

**Seneca on the Renaissance University Stage: The Plays of William Gager and  
the Function of Moral Agency in the Tragic Genre**

**Scott O'Brien  
Senior Honors Thesis  
Department of Classics  
Dartmouth College  
Primary Advisor: Margaret Graver  
4/16/2012**

## Table of Contents

- I. Introduction**
  - i. William Gager: His Life and Theatrical Context
  - ii. Seneca and the Elizabethan Stage
  - iii. Gager, Seneca, and Moral Education
  - iv. Chapter Overviews
  - v. Conclusion
- II. The Tragic Psyche On Stage: Narrative Technique in Seneca and Gager**
  - i. Introduction
  - ii. Senecan Narrative Style: Critical Approaches
  - iii. *Oedipus*
  - iv. *Agamemnon*
  - v. Gager's Narrative Technique
  - vi. *Ulysses Redux*
  - vii. Conclusion
- III. The Citizen Chorus: Character, Spectator, Philosopher**
  - i. Introduction
  - ii. The Senecan Chorus: Critical Approaches
  - iii. *Phaedra*
  - iv. *Troades*
  - v. Gager's Chorus
  - vi. *Meleager*
  - vii. *Ulysses Redux*
  - viii. Conclusion
- IV. Bit Parts and Bad Advice: Gager's Expanded Use of the Senecan Attendant**
  - i. Introduction
  - ii. Seneca's Attendant
  - iii. *Thyestes*
  - iv. *Phaedra*
  - v. Gager's Attendant
  - vi. Achates and Pandarus
  - vii. Conclusion
- V. Conclusion**

## Preface

This project, which represents the culmination of my studies in Classical Languages and Literature, treats a subject that until quite recently had not played a particularly significant role in my experience of the literature of Greece and Rome. I have been a student of the classics in some capacity ever since my first Latin class in the sixth grade, but throughout high school and most of college my readings have focused largely on ancient prose and epic poetry rather than on classical theatre. During the spring of my junior year, however, I took a course on the Latin drama of the fourteenth-century Italian humanists and was very excited to discover texts linking the classical world to the Renaissance vernacular literature that I had read during the course of my English minor. The Latin writings of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance seemed like the perfect subject for my senior thesis, as their study allowed me to combine my long-standing love of the classics with my studies in English literature. After reading further into examples of classical imitation in the Renaissance, I chose the plays of William Gager as my topic. At first I was interested in his tragedies both because of how closely he imitates Seneca and because of how his plays had been so scarcely treated in Renaissance scholarship relative to the works of his more illustrious contemporaries, but after reading Gager's works in full I discovered that his plays were quite interesting in their own right as well.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank several groups of people whose constant support have made this thesis possible throughout my writing process. First of all I am very grateful to Professor Primit Chadhuri (Classics), who not only introduced me to the world of humanist tragedy in his course during my junior

spring but also turned me on to Gager's plays in the first place. When I was searching generally for a topic within Renaissance Latin literature it was Professor Chaudhuri who suggested that I look at the tragedies of this obscure Oxford playwright. Without his expertise and direction I would surely have never discovered such an excellent subject for my thesis, and his continued support throughout the process proved invaluable. I am, of course, hugely indebted to my primary advisor, Professor Margaret Graver (Classics), who had the formidable task of transforming my approach to research and writing from that of a 10-page term paper to that of a large-scale senior thesis. Her unfailing patience with my inclination towards overwrought prose and occasionally erratic work schedule have made this entire project possible, and I am profoundly grateful for all of her hard work and support.

Finally, I would like to thank my friends and family who have helped me in so many ways throughout my academic career. I am thankful to my friends here at Dartmouth for putting up with my late hours and overflowing desk space, and particularly for helping to edit material that they surely held little to no interest for them. To my family I am forever grateful for your love and support during as well as before my time at Dartmouth, and for always encouraging me to pursue my academic interests, however impractical they may have seemed.

## Chapter I – Introduction

When William Gager began producing Latin drama at Oxford University in the late sixteenth century, he found himself writing for an audience at a literary and cultural crossroads. The religious reforms of Queen Elizabeth and her Tudor predecessors had left England's cultural identity in disarray, and Elizabeth's state-mandated church did little to unite the opposing groups of Catholics and Protestants throughout the nation. The second half of the sixteenth century was also a critical period for the English theater, as Elizabeth's reign represented a transition point between medieval dramatic form and the Renaissance style of Shakespeare, Marlowe, and Kyd. As the church-governed dramaturgy of the Middle Ages faded from popularity, playwrights and scholars began to look to the literature of Greece and Rome for inspiration as they built for England a new national artistic identity.<sup>1</sup> The transition was a slow one, however, as religion was still of supreme importance and did not integrate easily with the products of an ancient pagan culture. Indeed, it would be difficult to imagine a seamless transition from fifteenth century biblical mystery plays to a new form of drama modeled on the graphically violent tragedies of Greece and Rome. It is thus unsurprising that when Alexander Nowell, headmaster of London's Westminster School, introduced Seneca's *Phaedra* to his students' stage in 1546 he felt the need to write a prologue to the audience in which he suggested a biblical reading of the tragedy that absolved the viewers of attempting to interpret the play in its raw, morally ambiguous context. The commentary instructed the viewer to equate Hippolytus with Joseph and Phaedra

---

<sup>1</sup> See Black (1959) for an account of the driving factors behind the development of Renaissance literature, esp. 282ff.

with Potiphar's wife from the familiar story in Genesis, casting Hippolytus as the moral exemplar and Phaedra as nothing more than the wicked seductress. Nowell's prologue reduced the complicated tragedy to a straightforward tale of right and wrong, thus avoiding any sense of impropriety on the part of the headmaster (for staging the incestuous tale) or the audience (for the voyeuristic complicity of witnessing the crimes). Presumably Nowell saw some utility, whether aesthetic or philosophical, in putting on the *Phaedra*, but his decision to soften for the audience the most interesting and evocative details is indicative of the challenges Renaissance authors faced when attempting to adapt Senecan form to their own cultural context.

William Gager wrote his first Latin tragedies in the Senecan mold a quarter century after Nowell's production and used mythological subject matter to imitate directly his Roman counterpart. As will become evident, Gager discovered in Senecan tragedy a medium that, despite being well-suited as a tool for moral education, would not be effective on the Elizabethan stage without considerable adaptation. Though many of his contemporary playwrights and fellow scholars focused largely on Seneca when developing their visions of tragedy,<sup>2</sup> Gager is particularly interesting because his are some of the only extant Renaissance tragedies composed entirely in Latin.<sup>3</sup> While Gager's decision to write in Latin may

---

<sup>2</sup> See Smith (2006) 7ff.: "For Englishmen, no less than for Continental audiences, Seneca was *the* great tragic playwright, the model against which the Greek tragedians were judged. Whatever criterion we use – the date of the *editio princeps*, the number of translations, the number of vernacular imitations, success in production – Seneca's pre-eminence remains unchallenged."

