. Actaeon has committed a sin against the nimium saevi diva pudoris (line 764), though it is harmless enough when compared with Oedipus' crime against chastity. Cadmus' grandson attempts to flee and to avoid the traps he himself had set out:

praecpe silvas montesque fugit
citus Actaeon agilique magis
pede per saltus ac saxa vagus
metuit motas zephyris plumas
et quae posuit retia vitat....
(lines 755-759)

Like Oedipus he is the victim of his own hunt. He also returns to Dewey, op. cit., page 205 prefers to view the theme of fratricide in the ode as originating in the chorus' fears about the possible worsening of the conflict of Oedipus and Creon, a conflict they have just witnessed.

5. Metamorphoses III 138-255.
the scene of the original sacrilege just as Oedipus will return to
the bed of the man who vainly tried to ignore the warning of the oracle:

\[
\text{donec placidi fontis in unda}
\text{cornua vidit vultusque feros.}
\text{ibi virgineos foverat artus}
\text{nimium saevi diva pudoris.}
\]
\[
\text{(lines 760-763)}
\]

Seneca may have taken the idea of the chorus protesting
the innocence of the king from the first \textit{stasimon} of the \textit{Oedipus Tyrannus} (lines 463-512). At this point in the Greek play
Teiresias has just condemned Oedipus as Laius' slayer, and the
chorus refuses to accept this accusation. In the \textit{Oedipus Tyrannus}
the chorus is confused and tries to recall some possible reason
why Oedipus and Laius could have come into conflict (lines 483-
497). Then they rephrase Oedipus' doubts about the art of inter-
preting omens and recall Oedipus' victory over the Sphinx and his
concern for the city (lines 505-512). This ode is clearly a
personal statement on the part of the chorus which is based on
faith in the king. Nonetheless, when the seer is proven to be
correct, the chorus will not hesitate to condemn the past actions
of the king and judge him guilty (lines 1186-1222).

The purposes behind the Senecan ode are somewhat different.
He has used it to delay the imminent unveiling of the truth and to

re-emphasize Oedipus' connection with the city's past, a connection already strongly implied in the ode to Bacchus and necromancy. The chorus does not "unwittingly draw Oedipus into the history of evil"; that has been done already. The audience is not struck by the assertion that Oedipus is innocent nor by the chorus' inability to perceive that Laius' charge was true. Instead Seneca presents more mythological parallels to the dramatic situation, a situation which he has presented in a clear and consistent way from the very outset. The chorus' belief that the veteres deum irae is the cause of the city's woes is entirely correct, and the examples they cite are peculiarly appropriate ones for this play. Seneca uses the choral comment on Oedipus' innocence not as an ironic statement on their ignorance, but as an opportunity to present once more the king as the product and the source of the city's sickness.

The fourth act of Seneca's Oedipus (lines 764-881) presents the king's interrogation of his wife, the Corinthian messenger, and Phorbas the shepherd. Seneca has severely compressed the material he found in Sophocles, as the following table indicates:

Seneca:  
764-881 (117 lines)

I. 764-783b  
Oedipus is worried about results of the necromancy; he asks his wife about the age of Laius, the number of his companions and the time of the killing

II. 783b-823  
The senex arrives with news of the death of Polybus; he informs Oedipus that he is not Merope's son; the king sends for Laius' shepherds

III. 825-838a  
Interlude: the senex suggests that Oedipus stop his search

IV. 838b-867  
Phorbas the shepherd is questioned; he answers under threat of force and tells Oedipus he is the son of Jocasta

V. 868-881  
Oedipus reacts to the truth; he asks that he be destroyed and then rushes into the palace

Sophocles:  
698-1185 (387 lines)

I. 698-910  
Jocasta tells Oedipus of the oracle given to Laius and the place of the killing; Oedipus relates the story of his flight from Corinth; he sends for the survivor of the killing of Laius (chorus)

II. 911-1085  
Jocasta greets the Corinthian messenger who informs her of the death of Polybus and who tells the king he is not Polybus' son; Oedipus orders that the shepherd who gave the baby to the Corinthian be summoned; Jocasta realizes the truth and rushes off, leaving Oedipus confused and upset

III. 1086-1109  
Interlude: the chorus rejoices that Oedipus may be shown to be a native Theban

IV. 1110-1181  
Oedipus questions the herdsman who, under threat of force, admits that he gave a baby to the Corinthian, and that baby was Jocasta's

V. 1182-1185  
Oedipus reacts to the truth; he hints at his self-blinding and rushed into the palace

As drastically as Seneca compresses these scenes, he does not do so to the extent that some critics believe. Erich Thummer, for example, proposes to compare lines 354-1181 of Sophocles' play with...
line 659-868 of the Latin Oedipus, making units of 827 and 210 lines respectively. What Thummer has done, however, is to compare sections of the plays which have little to do with one another. Seneca omits the confrontation of Oedipus and Teiresias completely and cuts down the length of the dispute between Oedipus and Creon. He replaces these parts of the play with two entirely original scenes (the divination and necromancy) which Thummer does not include in his comparison. The legitimacy of the scene comparison which appears on the previous page is assured by the position of the scenes in their respective plays and by the similarity of their content. It is clear that Seneca has left our considerable parts of the Sophoclean treatment of the discovery; in the following analysis I will attempt to relate Seneca's abridgement to the dramatic purposes which underlie these scenes.

The fourth act begins with Oedipus' ruminations on Laius' accusation. He momentarily considers his innocence:

```
obisse nostro Laium scelere autumant
superi inferiique, sed animus contra innocens
sibique melius quam dei notus negat.
(lines 765-767)
```

Oedipus' animus is indeed known better to itself; the guilt he fears has been manifested in his own actions and in the actions of the gods. It is significant that in the midst of his assertion of his innocence

---

he himself provides the first bit of factual evidence needed to convict him:

\begin{verbatim}
redit memoria tenue per vestigium
cecidisse nostri stipitis pulsu obvium
datunque Diti, cum prior iuvenem senex
curru superbus pelleret, Thebis procul
Phocaea trifidas regio qua scindit vias.
\end{verbatim}

(lines 768-772)

Seneca's Oedipus produces the clue entirely on his own, without Jocasta's help as is the case in Sophocles (lines 715-716). His soul cannot leave him deceived for long, and his recollection about the incident at the cross-roads is a product of its acute self-insight, even though Oedipus, as we have seen, has tried to ignore it.