<sup>3</sup> Gager's most prominent contemporaries in Latin drama included Richard Legge (*Richardus Tertius* (1580)), Richard Eedes (*Caesar Interfectus* (1581)), and Nicholas Grimald (*Christus Redivivus* (1542) and *Achripropheta* (1548)). For a detailed

have been partly an academic exercise (for he also wrote poetry in English), it also functions to bring his imitation one step closer to the ancient form. In Gager's tragedies we see a bright young mind at the very beginnings of the secular tradition in English drama, searching for the best ways to adapt Senecan drama to the Renaissance stage. While scholars have identified points of Senecan influence in much of the more famous vernacular drama of the time period, particularly Shakespeare's,<sup>4</sup> Gager's works have received comparatively little scrutiny. In studying Gager's tragedies, however, we can witness firsthand the beginnings of Renaissance Senecan imitation in its purest sense – direct use of Senecan form in the ancient author's own tongue. Gager's dramas allow us to compare his uses of Senecan devices and conventions directly to their ancient models, without as much concern for the inherent challenges of contrasting sixteenth-century vernacular literature with Latin works from the Roman imperial era. Furthermore, our perspective allows us to see Gager through Seneca and understand which elements of Seneca's dramatic form and philosophical content were particularly important to a Renaissance scholar and dramatist. My discussion will still be colored by the fact that Gager's experience of Seneca comes through centuries of translation and reception. Bruce R. Smith observes in *Seneca on the Renaissance Stage* that humanist translators and imitators who preceded Gager subtly reworked Senecan tragedy to fit their own purposes. For example, Alexander Neville's 1563 translation of *Oedipus*,

---

overview of the university stage at this time, see Frederick S. Boas' *University Drama in the Tudor Age* (1914).

<sup>4</sup> e.g. T.S. Eliot's now-famous 1927 address to The Shakespeare Association, "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca" and his 1934 collection *Elizabethan Essays*. For a more recent treatment, see Miola (1992) *Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy: The Influence of Seneca*.

later reprinted in the widely circulated compilation *Seneca His Tenne Tragedies* (1581), departs considerably from the original text. Neville himself acknowledges that his own moral aims “caused me not to be precise in following the Author, word for word: but sometymes by addition, sometymes by subtraction, to use the aptest Phrases in geving the Sense that I could invent.”<sup>5</sup> In Gager’s case, however, his efforts to imitate the ancient form as closely as possible will make the parallels and differences considerably easier to recognize. Through a detailed comparison of Gager’s extant tragedies with their Senecan models, I hope to show how Gager adapted Seneca’s form to create a vision of tragedy rooted in the artistry of the ancient world but modified to be more effective as mode of moral education for the Renaissance audience and more optimistic in its stance on human agency in the tragic realm.

### **i. William Gager: His Life and Theatrical Context**

#### **a. The Early Modern Theater**

As mentioned above, Gager was part of a nascent theatrical tradition that arose from the vacuum left by the demise of medieval drama and eventually resulted in the now-famous literary corpus of the English Renaissance.<sup>6</sup> Though Gager and his university colleagues produced plays of a type rarely before seen on the English stage, an examination of dramatic practices up to his period will aid in our understanding of Gager’s theatrical context and the expectations of stage plays

---

<sup>5</sup> See Smith (2006) 19.

<sup>6</sup> For a reference guide to English Renaissance drama, see David Stevens’ *English Renaissance Theatre History* (1982). Stevens’ study is purely a theatrical bibliography: for a reference work incorporating critical and historical studies, see Ribner & Huffman’s *Tudor and Stuart Drama* (1978).



likely held by his audience.<sup>7</sup> The three primary dramatic forms of the early modern stage – mysteries, miracles, and moralities – developed over the course of several centuries from basic religious ritual to vehicles of secular artistry.

Just like the English educational system, English drama has its roots in the church: the most prevalent mimetic productions of the ninth and tenth centuries evolved from the theatrical aspects of the clergy's rituals during major Catholic festival days. These biblical plays,<sup>8</sup> later termed "mysteries,"<sup>9</sup> reenacted scenes from the Old and New Testaments and eventually grew into large-scale dramatic cycles that were performed during specific points of the liturgical calendar. In the centuries leading up to the reign of the Tudors, local trade guilds took over the responsibility of staging the mysteries in each English town from the clergy, marking the beginnings of the professional acting troupe. The guilds would compete with one another by designing elaborate costumes and mobile stages, and the

---

<sup>7</sup> A comprehensive bibliography of early modern stage plays, lost as well as extant, can be found in Alfred Harbage's *Annals of English Drama 975-1700* (1940). Particularly relevant as a reference to this project is D. Jerry White's *Early English Drama, Everyman to 1580* (1986), which presents a bibliography of stage plays and critical studies from the morality play era up to the beginning of Gager's career. For a detailed study of the development of stage drama up to and including the Elizabethan age, see C.F. Tucker Brooke's *The Tudor Drama* (1911) and J.C. Trewin's chapter in *Life Under the Tudors* (1950). For a more recent treatment that also discusses the social and political roles of Tudor drama, see Alexandra F. Johnston's chapter in *A Companion to Tudor Britain* (ed. Tittler & Jones 2009). For background on the influence of religion on Renaissance drama, see Patrick Collinson's "William Shakespeare's Religious Inheritance and Environment" in *Elizabethan Essays* (1994).

<sup>8</sup> Examples of mystery plays include *Harrowing of Hell* (reprinted W.H. Hulme 1907), *Creation of the World* (trans. Davies Gilbert 1827), and the guild cycles of the towns of Chester (1475-1500), Wakefield (reprinted *Surtees Society* 1836), and York (reprinted Lucy Toulmin Smith 1885).

<sup>9</sup> The earliest use of this term is attributed to the editor of Dodsley's "Collection of Old Plays" in 1744, and there is no evidence that the audiences of mystery plays knew them as anything but "plays" or "pageants." See Brooke (1911) 25.

producers would introduce comic elements to the religious texts wherever possible in order to hold the viewer's attention. Though Gager was born just as audiences and playwrights were abandoning the mystery play, the genre was hugely popular during the fifteenth and early sixteenth century and thus would have had a hand in shaping Renaissance understandings of stage drama and its aims.<sup>10</sup>

Like the mysteries, the miracle plays – which first appeared in the early twelfth century – dealt exclusively in religious themes. The miracles were not restricted to biblical scenes, however, and instead depicted specific events from the lives of saints or even fictional characters, generally at points of conversion or other significant moments. Free from the constraints of biblical source material, the miracles involved “a more romantic and independent treatment than the grave and sacred character of the Bible itself would easily allow.”<sup>11</sup> Though few of these plays have survived intact, the distinct style of the miracles is relevant to our discussion because of its similarities to Senecan drama. A typical miracle plot features a protagonist who is led into sin, punished accordingly, and ultimately redeemed through conversion at the hand of a higher power. Like Senecan tragedy, the miracles often involved fairly graphic and shocking transgressions, causing an emotional reaction in the viewer before resolving the conflict with a climactic religious revelation. For example, the fourteenth-century miracle *Dux Moraud* tells the story of a father who commits incest with his daughter, causing her to murder him out of grief and guilt. The daughter is tortured by the demons of her crime until, having wandered to a far-off country, she achieves deliverance through the

---

<sup>10</sup> See Brooke (1911) 11.

<sup>11</sup> Brooke (1911) p. 26.

preaching of St. Augustine and passes on to heaven after confessing her sins. Though Christian themes ultimately control the miracle plays, they are helpful precedents for Senecan imitation in that their authors evidently saw some utility in showing the audience horrific sinners and their potential for pious redemption.

Whereas both the mysteries and miracles portrayed realistic scenarios with tangible ethical conflicts, the morality plays of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries stepped back from explicit religious themes and focused on abstract theological and metaphysical dilemmas. The most well known examples of this style include the late-fifteenth century classic "Everyman" and "The Castle of Perseverance" (1425), though the authorship of both plays is currently unknown. Moralities would involve characters named generally "Mankind", "Virtue", or "Evil" and presented allegories for man's procession through life and his relationship to the divine.<sup>12</sup> Of the dramatic forms discussed in this section, the moralities will be most important to my treatment of Gager's work for several reasons. First, the moralities were the only dramas not explicitly based on scripture or church history that were performed on the popular stage in the years leading up to the reign of Elizabeth. Despite having no historical religious basis, the moralities were very popular and set a precedent for separating scripture from the stage, a model that Gager would follow in his use of

---

<sup>12</sup> In "The Castle of Perseverance," for example, Mankind sits in the Castle at the center of the stage surrounded by five scaffolds that contain the World, the Flesh, the Devil, Covetousness, and God/the Virtues. Mankind takes refuge within Perseverance as he is tempted by various vices over the course of his life and God/the Virtues sit by passively as judges. The play culminates in Death and Judgment, in which Mankind is rightly punished for his weaknesses and indiscretions before ultimately attaining Salvation through the forces of goodness. For a detailed description of the play's plot as well as its casting and staging conventions, see Brooke (1911) 51ff.

mythological source material. More significant, however, is the way that the moralities used allegorical figures to address abstract issues and communicate moral lessons to the audience. The viewer of a morality play would see the protagonist, usually a faceless representation of the common man, as he undergoes temptations and eventually triumphs with the help of reason and virtue. As we will see, Gager uses similar narrative techniques that encourage his audience to draw moral lessons from the actions of the characters onstage.

Conspicuously absent from this early theatrical tradition, however, is the genre of tragedy. Despite the fact that any of these dramatic styles – the morality play in particular<sup>13</sup> – might have easily carried tragic themes, the medieval forms attained their greatest levels of popularity when producers began to weave in comic elements.<sup>14</sup> The lack of vernacular tragedy on the early English stage makes Gager and his tragic contemporaries increasingly significant to the Renaissance theatrical tradition. Gager inherited a stage prepared by the church and its dramatic offshoots and brought in the Senecan influence that would fundamentally change both the structure and the philosophical implications of the morality play tradition. As I hope to show, the Senecan elements of Gager’s tragedies make his plays more effective as tools of moral education for a Renaissance audience than the religious drama of the early modern period could have been.

---

<sup>13</sup> See Brooke (1911) 48: “Tragedy, on the other hand, was early crowded out of the morality; and the promise of the mystery with its many tragic potentialities – the promise also of the first stern moralities – came to naught.”

<sup>14</sup> See Brooke (1911) 59-60: “It is a mistake to suppose, as is often done, that the early morality stands on a higher plane in the matter of plot construction than the mystery...Ultimately, to be sure, the mystery was out-distanced, but only after the morality proper had been supplanted by the “topical” and largely comic interlude.”

## **b. The Life of William Gager**

A brief overview of Gager's early life and, most importantly, his academic career will help to place him within the Renaissance dramatic tradition examined above. William Gager was born July 24<sup>th</sup>, 1555 in the town of Long Melford in Suffolk.<sup>15</sup> Though his own father was not particularly well-respected in the community, Gager was politically connected on his mother's side: his maternal uncle, Sir William Cordell, had married into the local aristocracy and served in parliament, allowing the rest of his family to seize the opportunity for social mobility. While the Cordells were certainly a successful clan in Suffolk, the Gager family was something of an outcast. Sir William held little regard for his sister Thomasina's choice in marriage – Gager's father Gilbert – and thus took care to write them out of his will at his death in 1581.<sup>16</sup> Despite the family quarrels, however, Gager was able to secure a top-notch education through his connections to the aristocracy: he came up through the venerable Winchester College in Hampshire and entered Christ Church at Oxford in 1574. There he proceeded with his degrees as quickly as possible, obtaining his B.A. in 1577 and his M.A. in 1580, and was finally named Doctor of Civil Law in 1589. In all, Oxford records indicate that Gager was continuously present at Christ Church for about sixteen years, although after 1593 his personal history becomes slightly more obscure.<sup>17</sup> For our purposes,

---

<sup>15</sup> For biographical details on William Gager I draw heavily from C.F. Tucker Brooke's comprehensive article *The Life and Times of William Gager* (1951) as well as the introductory materials to Dana F. Sutton's translations of Gager's works (1994).

<sup>16</sup> Brooke (1951) 403

<sup>17</sup> Sutton (1994) xii

however, Gager's time at Oxford is most relevant, and as it happens those are his best-documented years as well.

Gager's theatrical career began at age twelve, when he and his fellow students at Winchester College were required by the school statutes to produce a Latin tragedy or comedy during the Christmas holidays for their own amusement and edification.<sup>18</sup> This would also have been where Gager learned most of his Latin, as students began a program of Latin verse composition as early as the fourth form. Gager and his schoolmates regularly performed contemporary English plays as well, meaning that his classically based education (which focused on Plautus, Terence, Vergil, Ovid, and Horace) was supplemented by an appreciation of Renaissance theatrical practices. When Gager entered Christ Church he joined a student body already brimming with poets, playwrights, and authors who had either attained national literary significance or would soon rise to prominence.<sup>19</sup> For an aspiring poet and playwright with strong Latin, the well-funded and intellectually vibrant Oxford college would have been the perfect place to make an attempt at producing original Latin tragedy, and Gager wasted little time in beginning his dramatic career.

In all Gager authored six stage productions while at Oxford, two of which – the tragedy *Oedipus* and the popular comedy *Rivales* (1592) – survive only in fragments. Three full tragedies – *Meleager* (1582), *Dido* (1583), and *Ulysses Redux*

---

<sup>18</sup> See Brooke (1951) 405.

<sup>19</sup> See Sutton (1994) xiv: "Present in his Christ Church were other talented poets, such as the future London playwright George Peele, and the Anglo-Latin poets Richard Eedes and Martin Heton. Then there was Richard Haklyut, whose *Voyages* was a milestone in the developments of English prose." For a detailed bibliography of the most important vernacular dramatists prior to Shakespeare, see Smith & Logan's *The Predecessors of Shakespeare* (1973).

(1592) – have been preserved in full along with Gager’s added scenes to Seneca’s *Phaedra* (also performed in 1592). Of Gager’s authorial career Frederick Boas observes, “He seems to have written plays only during a single decade, from 1582 to 1592, but during this period his pen was fertile, and its chief products were staged on occasions of state.”<sup>20</sup> Indeed, Gager’s reputation as one of Oxford’s preeminent dramatists draws in large part on the fact that his plays were featured during visits to the college by such dignitaries as the Earl of Leicester and Queen Elizabeth herself. *Ulysses Redux* and *Rivales* were performed on the Christ Church stage at the Shrovetide dramatic festival in February of 1592, and *Rivales* made another appearance at the Queen’s visit in September of the same year. The repeated performances of Gager’s dramas at important occasions is testament to their popularity within the college as well as the respect he had earned among his fellows in the Oxford academic community.