It seems that once Seneca portrays Oedipus as his own most forceful prosecutor he does not want to spend much time on elaborating the actual discovery of Laius' killer. Oedipus' intelligence and, much more important, the subliminal fear that he is the killer do not require much further evidence to make a conclusion. Oedipus calls upon his wife, whom he rather inappropriately calls his *unanima coniux*, to give him the clinching bits of information. These pieces of evidence consist of (1) the age of Laius, (2) the number of his travelling companions, and (3) the number of those who died with the king. Similarly, in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* Oedipus asks Jocasta for a description of Laius (lines 740-741) and the number of men accompanying him (lines 750-751). What prevents Sophocles' Oedipus from finding the truth as he puts together the pieces of the puzzle (although he almost does so at line 754) is the question
of the number of "robbers" who attacked the king. Earlier in the Greek play there was a confusion about whether there was one or more than one of them (see lines 122-125, 225 ff., 246 ff., and lines 715-716). At lines 771-833 Oedipus relates the story of his trip to Delphi to question the oracle about his legitimacy and a subsequent incident in which he killed a man and his entourage at a triple-crossroads. Oedipus, after he finishes his story, decides to send for the lone survivor of the killing in order to question him (although by his own account he had murdered all the man's followers: line 813). The main purpose behind this questioning will be to fix the number of "robbers" who did away with Laius and his men. Oedipus realizes that if the survivor now changes his story and says that there was only one man who did the crime, he stands convicted of the killing (lines 842-847). Sophocles' Jocasta now begins to feel the nearness of the fulfillment of the various oracles, and tells her husband to disregard the testimony of the survivor no matter what he now says. She goes on to tell him that an oracle foretold that Laius would be killed by his child, and that his only child had been exposed (lines 848-858; see 710-725).

In Seneca this elaborate puzzle over the number of assailants and the testimony of the survivor of the killing is entirely omitted.

9. Seneca relates the story of the oracle given to Oedipus and his flight from Corinth in the prologue, lines 12-27.
The composition of Laius' retinue was mentioned only briefly in the earlier conversation between Oedipus and Creon (lines 206 ff.), and the possibility of survivors contributing some information is never brought up. Seneca is perhaps trying to make the Sophoclean version more credible by mentioning that the majority of Laius' companions lost their way:

\[
\text{Flures fefellit error ancipitis viae,}
\]
\[
\text{paucos fidelis curribus iunxit labor.}
\]
\[(\text{lines 778-779})\]

In the Senecan version there may indeed have been survivors, for out of the pauci only one was killed (line 781). However it must be noted that the shepherd who will later appear to confirm the handing over of baby Oedipus to the Corinthian is not, as in Sophocles, also the survivor of Laius' murder. This coincidence in the Oedipus Tyrannus makes the shepherd's testimony doubly important, even though Sophocles' Oedipus in fact does not question him at all about the killing (lines 1121 ff.). Seneca dispenses with the problem of the witness not only because, as Sophocles had shown, it was not an essential part of the discovery, but also because his Oedipus has enough information to realize immediately he is the actual murderer. As we would expect, his premonitions of guilt are accepted without much investigation; he needs only

10. Credible in the sense that it is easier to suppose that Oedipus overcomes two or three men as opposed to five or six.
a general idea of the time of the killing to confirm his guilt:

\[\text{teneo nocentem; convenit numerus, locus;}\]
\[\text{sed tempus adde.} \]

(lines 782-783)

We do not witness Oedipus' reaction to Jocasta's answer that it has been ten years since the death of Laius, although it surely gives the final confirmation to the king's fears. At this moment a messenger from Corinth appears, seemingly \textit{ex nihilo}, and announces to Oedipus that he is called to rule Corinth because Polybus has died:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Senex:} Corinthus te populus in regnum vocat patrium. quietem Polybus aeternam obtinet.
\textit{Oed. :} Ut undique in me saeva Fortuna irruit! edissere agedum, quo cadat fato pares.
\textit{Senex:} Animam senilem mollis exsolvit sopor.
\end{quote}

(lines 784-788)

The appearance of the \textit{senex Corinthius} is all the more surprising when it is compared with Sophocles' carefully elaborated entrance of the messenger. In the \textit{Oedipus Tyrannus} it follows an ode (lines 863-910) in which the chorus praises the god-fearing man and bemoans the lack of respect shown to Apollo and the other gods. This ode has been prompted by Oedipus' treatment of Creon, by the growing suspicion that the king is somehow connected with Laius' death, and by Jocasta's contempt for Apollo's ministers.\textsuperscript{11} After the chorus finishes, Jocasta appears as a suppliant to Apollo (lines 911-923) and it is she whom the messenger first addresses.

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}
The messenger tells her both about the death of Polybus and the desire of the people of Corinth to make Oedipus king. Jocasta then calls her husband out of the palace and informs him of Polybus' death, while carefully leaving out the possibility of Oedipus returning to rule Corinth. Oedipus is upset by the death of his supposed father, but quickly interprets his death as yet another indication of the fallibility of oracles:

Φησὶ δὲ οὗτ' ἂν, ὡ γὰρ, σκοπεῖτό τις τὴν Πυθεύματαν ἐστίν, ἢ τοῦς ἄνω κλάζοντας δρονές, ὃν ψηφηγητόν ἐγώ κενεῖτε ἐμελλον πατέρα τὸν ἐμὸν; ὁ δὲ θανὼν κεῖθεν κάτω ὡς γῆς· ἐγώ ὁ δ' ὄντων ἐνθάδες ἐφαυστὸς ἔγχος...

(lines 964-969)

Seneca at this point in his play has little interest in the question of the oracles' powers or accuracy, and he has relatively little concern to portray the character of Jocasta. Consequently he limits the arrival of the messenger to a scant two lines which are spoken directly to Oedipus. Seneca has not missed a dramatic opportunity here; all he does is not to copy inappropriately a scene from Sophocles. His purpose is to reach the formal anagnorisis of the protagonist as quickly as possible while not leaving out any necessary elements of the plot. Seneca seems eager to reach a point in the play where the audience can observe Oedipus' reaction to the fulfillment of

his suspicions.