Aside from his dramatic exploits, Gager is perhaps best known for his highly public academic dispute with Dr. John Rainolds, a fellow at Oxford’s Queen’s College. A conservative Protestant, Rainolds declined an invitation to the Shrovetide dramatic productions and explained in a letter that he objected to stage-plays of any kind, primarily because he found them wasteful and immoral. Rainolds is representative of the Puritan sentiments against staged drama: in the academic communities of Oxford and Cambridge there was at that time a movement to overthrow the established educational authorities, with theatrical productions being just one of the contested issues. Gager did his best to stay out of a heated

---

<sup>20</sup> Boas (1914) 167f.

debate with Rainolds, exchanging letters in an attempt to mollify him and convince him to attend the plays. When his *Panniculus* finally made its debut at the Shrovetide festival, however, Gager wrote in an appearance by “Momus,” a comic character who seems to lampoon Rainolds and his views directly. I will examine this epilogue in more detail later when discussing Gager’s views on the moral utility of drama, but as for the dispute with Rainolds the extant records of plays at Oxford indicate that Rainolds was not successful in overthrowing the university’s theatrical tradition.<sup>21</sup>

Upon leaving Oxford Gager seems to have given up writing plays in favor of poetry and political letters, which he composed while serving Bishop Martin Heton as the Chancellor and Vicar-General of the diocese of Ely. He continued to draw a small salary from Oxford through the end of the sixteenth century and even had several of his plays published under his own supervision at the Oxford University Press. Though his writing, as far as the extant records show, tapered off significantly at the turn of the century, he remained as Brooke puts it, “a man of very considerable dignity and great, if somewhat ill-rewarded, industry.”<sup>22</sup> Gager died at age seventy-seven in 1622 and is buried at All Saints’ Church in Cambridge.

As he was writing alongside some of the English Renaissance’s biggest literary names, it is unsurprising that Gager’s work crops up only rarely in modern scholarship on the time period: indeed, if his plays had significant influence upon any of his contemporaries then we have little evidence of such interaction. I submit, however, that to discount his plays as little more than academic experimentation

---

<sup>21</sup> Sutton (1994 x) even goes so far as to suggest that the Shrovetide festival was put on in response to Rainolds and his fellow critics, as such an expensive affair was not customary at that time of the year.

<sup>22</sup> Brooke (1951) 430.



would be to ignore their significance in the discussion of Renaissance Senecan reception and influence. Gager was writing in a premiere academic environment during one of the most important periods for English literature, and his direct imitation of Seneca's form can contribute to our understanding of both the ancient author and his modern followers. In Gager we find a sharp literary mind engaging in direct Senecan reception, and by reading Seneca through Gager we can thus discover the aspects of Senecan form and philosophy that were most relevant or controversial in the context of Renaissance drama.

## **ii. Seneca and the Elizabethan Stage**

In the well-documented realm of Greek and Roman influence on Renaissance literature, Senecan tragedy is something of an enigma. Seneca was hugely popular among sixteenth-century translators,<sup>23</sup> yet the reasons behind his rediscovery at that time are not immediately apparent. Typically, humanists looked to ancient literature as sources of learning – whether mythological or philosophical – or as aesthetic models. Jessica Winston observes that Seneca does not fit into any of these categories:

[Seneca's] works were translated more frequently than any other classical author in the period; yet while he took up the subjects of mythology and philosophy, he was not considered a great source of mythological learning, and his philosophical works received only passing attention at this time. Moreover, while Heywood praises Seneca for his "regall stile" he is not described – for instance, in educational treatises – nearly as often as Cicero (or even Ovid) as the sort of master of language whom educated men should most try to imitate.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> See n.2.

<sup>24</sup> Winston (2006) 36.

Winston goes on to observe that Seneca's tragedies were interesting to Renaissance scholars for another reason entirely: they found in his drama a form perfectly suited for the type of political and cultural commentary needed to make sense of their own confusing times.<sup>25</sup> The biblical dramas of the Middle Ages offered little opportunity to discuss the traits of effective or incompetent rulers and Senecan tragedy, with its maniacal tyrants and moralizing choruses, filled this gap nicely. As discussed above, Gager's theatrical predecessors focused primarily on religious themes or abstract ethical issues, but regardless of subject matter the earlier plays were largely concerned with the condition of the common man rather than the perils or sins of those in power.<sup>26</sup>

This is not to say, however, that Seneca transitioned seamlessly to the Renaissance stage. Several aspects of his tragedies – most notably their moral ambiguity and reliance on dialogue – posed challenges to translators and imitators attempting to bring Seneca to their modern audiences. Seneca's protagonists are particularly problematic, as they rarely conform to the moral absolutes of Christianity in Gager's time. About the approaches taken by Senecan imitators<sup>27</sup> in the Renaissance, Bruce R. Smith observes, "Their view of the protagonist is starkly simple. He must be one of two things: either the culpable choice-maker of morality-

---

<sup>25</sup> See Winston (2006) 40-41.

<sup>26</sup> A notable exception to this rule occurred under the practice of Henry VIII, who used drama as a propaganda vehicle against the papacy. Cf. Johnston (2009) p. 435: "Cromwell and Bale took the dramatic discourse out of the Court and into the public domain, deliberately using the popular forms of civic and parish drama to attack the hierarchy of the Roman church."

<sup>27</sup> Specifically, Alexander Nowell, Alexander Neville, and William Gager.

play tradition or the virtuous innocent victim of saints'-play tradition."<sup>28</sup> Seneca's tragedies are never quite so clear-cut in their conclusions, leading to the type of confusion that Alexander Nowell tried to avoid in the production described above. Furthermore, Seneca's rhetorically dense style and reliance on soliloquy over dialogue and action, despite its contributions to Renaissance dramatic practice,<sup>29</sup> made for less-than-compelling stage productions if reproduced precisely. Thus, those wishing to imitate or borrow from Seneca could hardly follow his form exactly and instead had to supplement some of the theatrical flair characteristic of the contemporary theater, as we will see when examining some of Gager's more practical deviations from the Senecan model. Due to the commercial pressures of producing plays or translations, imitators and translators had to devise new modes of bringing Seneca to the Renaissance stage.<sup>30</sup>

### **iii. Gager, Seneca, and Moral Education**

One of the primary concerns of this thesis will be the function of Gager and Seneca's plays as opportunities for moral education on the part of the audience. This issue naturally presents the problem of assuming intentionality on the part of either author: absent an express statement of purpose from the author himself, we cannot be absolutely sure that either playwright was concerned with the viewer's moral

---

<sup>28</sup> Smith (1978) 36.

<sup>29</sup> See Belsey (1973) 67f for a discussion of Renaissance dramatists borrowing from Seneca's rhetorical style, particularly in the use of soliloquy to depict psychological fluctuation during the process of ethical decision-making.

<sup>30</sup> See Winston (2006) 54-55: "playwrights could not rely upon Seneca (or upon any other dramatic form) as a template for new drama, and had to continue to innovate -- combining Senecan "sentences" and "speeches" with the dramatic and rhetorical features of other sources -- in fresh and unexpected ways. In short, they had to rework old (and invent new) kinds of drama that would draw crowds to the commercial theaters of London."

state. It is not an easy question to answer, particularly in Seneca's case, but certain aspects of the plays themselves – for example, Seneca's moralizing choruses or the overarching theme of chastity in Gager's *Ulysses Redux* – suggest that moral issues would have been central to the viewer's experience regardless of the author's intentions. Given the lack of direct evidence regarding both authors' goals in producing tragedy, I will instead focus on the relevant features of the texts and draw conclusions about how the tragedies might have affected the audience's appreciation of the moral issues at hand.