In the king's talk with the messenger we see that Seneca has borrowed a motif found in the comparable scene from the Greek play: The king's fear of future incest (Oedipus Tyrannus lines 975, 984-986, 988). This comes as no surprise, especially in light of the emphasis which has already been placed on incest. The king's fear comes across clearly in his conversation as being a very serious concern, notwithstanding the rather crude double-entendre:

Oed. : Repetam paterna regna; sed matrem horreo
Senex : Metuis parentem, quae tuum reditum expetens sollicita pendet?
Oed. : Ipsa me pietas fugat.
Senex : Viduam relinquues?
Oed. : Tangis en ipsos metus!
Senex : Effare mersus quis premat mentem timor;
praestare tacitam regibus soleo fidem.
Oed. : Conubia matris Delphico admonitu tremo.
(lines 812-813)

The old man cannot remember the name of the shepherd who gave him the baby, but he says that he can identify him in person, and Oedipus calls for the flocks to be brought in and the shepherds summoned.

The messenger in Sophocles tells virtually the same story under more intense questioning (lines 989-1050). The messenger mistakenly tries to soothe Oedipus by telling him he is not Merope's son and by recounting how Oedipus had been taken up as an orphan on Cithaeron (lines 1016-1026). Oedipus asks for evidence and here too
the messenger refers to his pierced ankles.\textsuperscript{13} The messenger does not know the name of the shepherd who gave him the baby, and knows only that he was of the royal household (lines 1040-1042). At this point the chorus informs Oedipus that the shepherd is the same person who has already been sent for in connection with the investigation into Laius' murder. Oedipus then asks Jocasta if she knows him. Her answer to that question and her remaining lines are some of the most moving in the play. She knows that Oedipus is her son because of his wounded feet and because of the identification of the anonymous Theban shepherd as the survivor of the killing. She tries not to admit the truth to herself, but the only thing she can do is to try to make Oedipus stop asking questions. He misunderstands her completely and supposes that she is ashamed because of the possibility that he is of humble birth (lines 1062-1063, 1971-1072).

Seneca does not have such a dramatic parting of the ill-starred couple. In fact there is no sure indication exactly when Jocasta leaves the scene in Act IV; it is entirely possible that she stays with Oedipus until his discovery.\textsuperscript{14} So far in the

\begin{quote}
13. In Sophocles the piercing of the feet has already been mentioned in Jocasta's description of the exposure of Laius' son. When the messenger points to Oedipus feet it probably is clear to her who her husband really is.

14. She certainly is gone by lines 880-881, where Oedipus says he will go in to "congratulate" her on her offspring.
\end{quote}
play she has been merely an impersonal interlocutor, and she will be so until she later confronts her blind son and husband. It is at this point in the Oedipus that Seneca will explore however tentatively the dramatic possibilities of her role.

In Seneca's play the king sends for the shepherds at lines 822-824. In the Oedipus Tyrannus this action is followed by a brief ode (lines 1086-1109) expressing the joy of the chorus concerning the possibility that Oedipus will be found to be a native-born Theban. It even considers that possibility of divine parentage for the king. The ode is striking because it interrupts the investigation which seems to be drawing to its conclusion, and because the chorus is so completely oblivious to the sinister implications of their words. Sophocles skillfully manipulates the emotions of the audience by delaying the arrival of the shepherd and by presenting the paradoxically joyous song of the chorus. In Seneca a delay is also necessary in order to produce the shepherd, but the possibility of using a choral ode is removed by the brevity of the preceding scene (60 lines). Consequently, we find that the senex Corinthius and Oedipus engage in a 13 line exchange in which the old man tries to dissuade Oedipus from going further.

It is perhaps strange that Seneca does not give these lines of the senex to Jocasta, who in the Greek play is the one who tries to stop Oedipus after he calls for the shepherd (lines 1056-1072). Of course in the Oedipus her role has been reduced, but it still
would have been possible for her to utter the lines given to the 
*senex*. The answer to this problem may lie in Seneca's attitude 
to the relationship of Oedipus and his wife. Seneca conceives of 
his protagonist as being totally isolated and totally the victim of 
his own fear and neurosis. We actually have seen Oedipus' relations 
with his wife only through the eyes of Laius, who condemns them as 
a hideous aberration. There is a definite distance between Oedipus 
and Jocasta in this play and consequently there is none of the 
tenderness and concern between them which we find in Sophocles. 
This distance is expressed both on a physical level (they are on 
scene together only briefly) and on an emotional one; their mutual 
respect and love are nowhere indicated. This lack of contact 
between Jocasta and Oedipus is symbolic of their ignorance 
of the true bond which exists for them. They have barely spoken 
to each other during the play, and it may be that Seneca wants us 
to feel that this lack of communication has characterized their 
life together. It never occurs to us to ask the irrelevant 
questions which inevitably plague discussion of Sophocles' 
*Oedipus Tyrannus*: How could they not know after all these years 
that they were not son and mother?.....didn't Jocasta notice her 
husband's feet?.....why didn't Oedipus ask some questions about 
his predecessor in the throne of Thebes and Jocasta's bed? We 
do not ask them not because Seneca handles the story with such 
skill and tension that they never have a chance to occur to us, 
but because we sense, on the basis of what we have seen in the
play, that they have never really known each other as husband and wife. It is only later when the conjugal bond has been shown to be only one aspect of their relationship that Jocasta can really speak to Oedipus, and then she speaks to him as mother to her son (lines 1009 ff.).

The warning which the Senex gives to Oedipus elicits some telling responses:

Oed.: Malum timeri maius his aliquod potest?
Senex: Magnum esse magna mole quod petitur scias...

Oed.: non expedit concutere felicem statum;
tuto movetur quidquid extremo in loco est.
Senex: Nobilius aliquid genere regali appetis?
ne te parentis pigrat inventi vide.
Oed.: Vel paenitendi sanguinis quaeram fidem;
sic nosse certum est.