Compared to Seneca, it is considerably easier to ascribe to Gager some concern for moral responsibility in his playwriting. Aside from the fact that Gager was working in a conservative culture heavily influenced by the Anglican and Catholic churches, certain aspects of his plays and their appendices indicate that if moral education was not his goal then it was certainly on his mind. In the course of the aforementioned dispute with Dr. Rainolds, Gager published his additions to Seneca's *Phaedra* with several epilogues that seemed to address Rainolds directly. In the first epilogue, "Momus" comes onstage and delivers a hundred lines of invective aimed at Gager and his production. Momus' criticisms identify him as Dr. Rainolds, as his primary objections echo those raised in Rainolds' letter of opposition to the Shrovetide plays.<sup>31</sup> Momus finds stage drama generally immoral (*quid habet modestum scena, quid non impudens?*/what does the stage have that is

---

<sup>31</sup> See Binns' (1972) summary of the complaints in his introduction to Rainolds' *Th' Overthrow of Stage-Players*: "(i) That it is wrong for men to dress in women's clothes, (ii) that plays are a waste of time and money, (iii) that plays are a bad moral influence, (iv) that actors were considered infamous even by the Romans, (v) that it is a profanation of the Sabbath to act plays on a Sunday."

modest and not shameless?<sup>32</sup> (*Panniculus* 418)), objects to men playing female parts, and accuses Gager of wasting time and money. Though Gager claimed that Momus did not represent any real person, the parallels between Momus' criticisms and Rainolds' letter would have made the comparison inevitable for the audience of academics and local dignitaries. Immediately after Momus leaves the stage another cast member delivers the *Epilogus Responsivus*, which presumably comes directly from the author and attempts a point-by-point refutation of Momus' claims. He observes that dressing as a woman is only reprehensible if done for immoral reasons (*non ergo vestis foeminea iuveni est scelus, sed prava mens, libido, malitia, ac dolus*/therefore it is not the wearing of female clothing that is wicked for a young man, but rather a depraved mind, lust, malice, and deceit (542-543)) and that no time has been taken away from official studies in preparation for the plays. While it may seem that Gager and Rainolds are here simply arguing about staging practices, the fact that Gager felt the need to shield his plays against charges of depravity indicates a concern on Gager's part for the popular opinion of stage drama. He may have been partly defending the artistic integrity of his profession, but by refuting Rainolds' accusations of moral degeneracy Gager shows that he has indeed considered the effects of his plays upon the viewer's moral constitution.

In the same play that features the Momus epilogue – the *Panniculus Hippolyto Senecae Tragoediae Assutus*/"A Patch Sewn on Seneca's Tragedy Hippolytus" – Gager's adjustments indicate his concern for the moral implications of his production. His additions are small, two scenes that account for little more than

---

<sup>32</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations of Greek and Latin are my own.

three hundred lines, but they have a significant effect upon the audience's experience of the Senecan original. The first scene is a brief prologue in the style of the ghost scenes from *Thyestes* or *Agamemnon*. Megaera comes onstage furious at Theseus for entering the underworld as a mortal, and she therefore drives Cupid to instill turmoil in the kingdom by causing Phaedra to fall in love with Hippolytus. In the Senecan version no particular reason is given for Phaedra's incestuous lust, so this addition is important because it identifies her madness as the product of divine retribution. The attempted incest would have been the most scandalous part of the tragedy, and Gager's prologue helps the audience rationalize the crime as punishment for some ancient crime. An audience brought up on the clear-cut moral conclusions of mystery or morality plays would be accustomed to an absolute representation of right and wrong in a stage drama, and the prologue provides an explanation for Phaedra's lust that makes her fate seem more justified.

In the second added scene Gager takes on the play's other major victim, Hippolytus.<sup>33</sup> If the Hippolytus of Seneca's original script is isolationist and obsessed with chastity,<sup>34</sup> then in the *Panniculus* he comes off as an outright misogynist. His language in Gager's new scene is less focused on the benefits of living in nature and much stronger in its condemnation of womankind, peppered with outbursts such as:

*totam mariti mulier evertit domum,*

---

<sup>33</sup> Dana Sutton (1994) and J.W. Binns (1970) provide recent criticism of this scene and Gager's rendering of Hippolytus. The details of their readings will be discussed later in this thesis (specifically Chapter IV Section iv).

<sup>34</sup> See Fitch (2002) 439-440: "[Hippolytus'] obsessive harping on the corruption found in cities and women makes it clear that the countryside represents for him an escape made necessary by a paranoia about human guilt and corruption. His escapism is confirmed later in the Act, where his only means of dealing with Phaedra's advances is to flee to the "woods and wild beasts" (718)."

*stirpemque totam persequitur odio viri.  
quis faeminarum multiplex narret scelus? (245-247)*

A woman overturns her husband's entire home,  
and she pursues his whole family with hatred.  
Who could recall the many evils of women?

This type of invective draws out and enlarges the subtle misogynistic leanings of Seneca's Hippolytus until Gager's character becomes a full-blown woman hater who shuns the conventions of healthy society and hides among the wild beasts. Just as Megaera's rage helps the audience understand Phaedra's fate, Gager's expanded characterization of Hippolytus gives them grounds to consider Hippolytus' untimely death appropriate punishment for his corrupt worldview. Hippolytus is further condemned through contrast with another character of Gager's invention, the Naiad, who espouses matrimonial chastity and sexual union as part of the natural order of the world. Considering that English religious and social culture had been so recently thrown into confusion by the marital turmoil of Henry VIII, one can see how Gager's audience might have reacted positively to the Naiad's description of virtuous monogamy. Hippolytus' rejection of this virtuous and proper proposal further vilifies him in the viewer's eyes and shows that he irrationally shuns all women, not just his stepmother. Clearly Gager wants his audience to find Hippolytus guilty for the tragedy, and even instructs them to do so in his own prologue:

*deinde culpam prorsus Hippolyto imputet,  
iuveni protervo, caelibis, duro, truci,  
qui refugit odio faeminas omnes pari,  
indomitus, et Sylvester, et nemorum incola. (23-26)*

Then let him lay the blame on Hippolytus,  
a stubborn young man, celibate, hard, truculent,  
who fled all women with equal hatred,  
unconquerable, a woodsman and forest-dweller.

Gager's goal is here explicitly clear: he wants to shift the moral responsibility of the tragedy to Hippolytus, who is chaste to a fault and, in Gager's eyes, not quite the victim that he seems to be in the Senecan version. This adjustment would again be helpful for Gager's audience, as it enables them make sense of what might otherwise seem the pointless death of an innocent man who becomes the target of incestuous desire. Gager's additions to the text encourage a more straightforward reading of the *Phaedra* than Seneca's text allows for, and the new scenes allow Gager's audience to judge his characters in absolute terms. Thus, we can assume Gager felt that putting on the original text with no additions would be problematic for his viewers and added his scenes with a specific ethical purpose. Since, as I have argued, the primary effect of the new scenes is to alter the audience's judgment of Hippolytus, I submit that Gager's changes are indicative of a concern for the moral effect of his tragedy.