(lines 828-829, 833-838)

What is the malum which Oedipus is so frightened of? It is first of all the possibility that he is not who he thinks he is: the son of Polybus and Merope. His belief that they are his parents was the first reason he gave previously for not believing the words of Laius and supposing that Creon had lied (lines 661-664). However, Oedipus is also probably considering the original oracle he received which has already been confirmed by the plague, the divination, and the necromancy. He finds himself now extremo in loco, and when the old man suggests that he should be content with being a member of a royal family, Oedipus says that he will seek evidence even for his paenitendus sanguis. In Seneca Oedipus is not concerned with being base-born or with the possibility that he is the "son of Chance." Instead he worries that his origins will prove to be
"worthy of repentance." He is correct in his prognostication, and his words suggest that he is aware of the more serious consequences of his search. Since the start of the play he has never forgotten the curse of the oracle.

Seneca uses Sophocles extensively in the scene of the interrogation of the shepherd, even though he cuts its length. In the Oedipus Tyrannus the king asks the shepherd if he served Laius (lines 1119-1125). The shepherd answers affirmatively and tells Oedipus that he worked in the neighborhood of Cithaeron (line 1127). Oedipus asks the messenger if he recognizes the shepherd and then turns over the questioning to him. The messenger recounts to the shepherd their old friendship while tending flocks on the mountain, and he tries to make the shepherd admit he once gave him a baby (lines 1142-1145). The shepherd at first tries to avoid answering, but finally after Oedipus threatens him he admits that he did give the Corinthian a baby (lines 1146-1161). Oedipus demands to know from where the child came (he knows it was he), but the shepherd tells him only that it came from the house of Laius (lines 1167). The questions and threats have come with increasing speed and terror, and now Oedipus has to face the fact that he was born a slave, or, worse yet, born to Jocasta. This is exactly what the shepherd tells him, adding that the baby was to be exposed because of the prophecy which said it would kill its father. The mystery is cleared up completely at this point, but Oedipus' characteristic curiosity leads him to
ask a really superfluous question about the reason the shepherd gave the baby to the Corinthian (lines 1177). The shepherd responds that he did so out of pity and expected the child to be carried far away (lines 1178-1181).

In the Senecan version Oedipus already knows that the shepherd Phorbas was in charge of the royal herds, and immediately asks the senex if he recognizes him. Just as in Sophocles the messenger handles the first part of the questioning:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Senex</th>
<th>Adridet animo forma; nec notus satis, nec rursus iste vultus ignotus mihi.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oed.</td>
<td>Regnum optinente Laio famulus greges agitasti opimos sub Cithaeronis plaga?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phor.</td>
<td>Laetus Cithaeron pabulo semper novo aestival nostro prata summittit gregi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senex</td>
<td>Noscisne memet?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phorb.</td>
<td>Dubitat anceps memoria</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Clines 841-847)

Cithaeron is here also the scene of the transfer of the child, and it takes place during the summer (see Oedipus Tyrannus 1132-1140). Oedipus asks point-blank if Phorbas gave a child to the Corinthian, and then threatens his hesitant subject (lines 848-852). Phorbas tries to make Oedipus suppose that the child died of the wound in his feet (lines 853-859, see also lines 812-813). Interestingly enough Seneca uses the evidence of the bound feet as a much more conclusive fact, for when his Oedipus hears the reference to his feet he begins to accept the truth:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phor.</th>
<th>Ferrum per ambos tenue transactum pedes ligabat artus, vulneri innatus tumor puerile foeda corpus urebat lues.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oed.</td>
<td>Quid quaeris ultra? fata iam accedunt prope.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(lines 857-860)
We may be certain that Seneca's Oedipus has made the connection between himself and the baby, for, after he wildly threatens Phorbas to tell him who the child's parents were, it is enough for the shepherd to say *coniuge est genitus tua* (lines 867) to send Oedipus into his lament.

Seneca stays fairly close to Sophocles in lines 838-867 of his play, but he does not really attempt to create the suspense which surrounds Oedipus' final push to the truth in the Greek play. If anything, Seneca handles this section of Act IV in an almost perfunctory way. His concern is to move quickly to the effects of discovery on the king and his wife, and not to tarry on the way in which that discovery is achieved.

It is in the portrayal of these effects that Seneca reverses his practice of paring down the scenes from the *Oedipus Tyrannus*. He takes the four lines Oedipus utters after he discovers the truth in the Greek play and expands them to fourteen:

```greek
Dehisce, tellus, tuque tenebrarum potens,
in Tartara ima, rector umbrarum, rape retro reversas generis ac stirpis vices,
congerite, cives, saxa in infandum caput,
mactate telis, me petat ferro parens,
me natus, in me coniuges arment manus fratresque, et aeger populus ereptos rogis iaculetur ignes. saeculi crimen vagor,
odium deorum, iuris exitium sacri,
qua luce primum spiritus hausit rudes
```
iam morte dignus. redde nunc animos† acres
nunc aliquid aude sceleribus dignum tuis.
i, perge, proprio regiam gressu pete;
gratate matri liberis auctam domum.
(lines 868-881)

Seneca's Oedipus seeks destruction, first at the hands of the
rector umbrarum and then by the citizens who have suffered because
of his crimes. He knows he has confused and obliterated the normal
family distinctions and he acutely wants to atone for this. This
is the reason he calls not just on the citizens as a whole, but
specifically upon those who represent the family roles he has
profaned (lines 872-874). Oedipus' desire to be burned by the
very fire which consumes the bodies of the plague victims indicates
his sense of personal responsibility for the condition of the city
and his futile hope that his sickness can be similarly purged.
This hope is futile because although he heaps epithets and curses
on his own head (crimen saeculi, odium deorum, iuris exitium sacri),
he remains the hapless victim he has been throughout the play. He
waits for the gods or the people to destroy him, and indeed tries
to incite them to do so. His fear now is to remain alive, and,
as has been the case with his other fears, it will be fulfilled.

In Sophocles, Oedipus is fairly explicit in naming his
crimes. Seneca's Oedipus, on the other hand, cannot bring himself

15. Thummer, op. cit., page 169, note 16 considers parens
to refer to Oedipus' mother, which misses the significance of the
specific relationships which Oedipus names.
to say what he has done. He alludes only to the incest, as we by this time expect, but he is so appalled by it that his last three lines seem to indicate that he might actually do something to alleviate his remorse. What Seneca perhaps wants his audience to consider is the possibility to matricide, an act which Sophocles' character momentarily seems to consider (lines 1255-1257). Oedipus' bitterly sarcastic words as he leaves promise some sort of confrontation with Jocasta. The question in our minds is whether that meeting will follow Sophocles' model or take on a more Senecan and more violent turn.

16. Thummer, ibid.
CHAPTER VI

ACT V OF SENeca’S OEDIPUS

The fourth and fifth acts of the play are separated by a brief passage which registers the chorus' reaction to Oedipus' discovery (lines 882-914). The theme is *media via*.

Fata si liceat mihi
fingere arbitrio meo
temperem zephyro levi
vela, ne pressae gravi
spiritu antennae tremant.
lenis et modice fluens
aura nec vergens latus
ducat intrepidam ratem;
tuta me media vehat
vita decurrens via.

(lines 882-891)

What this has to do with Oedipus is not very clear. Certainly there have been in the play few indications of dangerous action on the part of Oedipus, and when we consider the predominant role of fate in the drama it is hardly reasonable to suppose that Oedipus ever had an opportunity to "trim his sails" or to stay in the "middle course." What we have in these lines is not so much a reproof to the king as it is an expression on the part of the chorus of their hope to avoid a similar calamity.

The second part of the ode (lines 891-910) offers an *exemplum* of one who did not stay within established bounds, Icarus.

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Here the chorus is making an allusion to the fall of Oedipus, for it parallels that of Icarus in several ways. Oedipus, like Icarus, fears a king (*regem timens*, line 892), and, trusting in *artibus novis* (line 894), had a contest with a type of bird (*certat et veras aves vincere*, line 895-896; see the description of the Sphinx as a bird at line 95-97). Earlier Oedipus was described by Laius as *implicitum malum* (line 640) and the same word is used at line 907 in reference to the entanglement of Icarus in his wings:

```
donec in ponto manus
movit implicitas puer
compede audacis viae.
(lines 906-908)
```

Just as Icarus' contest with the true birds in the lines quoted ends with his downfall, Oedipus' supposed triumph over the Sphinx will mark the beginning of his destruction. Daedalus watches his son's failure, and is compared with a loving bird who tries to rescue her offspring:

```
callidus medium senex
Daedalus librans iter
nube sub media stetit,
alitem expectans suam
(qualis accipitris minas
fugit et sparsos metu
conligit fetus avis)...
(lines 899-905)
```

This is a contrast with the actions of Oedipus' father who has condemned his son. Yet there is a similarity in that Laius observes his son from the shadows of the underworld and is part of a group which flies about:
The last two lines of the exemplum provide the moral to the story: whoever exceeds the normal boundaries of nature is suspended in an instabili loco (lines 909-910). This remains an unsatisfactory interpretation of what the chorus has witnessed, for although Oedipus has indeed gone beyond the modum he had done so unwittingly. He has not had the privilege of regulating the course of fate, a desire which the chorus enunciates at the beginning of the ode. The Oedipus has not been the story of a man brought down by his hybris or caught by the powers of his own intelligence or by his perserverance; its protagonist strays from the media via quite by accident. It is fate which has forced the king from the path and it is fate which has destroyed him. The chorus at this point in the play does not perceive this. It is only after the messenger describes Oedipus' self-punishment that the chorus begins to realize the implications of the king's crimes.

It does so in its last utterance at line 980-997. These lines may or may not embody "Seneca's interpretation of the tragedy of Oedipus,"¹ but they do express the sense of inevitability which Oedipus has felt in the play:

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¹ Dewey, op. cit., pages 212-213.
The last two and a half lines of course refer very specifically to Oedipus and the overwhelmingly destructive nature of his fear. However, the ode really concerns itself with the broader implications of the story of Oedipus. Heroism in the face of inevitable fate is futile, and it is itself ordained ex alto. The gods are helpless and man's prayers and aspirations are merely part of a charade. Fear is real enough, but it is pointless and leads only to swifter destruction.

The idea that man is doomed to suffer much and that happiness is only an illusion was not a new one. The last choral ode in the Oedipus Tyrannus may have served as a model for Seneca:

2. See above, pages 116-117.
What makes the Senecan version so terrifying is that there is no reason to suppose that there can be any exceptions to the universal despair. Despite the words of the chorus in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* quoted above, the character whose destruction they have witnessed remains magnificent; he is brought low by fate and by being true to the shortcomings and excesses of his character. Sophocles does call into question the limits of Oedipus' *arete*, but he presents the ruler of Thebes, even after the discovery, as one who is motivated by love for his people and by his respect for the truth and its consequences.

Seneca in this play finds little that is redeemable in man, whose only power is to acquiesce to forces which are more powerful and destructive than himself. Seneca's Oedipus does not act because his knowledge has killed the possibility of action; the drama of the play exists in the efforts of those outside forces to compel him to confront his guilt. Oedipus' dilemma is that he has the strength neither to follow or ignore the advice of the chorus: *Fatis agimur; cedite fatis*. The optimism present especially in the philosophical works of Seneca is not to be found in this city of Thebes, where sin is inevitable and heroism in the face of destruction is an almost forgotten memory.

The messenger's speech in Seneca (lines 915-979) is loosely based on the one found in Sophocles (lines 1237-1285). In the Greek play the messenger prefaces his report with an address to the chorus in which he alludes to what has gone on inside the palace,
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κακὰ ἔχοντα κοῦν ἁμοῦνα (lines 1229-1230). The chorus asks what has happened, and the messenger replies pointedly that Jocasta is dead (lines 1234-1235). The chorus then inquires as to the cause of her death, and it is at this point that the messenger begins his extended description.