To be sure, the mere presence of moral concern on the author's part does not necessarily mean that Gager wanted to use his plays as educational tools. What it does show, however, is that Gager was aware of the power of stage drama in arousing passion and shaping moral understanding. Thus as a playwright he bore the burden of presenting tragedies that both fit with his audience's expectations of stage drama and made sense relative to the cultural norms of the period. My approach, then, will not be to assume generally that Gager wrote tragedies to inculcate some moral philosophy of his own. Rather, I will conclude that Gager was cognizant of his tragedies' effects on the audience's moral development and that some of his authorial decisions show a concern for the impressionability of his



viewer. The specific moral themes of Gager's plays are widely varied and do not suggest a coherent underlying moral philosophy: some of his subjects, such as the necessity of fearing god in the *Meleager*, are noticeably religious while others, like the discourse on responsible kingship in the same play, are clearly secular. I plan to argue that Gager's tragedies create a space in which the viewers can observe and reflect upon the actions of the characters and then draw moral conclusions that can be easily applied to their own daily lives.

Just as it is problematic for us to assume moralistic intentions on Gager's part, our limited biographical knowledge of Seneca makes a similar inference about his tragedies impossible: although Seneca's prose writings contain discussions of poetics<sup>35</sup> he never refer to the tragedies now ascribed to his name, and there is even some doubt that the Seneca of prose and tragedy are the same person.<sup>36</sup> Thus a reader who is tempted to treat Seneca's tragedies as dramatic channels for his Stoic philosophy would be confounded by the fact that Seneca the philosopher offers no poetics that relate specifically to the tragedies of Seneca the playwright. In the absence of conclusive evidence linking the author of the philosophical texts to the composer of the tragedies, I will instead look to the details of the dramatic texts to examine the function of contemporary philosophy in Senecan tragedy. The philosophy discussed in the plays does not always mirror Seneca's prose works, but in more general terms his dramatic approach suggests that he was often concerned

---

<sup>35</sup> In *Ep.* 108.6-8, for example, Seneca discusses the moral implications of audience response to stage drama relative to philosophical lecture. See Staley (2010 89ff) for analysis of this passage and its relevance to the idea of spectatorship in Senecan drama.

<sup>36</sup> For a detailed overview of this debate see Kohn (2003) in *The Classical World*.

with using tragedy to explore the psychological effects of passion. Gregory Staley notes the distinct inward focus of Seneca's tragedy – that is, its emphasis on the cognitive elements of crime and passion over the physical results – and comes to a conclusion that will be particularly relevant to my discussion:

I argue that Seneca wrote tragedy in the way that his fellow Stoics read it: as a model of the cognitive process and thus as a means by which to clarify the nature of the emotions. Inevitably, to write tragedy is for a Stoic to explore psychology, but in the process Seneca was not so much teaching psychology as persuading his audience and making a case about the causes of tragedy.<sup>37</sup>

Staley's point that we should not read Senecan tragedy as Stoic handbook is important because it enables us to analyze the plays from multiple perspectives rather than a particular philosophical one.<sup>38</sup> Instead of assuming that Seneca's tragedies were vehicles for his own philosophy, I plan to use the tragic texts as a lens through which we can appreciate the moral effects of the plays. By concentrating on how Seneca's authorial decisions dictate the audience's experience of his tragedies I will avoid arguing for a specific philosophical doctrine and instead draw conclusions about what the plays would have meant to the viewer and, ultimately, why Seneca might have desired these particular effects.

My approach to the question of moral intentionality draws on the prevailing sentiments of the modern Senecan scholarship. The root of the issue is whether we

---

<sup>37</sup> Staley (2010) 67.

<sup>38</sup> For an argument in favor of a hybrid reading of the philosophical and dramatic texts, see Christopher Star (2006) in *Transactions of the American Philological Association*: "The characters' continual use and abuse of Seneca's theory suggests that reading his tragedies and philosophy in tandem reveals a holistic portrait of human psychology. We see the full nature of the passions, vice, inconsistency, virtue, control, and *constantia*, as well as the hidden relationships between them." See also Berthe Marti (1945) "Seneca's Tragedies. A New Interpretation" in an earlier issue of the same journal.

view Seneca's tragedies as works of art or as philosophical exercises, and in this thesis I plan to approach the question from a balanced perspective. The surest route, I believe, is to refrain from focusing solely on the philosophical elements while still acknowledging their presence and analyzing their probable effects upon the audience as well as their relevance to the surrounding text. Charles Segal's 1986 study, "Boundary Violation and the Landscape of the Self in Senecan Tragedy," provides an excellent example of this approach. Segal acknowledges the influence of Stoicism on Seneca's style<sup>39</sup> yet refrains from identifying Stoic philosophy as the only way to understand Senecan tragedy.<sup>40</sup> Segal's mode of analyzing the philosophical aspects of Seneca's plays without making his philosophy the exclusive critical lens will be an important part of my method, and A.J. Boyle shows that this perspective is possible even if we assume that Seneca the philosopher and Seneca the playwright were indeed the same person. Boyle observes that "The tragedies abound in Stoic moral ideas"<sup>41</sup> but that these themes occur within a dramatic world that is "generally unStoic, even a negation of Stoicism."<sup>42</sup> He concludes that Senecan tragedy shuns any simplistic critical approach (not only across the corpus but also from play to play) and that the philosophical subjects of the plays should be

---

<sup>39</sup> e.g. 146, in his discussion of Seneca's practice of connecting his protagonist's psychological state to the natural setting surrounding the character: "This interaction between the enclosed depths of the soul and the expansive frame of nature obviously has its philosophical roots in the Stoic correspondence of macrocosm and microcosm and the ideal of living in harmony with the universe."

<sup>40</sup> See Segal (1986) n.3: "In pointing to some links between Seneca's tragedies and Stoic philosophy, I do not mean to imply that a strictly Stoic interpretation exhausts the meanings of the plays or that their purpose was simply to illustrate Stoic doctrine."

<sup>41</sup> Boyle (2009) 32.

<sup>42</sup> Boyle (2009) 33.

analyzed in more specific contexts, such as in terms of only the surrounding text or even within the particular act/scene. These analytical methods will frame my treatment of the moral and philosophical issues in the Senecan tragedies examined below: that is, I will consider the dramatic and philosophical effects of Seneca's tragedies based purely on the context provided by the individual texts. Instead of starting with assumptions about Seneca's philosophical intentions, I hope to use evidence from the text to suggest potential motives behind the author's dramaturgical practices and then analyze the effects of these practices on the moral implications of each play.

#### **iv. Chapter Overviews**

This thesis will begin with an examination of the narrative techniques of the two authors, particularly in how Gager reverses Seneca's psychological focus and chooses instead to foreground the action of his tragedies. In this section I will show how Seneca's framing devices – that is, the elements within the plays that create layers of mental or physical separation between the audience and the tragedy itself – draw the viewer's attention away from the action of the plot and instead to the mental states of the primary characters, thereby encouraging rational reflection on the sources of each tragedy. The discussion will then turn to Gager and his *Ulysses Redux*, a lengthy work in which he stages as much of the action as possible and displays the psychological progression of multiple characters besides the hero. This approach, I will argue, brings the viewer's focus to the deeds of each character and identifies their actions as the real drivers of their fates. The distinction in narrative techniques displays Gager's primary point of revision in his adaptation of Senecan

form. By altering Seneca's narrative method and expanding the scope of the tragedies, Gager gives his audience the opportunity to consider multiple characters when forming judgments about the nature of agency in a tragic setting and thus shifts the viewer's focus to the actions and consequences playing out onstage.