First he tells of Jocasta's reaction to the truth (lines 1241-1251). She rushes into her bedroom, slams the doors behind her, and bewails her marriage to Oedipus. Second, the messenger relates Oedipus' wild entrance into the palace, his frantic request for a sword, and his violent entrance into Jocasta's chamber (lines 1252-1262). We are then told of Oedipus' discovery of the body of his wife, who has hanged herself, and his self-blinding with her brooches (lines 1263-1279). There is a comment by the messenger on the extent of the woe for the wretched couple, and finally, after the chorus asks about the king's suffering, the messenger tells of his remorse:

In Seneca the chorus introduces the nuntius and does not, as in Sophocles, express any of his own feelings about what he reports; we know his feelings only from the chorus' announcement of his arrival.
The speech itself (lines 916-979) differs from the one in Sophocles in that Jocasta is entirely absent and Oedipus much more thoroughly expresses his sense of guilt. Oedipus' tone is a continuation of his outcry at lines 868 ff.: he wishes to be destroyed. He calls upon some citizens to strike him dead, or to stone or burn him (repeating his wish to be burned which he first mentioned at line 872 ff.). When that wish is not fulfilled, he calls upon nature to send some wild animal against him (lines 929 ff.) and he even calls upon Cithaeron to unleash its beasts upon him:

\[\text{ipse tu scelerum capax, sacer Cithaeron, vel feras in me tuas emitte silvis, mitte vel rabidos canes--- nunc redde Agauen, anime, quid mortem times? mors innocentem sola fortunae eripit.}\]  
(lines 930-934)

The reference to Agave in these lines is important. For one thing it indicates that Oedipus realizes his membership in Thebes' catalogue of crime. We might assume that these lines, along with earlier allusions to Agave's crime (lines 483 ff. 615 ff.) merely recall a terrible incident which in its abnormality prefigures the actions of Oedipus. However, at lines 930-933 the example of Agave is not viewed by the king as a monstrous crime so much as it is seen to be a welcome precedent. Oedipus wants Cithaeron to produce another Agave so that he can suffer for his crime in specifically the same way Pentheus did, at the hands of his mother. As we
shall see in a few lines Oedipus considers the crime of incest unatoneable (solvendo non es line 942). It is Jocasta alone who is able to exculpate her son, even through the act of destroying him. Oedipus desires punishment from the hands of the one he has most severely injured, and it is this wish which motivates his reference to Agave.

The sententia expressed in line 934 is remarkable, because although it is uttered by Oedipus it has no relevance to his situation at all: mors innocentem sola Fortunae eripit. A case might be made for his innocence on the basis that he acted out of ignorance, yet Oedipus has rejected that possibility throughout the play, and he continues to reject it in this speech. He says that "death saves the innocent" to attract sympathy and perhaps to encourage the people of Thebes to kill him. His real purpose in line 934 is to achieve death, to escape the necessity of facing the results of his crimes. Seneca's Oedipus initially wants to die very much, and his inability to find a way to achieve it makes him at the same time unheroic and pitiable.

Oedipus immediately rejects the possibility that he might be innocent and realizes that death is not at hand. He rationalizes that suicide will merely pose new terrors:
Oedipus says that he cannot atone for his crimes just by death; that might satisfy Laius, but can never be enough to atone for what he has done to his mother. He proceeds to call on Natura to continue the perversion she has begun in Oedipus by devising some new form of death which will permit him to suffer always, which will somehow enable Oedipus to face new torments. Finally he defines his punishment as a type of limbo in which he will have to face neither the living nor the dead. His reference to the sepultis .. et vivis clearly means Laius and Jocasta. In Sophocles the king gives a similar reason for his blinding, even though both his parents are in the underworld:

ἐγὼ γὰρ οὐκ ὤξα διμασὶν κοῦους βλέπων
πατέρα ποτ' ἀν προσεζέδουν εἰς 'Αλδοὺ μολὼν
οὖς' ἀδ' τῷ λαλῶν υπὲρ', οὖν ἐμοὶ δυσόν
ἐργ' ἐστὶ καταλίπον' ἀγχόνης εἰργασμένα.

(lines 1371-1374)
In Seneca this reason is given before the blinding, and that makes it appear less as an emotional reaction of shame and despair than as an attempt to avoid a full confrontation with his guilt. Oedipus' blinding is an act of fear which he hopes will enable him to meet neither of his parents: *morere sed citra patrem*. He realizes the truth of the report of Laius' ghost, and he is terrified at the prospect of facing the man whom he has physically killed and sexually humiliated. Authentic suicide is out of the question for Oedipus; he instead will be cut off from the living and the dead.

The messenger's report of the blinding is noteworthy for its grisly detail and for the false expectations the blinding raises for Oedipus. His words after the deed is done once again indicate the inefficacy of his attempts to understand or accept what he has done:

```
Factum est periculum lucis; attollit caput
cavisque lustrans orbibus caeli plagas
noctem experitur....
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parcite, en, patriae precor;
iam iusta feci, debitas poenas tuli;
inventa thalamis digna nox tandem meis.
(lines 971-973, 975-977)
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Oedipus cannot pay his debts so easily. The night for which he longs will not cover his infamy. Instead of offering him refuge, the physical blindness of Oedipus will only be a manifestation of his continued efforts at self-delusion:

3. As in Sophocles the blinding takes place off-scene.
... she (Jocasta) is an emblem of the opposition to Fate's importunities which Oedipus proposes for himself (933-934): "anima, quid mortem times? mors innocentem sola Fortunae eripit," but has not the courage to execute (951): "morere, sed citra patrem." Instead he opts for a sham death, which releases him from light indeed but furnishes no real refuge, no genuine solution (1012 ff.)... Blindness is no longer the symbol of superior insight....but merely one more false refuge from the periculum lucis (971).4

After the choral passage (lines 980-997) Oedipus himself appears, and we begin the final portion of the play. This lasts for 63 lines, whereas the comparable passage in Sophocles is 222 lines (lines 1308-1530). The end of the Greek play includes Oedipus' remorse over his crimes (lines 1369 ff.), his meeting with Creon (lines 1422 ff.), and his meeting with his daughters (lines 1471 ff.). Despite his downfall and the ruin he has brought on his family, Oedipus still attempts to control events in these last scenes:

The last scene of the play (Sophocles) presents us with an unpredictable situation: in spite of his tremendous reversal, Oedipus is still the active force which binds men and circumstances to its will. His reflection and intelligence assure him that he must go into exile, and to this point of view he clings stubbornly, urging it persistently and imperiously on Creon... the swiftness and force of Oedipus' recovery from the shock of self-recognition can be gauged from the fact that in the very last line of the play Oedipus has to be reminded of his reversal.5

The re-emergence of Oedipus' character should not, however, make us ignore the intensely emotional tone of the exodos of the


Oedipus Tyrannus. One of the reasons for its rather considerable length is that Sophocles gives his character the opportunity to understand and react to his discovery. The entire play has been building up to the revelation of the truth, and in this last scene we see its ramifications on Oedipus himself, on his political successor, and on those he loves most dearly, his daughters:

...it is quite essential that Oedipus should give the fullest possible expression to the fact of incest and his reaction to it, for two reasons. First, his disgust at the perversion reveals the intensity with which he holds his values. Secondly... it is only now that he realizes the horror on which his whole adult life has been based and which ... is going to ruin the lives of Antigone and Ismeme.⁶

In the last scene of the Oedipus of Seneca the king appears exulting in his conviction that his mutilation has somehow fulfilled his obligations and expiated his guilt:

Bene habet, peractum est; iusta persolvi patri. iuvant tenebrae....

...Conscium evasi diem nil, parricida, dexterae debes tuae; lux to refugit. vultus Oedipodam hic decet. (lines 998-999, 1001-1003)

He is quite mistaken. His blinding may have absolved him as a parricide, but it has done nothing to lessen the guilt over incest. He is brought back to reality to Jocasta vaecors, who at last is fulfilling his wish for another Agave (see line 933):

En ecce, rapido saeva prosiluit gradu Iocasta vaecors, qualis attonita et furens Cadmea mater abstulit nato caput sensitque raptum... (lines 1004-1007)

⁶ Vickers, op. cit., page 520.
The chorus’ allusion to Agave and Pentheus is appropriate, for Jocasta has recognized too late the crime she has committed with her son. For Oedipus, however, this new Agave will harm him in an unexpected way: her presence rips away his temporary relief and drives him back into his own brooding guilt. She accomplishes this simply by calling him by his true name:

Quid te vocem?
natumne? dubitas? natus es; natum pudet?
invite loquere, nate -- quo avertis caput
vacuosque vultus?

(lines 1009-1012)

Seneca has kept Jocasta alive for this meeting for another purpose. Her actions are contrasted with those of her son; she accepts her crime and possesses the courage to take decisive and final action. She momentarily mouths an aphorism which suggests that there are no truly guilty parties: nemo fit fate nocens (line 1019). At once she realizes that sententiae are of no help and decides that death is her only choice. She asks her son to help her in this (lines 1032-1033), but finally kills herself, striking her uterum capacem.

The discovery of the truth has liberated Jocasta’s character in Seneca’s play. In her role as mother she is able to address Oedipus with a fervor and intensity which was impossible earlier. The character of Jocasta in Sophocles was developed as that of a loving wife to the king, a skeptic about oracles, and finally as the primary critic of her husband’s continuing search. Seneca ignores all these aspects of Jocasta. He transfers her most powerful lines...
to the end of the play, after the blinding of the king, and thus portrays her anger and shame more fully than Sophocles. She represents the courage which is lacking in her son, by her refusal to mitigate her responsibility. In a sense it is Jocasta and not Oedipus who is more conscious of the truth and aware of its implications.

Jocasta's presence in the last scene of this play is also appropriate when we consider the recurrent emphasis which has been placed on incest. While Sophocles stresses the priority of the crime of incest at the end of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* Seneca has done so from the very beginning. In this scene the king will be forced to meet his fellow-criminal, and that meeting is shattering, for it leads to even greater guilt:

Fatidice te, te praesidem et veri deum
compello, solum debui fatis patrem;
bis parricida plusque quam timui nocens
matrem perem; sce1ere confecta est meo.
(lines 1042-1045)

Oedipus' isolation at the end of the play is significant, for it parallels that of the prologue, where we similarly saw Oedipus addressing himself while worrying about the citizens of Thebes. It would have been quite simple for Seneca to have copied Sophocles and produce a tearful farewell between the king and his children.8


8. Thummer, op. cit., pages 184 ff. Thummer suggests that Seneca prepares us for the absence of the daughters by earlier referring only to Oedipus sons; see lines 237, 260, 638, 748-750, and 939-940.
He does not do so because his Oedipus will pass judgment on himself; he will be the source of his own punishment. The opportunity for Oedipus to purge himself of his guilt seems to be finally at hand.

What happens instead is that the king flees. He attempts to escape the scene of his crimes and tries to avoid embracing whatever meaning his fate may have for him. Superficially he considers himself the savior of his land; he will clean the air and take with him the evils which have plagued the city: violenta Fata, horridus Morbi tremor, Macies, atra Pestis, rabidus Dolor (lines 1059-1060). It is easy to accept his rationale for his exile and some have found in the last lines of the play an inspiring picture of self-sacrifice:

Die sophokleischen Schlusszzenen, in denen Unglück des Helden von verschiedenen Seiten beleuchtet und vertieft wird, hätten in einem Drama, das Oedipus als Retter der Heimat zeigt, keinen Sinn. Dieser bei Seneca so stark hervortretende Gedanke der Rettung der Heimat und die Besonderheit des Trägers dieses Gedankens, des Oedipus, erklären aber auch andere wesentliche Neuerungen Senecas gegenüber Sophokles, von denen wir einige am Beginn der Untersuchungen aufgezählt haben. 9