Next I will turn to the use of the chorus in the tragedies of both authors, and show how Gager's choral odes shun the didacticism of the Senecan chorus, instead encouraging the audience to draw its moral precepts from the actions of the characters. Though Gager's choruses seem to fit the Senecan mold in the most basic sense, a close analysis of the odes in *Ulysses Redux* and *Meleager* will illustrate Gager's significant departure from the ancient model. I plan to show that Gager's choruses refrain from extended philosophical discussions and instead serve to provide onstage reactions to the plot while supplying a theoretical framework for the audience. The effect of this adaptation, I will argue, is that the audience looks to the primary characters rather than the detached and vaguely identified chorus when attempting to understand the moral issues of Gager's tragedies.

In the final chapter I will analyze one character type in particular – namely the “Attendant,” or the role attached to many of Seneca's primary characters to act as an advisor or servant. Using examples drawn from multiple plays within each corpus, I will show how Gager imitates and expands this stock character to present his audience with a variety of Attendant figures: that is, Gager creates Attendants that reflect not only the Senecan version of the advisor but also some more complicated and occasionally sinister examples. Gager does indeed employ some Attendants that function exactly like their Senecan counterparts, suggesting that

Gager found Seneca's Attendant useful as a moral counterexample to the main characters. The adaptation comes in the extra characters that Gager adds who, while certainly Attendant-types, do not follow the Senecan model of the role. I will argue that Gager's expanded use of the character type functions to broaden the audience's focus away from simply the protagonist, allowing the viewer to reflect upon the tragedy from multiple perspectives. Furthermore, Gager's more unorthodox Attendants point to the one-sided nature of Seneca's use of the character, implying that external advice can come from sources besides well-intentioned and faithful counselors. Most importantly, however, Gager's Attendants endeavor to save their masters from immoral impulses suggests an underlying departure from the moral philosophy of Senecan drama. Whereas Seneca's Attendants show that his protagonists become irredeemably responsible as soon as destructive passion infects their minds, Gager's Attendant figures imply that their masters are innocent as long as they do not act upon their immoral thoughts, reminding his audience that corrupt behavior is the ultimate source of tragic events.

## **v. Conclusion**

Considering the wealth of important English literature and drama emerging from England during Gager's lifetime, it is easy to overlook his Oxford tragedies as simple imitation, the intellectual exercises of a young talent during his college days. Indeed, the plays themselves do not seem particularly outstanding in comparison to their ancient source material; the vocabulary is simpler, the meter and arrangement not nearly as artful, and the religious moralizing somewhat heavy-handed. A close reading of Gager's tragedies, however, shows that his primary concerns ran much

deeper than faithfulness of imitation. Like Seneca, Gager understood the potential of tragedy as a vehicle for moral enlightenment: unlike prose or poetry, stage drama forces the audience to experience and interpret a story in real time and develop a personal position on its content, sometimes even without conscious reflection. For his purposes, though, Gager knew that some of Seneca's most basic dramaturgical philosophies and practices would not affect a Renaissance audience in the most beneficial manner, and his adaptations show us how Gager thought Senecan form would best transition to the modern English stage.

Through a close examination of several points of adaptation, I hope to show how Gager takes Seneca's central form and uses it to create a brand of tragedy that will be most beneficial and enjoyable for his modern audience. This discussion will be relevant not only to our understanding of how Gager's tragedies function but also to the broader tradition of Senecan reception in the English Renaissance. Gager's plays, while not hugely significant from a literary standpoint, are important to a discussion of Senecan reception because they represent the closest possible imitation of Seneca for Gager's time period. His adaptations will show what a Renaissance Senecan imitator felt needed to be added or removed in order for the plays to be effective in a modern context. Compared to literary heavyweights such as Shakespeare and Marlowe, Gager was certainly not a major player in the realm of Renaissance drama, but in this thesis I hope to prove that his works are still significant to our understanding of how Seneca's drama shaped the development of tragic form at a point in time so critical to its progression as a genre

## Chapter II – The Tragic Psyche On Stage: Narrative Technique in Seneca and Gager

### i. Introduction

The differences between Gager and Seneca's dramatic forms are certainly evident in the texts of their plays, but Gager's major adaptations become even more clear if we attempt to envision what the two authors' works might have looked like onstage. Though the ambiguity surrounding the actual performance history of Seneca's dramas makes it difficult to estimate the effort and cost of staging one of his tragedies, a brief comparison of the two authors' scripts shows that if one were to follow the texts faithfully then Gager's would be much more elaborate affairs. Senecan tragedy is highly dialogue-driven and features small casts delivering lengthy speeches with little evidence of theatrical action or complicated setting pieces.<sup>43</sup> Gager's stage, on the other hand, is consistently filled with a variety of actors engaging in exciting scenes ranging from dances to full-scale battles. Furthermore, the only records of Gager's performances indicate that they were quite expensive for the university stage at that time. For example, in preparation the two plays put on at the queen's second visit to Oxford in 1592, Christ Church college alone allocated more than thirty pounds.<sup>44</sup> The differences between the performative aspects of the two authors' plays result from the way that Gager develops his plotlines through staged action while Seneca relies on character

---

<sup>43</sup> Modern critics have adopted the phrase "the declamatory style" to describe Seneca's dramatic technique. See Segal (1986 18ff) for a discussion of Seneca's rhetorical approach to character construction. For a more general examination of the declamatory style see Pratt (1986), esp. 132ff and 150ff.

<sup>44</sup> C.F. Tucker Brooke (1951) 424.



dialogue and soliloquy to reveal the details of his tragedies. Even though we cannot be absolutely certain how any of these plays looked onstage, the clues provided by the texts can help us understand how the playwrights' dramaturgical approaches would have affected their audiences' experience. Indeed, the disparity in narrative techniques is perhaps the most noticeable difference between the tragedies of these two authors, and it is tempting to write off Gager's changes as mere acquiescence to the popular demands of the Renaissance stage. When I mention "narrative techniques" in this section I will be referring to decisions a playwright makes about the script that dictate how the plot unfolds in the eyes of a viewer or reader. For example, the role of the *nuntius* in the *Thyestes* precludes the audience from actually witnessing the murder of Thyestes' children unless the producer decides independently to act out the scene while the *nuntius* narrates it. Gager's decision to eliminate or alter some of Seneca's narrative techniques may have been partially motivated by a desire to make Senecan drama more exciting and watchable, but his specific alterations point to a more significant revision of Senecan form.

The exercise of imagining what Senecan tragedy may have looked like onstage is indeed helpful for generally contrasting his narrative approach with that of Gager, but for the purposes of my discussion the true nature of Senecan performance will not be particularly important. The question of whether or not Seneca's dramas were ever performed (or even meant to be performed) has always been a highly contested one in the Senecan scholarship, and my argument will focus on the texts themselves without making assumptions about the true performance history of the tragedies. A brief overview of the question, however, will help to

orient us to the theories surrounding Senecan performance history and show how the methodology of this chapter will interact with the scholarly tradition of Senecan performance. Critics first decided in the nineteenth century that the plays were never written for performance, primarily because of their graphic nature and reliance on dialogue over action.<sup>45</sup> In the subsequent century, however, the prevailing sentiment has turned towards the existence of real productions – either on stage or in recitation for a small audience.<sup>46</sup> Inasmuch as it is difficult for classical scholars to agree on this issue in modern times,<sup>47</sup> it is even less possible to

---

<sup>45</sup> Fitch (2000) identifies Schlegel (1809) as the first published study of this perspective. See also Boissier (1861) and particularly Leo (1878-9) and Zwierlein (1966). See Sutton (1986) for criticism of this tradition (Zwierlein's study in particular). Patrick Kragelund (2008) argues against the practice of evaluating Senecan tragedy by Attic performance standards in "Senecan Tragedy: Back on Stage?" For a more recent defense of the conservative position see Elaine Fantham in *Senecan in Performance* (ed. Harrison 2000), in which she contends that Seneca's tragedies could not have been written for effective performances but presents her own vision of *Troades* onstage. In the same volume, Katharina Volk describes a 1993 staging of the *Troades* in Munich, and the 1998 performances of Senecan tragedies at Xavier University are the most notable examples of modern Senecan revival. Though my approach as described in this section does not involve an investigation of Senecan performance history, the scholarly tradition surrounding the performative aspects of the tragedies provides insight into modern readings of Seneca's narrative techniques.