I suggest that Seneca had a very different purpose in mind for these last words of Oedipus. Far from implying a happy conclusion to the Oedipus legend, Seneca presents a king who remains oppressed by his fears while refusing to admit he is afraid. His healing of Thebes, as the audience knows, will be temporary; the unhappy fates of his sons and daughters will not be changed. As was the case

in the prologue, Oedipus grasps at straws. He assumes the role of savior of his city as a last effort to withstand the hatred of his father, the contempt of his mother, and condemnation by himself. His blindness, vis-a-vis that of his Sophoclean counterpart is much more than physical. It is a blindness which prevents Oedipus from accepting what he finds in his own soul:

Thus Oedipus, fearful by day and night, wanders off in the end, having gathered the worst of both worlds, a sham night and a polluted day...10

CONCLUSION

The Oedipus embodies a different interpretation of Oedipus legend from that found in Sophocles. The reader of Seneca may not find that interpretation goes as far in exploring the elements of the myth, and he may find it single-minded if not actually repetitive in its focus. The questions Seneca raises regarding destiny, fear, and guilt nonetheless require our serious attention:

Il est juste de reconnaître dans l'oeuvre latine une création indépendante de l'oeuvre grecque, dont elle n'emprunte que le sujet et dont elle renouvelle l'action, la psychologie, les tendances. Si Oedipe-Roi reste la source principale de Sénèque, cette source même lui a moins servi qu'on ne l'a dit.¹

If my assumption that Seneca used only the Sophoclean play is correct, then we are able to look upon his Oedipus as a particularly creative adaptation of the Greek model. The most striking feature of Seneca's version is the shortening of the play as a whole and of specific scenes. Seneca does not do this haphazardly. He constructs scenes and roles with the purpose of

1. Herrmann, op. cit., page 305.
presenting his protagonist as emotionally and physically isolated. The conflict of Creon and Oedipus, the role of Jocasta, the discovery scene, and the exodos of the Roman play are given brief treatment because Seneca's hero does not need to interact with other characters either to discover his origins or to express his shame. Seneca's diminution of all the minor roles found in the Sophoclean play (including Jocasta's) serves to focus our attention more completely on Oedipus.

Seneca does more than merely cut the number of lines he gives to certain characters. In some cases he alters character and scenes found in the Oedipus Tyrannus. The clearest example of this technique is found in Oedipus' opening speech; his awareness of guilt and isolation are themes presented there for the first time and influence every scene that follows. Oedipus' prescience provokes a change in the treatment of Teiresias. In Seneca the seer is ignorant and his divination fails because there is no need for further interpretations of the oracles; Oedipus understands them correctly. Similarly, there is no need for Seneca to introduce the Sophoclean motif of questioning the validity of the oracles, inasmuch as Oedipus trusts them completely.

Beyond even changing material found in the Greek play, Seneca is able to create entirely new elements of the legend for his drama. He does this most obviously in the divination and necromancy scenes, scenes which are embellished but nonetheless remain important for the Senecan interpretation. They indicate the
reaction of the supernatural to Oedipus' crimes and show the furthest limits of the contagion these crimes have caused. The divination and necromancy place further emphasis on the king's incest, especially by the introduction of the sexually-jealous ghost of Laius. The pre-occupation with incest, presented first in the prologue and subsequently expanded in the imagery of the extispicium and the words of Laius, provides the motivation for the extended speech of Oedipus at the moment of discovery and for Jocasta's appearance and suicide in the final act.

The preceding analysis of the Oedipus owes a great deal to the work of those scholars whose work was discussed in Chapter I. The play does indeed contain elements of rhetoric, poetry, philosophy, and psychological insight. Where I take issue with some of them is in the relative importance of those elements in their interpretations of the plays of Seneca. In virtually every case their belief that Seneca wrote tragedy for a specifically philosophic or rhetorical or psychological purpose led to the disintegration of the plays. By this I mean that the tragedies were said to contain no consistent themes, no consistent characterization, and no consistently plausible plots. In short, the plays supposedly had no dramatic unity.

I believe that the Oedipus is not made up of a series of unrelated character sketches or rhetorical embellishments. It is the story of a man and his destiny, told in a way different from the Greek original. In Seneca's play the dramatic conflict
centers on the king's refusal to accept the fact of his guilt. This conflict takes place on two levels. On the one hand it is internalized; the king's ever-present suspicions of his responsibility undercut his efforts to find evidence which would exculpate him. Unlike the Sophoclean character the Roman Oedipus does not bring his considerable intuition and intelligence to bear on the investigation. He is for the most part a spectator of his own tragedy.

At another level the conflict exists in the efforts of the supernatural to compel Oedipus to recognize what he has done as well as its implications. These forces are at work especially in the prologue and first chorus, which deal with the plague, and in the extispicium and necromancy which are attempts to enlighten the king. The king is enlightened to some extent, for the subsequent interrogation of Jocasta and the others needs to produce only meager evidence for Oedipus to realize the truth.

This centering of the action around the thoughts and emotions of the king is what makes the Oedipus a psychological drama. We witness his elation and despair as he reacts to the mounting evidence; nature, the gods of Olympus and the underworld, the spirits of the dead, and Thebes' past are marshalled against him, against the cause of the pollution which has infected them all. Seneca permits us to feel the mounting terror of Oedipus as he is reluctantly pushed to self-understanding. He does this by isolating the king from all but his own imagination
and by reducing the normal stage action to almost nothing. The Oedipus gives the appearance of a static situation only until we see that the real drama is taking place in the king's soul.

I find the Oedipus a pessimistic statement on man, who is presented as a victim of fate and his own weakness. We do not see the persistent struggle for the truth or heroism in the midst of destruction as we do in the Oedipus Tyrannus. Seneca's play implies that suffering is meaningless as well as inevitable. Oedipus' heroic stance at the end of the play strikes us as a futile attempt to regain the courage and self-confidence which he relinquished at the beginning. In the world of this play nobility is not an issue; it is never considered to be even a possibility.

Seneca poses serious questions in the Oedipus: whether heroism is possible in the face of fate, whether the search for truth must go on at whatever cost, whether self-knowledge is preferable to self-delusion. My analysis indicates that Seneca, in this play, answered these questions in the negative. Rather than representing man's ability to progress toward wisdom, his king of Thebes personifies moral defeat. The Oedipus of Seneca is a work written by a Stoic who, for a moment, has put aside the standard optimism of his philosophic school and instead has taken a hard and uncomforting look at man and man's weaknesses. What he found was a creature trapped by his past sins and terrified by inevitable punishment. In the hands of Seneca the Oedipus
legend has become a statement not of hope, but of despair.
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