<sup>46</sup> See Fitch (2000): "The suggestion that Seneca did not write for performance, then, arose in the nineteenth century from an intense distaste for the qualities of his dramas. Correspondingly the very gradual critical rehabilitation of Seneca's tragedies in the twentieth century, as Romantic criteria became less dominant, was accompanied by a renewed appreciation of their dramatic qualities...and the tide of opinion among critics who wrote in detail on this question turned increasingly in favour of performance of some kind."

<sup>47</sup> William Calder (1976) describes the lines of this debate clearly: "There are of course three possibilities. Seneca wrote his tragedies for recitation, he wrote them for performance and they were performed, or he wrote them for performance and they never happened to be performed in antiquity." In *Playing Seneca* (2000), John Fitch establishes the conservative position that some of Seneca's plays may have been acted, and some not: he points out that a simple *recitatio* would have made

determine how Gager and his contemporaries stood on the question, if indeed there was one. Instead I will consider the plays of both authors as texts and not as staged dramatic productions. Rather than guessing at how the plays looked onstage, I will operate under the assumption that Seneca's audience witnessed the scenes explicitly laid out by his scripts: that is, I will treat the extant scripts as the authoritative versions of the texts and assume that if the plays were indeed acted then they appeared exactly as the scripts suggest.<sup>48</sup> In this way, a reader or a listener at a *recitatio* is functionally the same as an audience member at a large-scale stage production in that they all observe the same characters delivering the same lines. Returning to my earlier example from *Thyestes*, then, I would conclude that the only characters onstage during that scene are the *nuntius* and the chorus, as they are the only ones who receive lines at that time.

This is an important distinction for the discussion in this chapter because it clarifies the primary issue at hand. I will not attempt to discover exactly how Seneca and Gager wanted their tragedies to look onstage, as such guesswork would require an unfeasible knowledge of both authors' intentions. Rather, I will come at the problem from the opposite direction and attempt to show what effects the authors' narrative techniques – as observed in the scripts – have on the audience or reader.

Detailed analysis of several different narrative techniques will yield an

---

some plays hopelessly confusing while others contain scenes (such as the animal sacrifice in *Oedipus*) that could scarcely be acted out in a serious manner.

<sup>48</sup> Precisely how Roman or modern producers may have used the texts to create these hypothetical stage dramas is a separate issue from the basic question of Senecan performance history. Details of medieval or early modern Senecan revivals – such as Alexander Nowell's, discussed in Chapter 1 – can provide insight into the theatrical or cultural context of the time period, but in this chapter I will restrict my argument to the scripts themselves.

understanding of how the viewer's experience is shaped by these devices, an understanding that will in turn provide some conclusions about the goals of the tragedies in general – particularly as they relate to moral education. Through a comparison of the narrative devices drawn from the texts I hope to show how Gager's decision to foreground the action of his tragedies provides greater command over his audience's reception of the characters and the situations involved. Additionally, I will show that Gager's control over his viewer's experience implies a revision of more than simply Seneca's dramatic practices: the changes that Gager makes to Seneca's narrative style alter not only the audience's literal experience of the tragedies but also its psychological appreciation of the moral issues inherent in the plays.

## **ii. Senecan Narrative Style: Critical Approaches**

A good deal of the critical tradition surrounding Seneca's narrative techniques is based upon contrast with Seneca's own models, the Greek tragedians. Leaving aside questions of actual performance practice – of which much more is known about Greek drama – Seneca's plays are structured similarly to Attic tragedies (with five acts and intervening citizen choruses) but are very different stylistically. A.J. Boyle points to several possible influences that may have led to Seneca's rhetoric-heavy declamatory style, including the expectations of writing for the aristocratic crowd of Neronian Rome and the significant emphasis on rhetorical training in Roman schools at the time.<sup>49</sup> He argues that Seneca's cultural and artistic context demanded an increased focus on the mental aspects of tragedy and “a

---

<sup>49</sup> Boyle (1997) 21-27.

concern with the complexities of human psychology and behaviour and their intelligible dramatization.”<sup>50</sup> Other authors have rejected the utility of evaluating Seneca’s drama by the Greek standard, claiming that such an approach aligns Seneca with mere imitation and ignores the significance of his new style.<sup>51</sup> C.J. Herington summarizes this position in his 1966 essay “Senecan Tragedy”:

The perpetual criticism that Seneca’s characters and situations are unrealistic seems to me to miss the point. He is not trying, even in the sense that Aeschylus did (let alone Sophocles and Euripides), to present the actions of human beings. His emphasis is on the action of Evil, and of the emotions which generate it; the human actors, the palaces, the landscapes, the starry heavens themselves, are subordinate to this action; they are its external manifestations.<sup>52</sup>

Herington’s argument here will be central to the discussion in this chapter because it speaks to the interactions between the world of Seneca’s tragedies and the metaphysical conflicts represented within it. Instead of reading Seneca’s characters, settings, or plots as realistic, Herington argues, we ought to analyze instead the ways that Seneca’s dramatic conventions draw out psychological and philosophical issues far beyond the mind and world of a “normal” human being. In this chapter I hope to show how Seneca uses particular dramaturgical devices to create a narrative space in which the events of the plot or the details of the setting are secondary to the psychological conditions of the characters and the passions that

---

<sup>50</sup> Boyle (1997) 26.

<sup>51</sup> See Hadas (1955) in the introduction to his translation of *Oedipus*: “Seneca must not be judged by the Greek gauge, because his aims were different. He is concerned, not to justify the ways of gods to men or of men to gods, but to display the capacity for emotional intensity exhibited by characters endowed with extraordinary passions.”

<sup>52</sup> Herington (1966) 448.

brought on such circumstances.<sup>53</sup> Thus when I refer to Seneca's "narrative techniques" I will mean the methods by which he draws the audience's attention to the mental state of his primary characters and away from the action of the plot itself.

If we assume, as discussed above, that moral philosophy was at least a partial influence on Seneca's approach to tragedy, then the lengths to which he goes in order to shield his audience from the emotional climaxes of his plays might seem somewhat surprising. After all, what could be more effective in deterring a viewer from morally questionable behavior than observing the terrible consequences of such actions firsthand? Nevertheless, many of Seneca's most shocking and dramatic scenes are not staged but rather related through the eyes of a secondary character, usually a nameless messenger of some sort: Atreus murders Thyestes' children somewhere far offstage, a *nuntius* recounts Hippolytus' grim demise to Theseus, and Agamemnon exits the stage permanently when he enters the banquet hall upon his return to Mycenae. Outside of scenes in which we have reason to believe that staging limitations could have required a specific mode of presentation, we must assume that Seneca made these critical decisions with a particular purpose in mind.

My reading of several Senecan narrative devices will focus in large part on Seneca's efforts to distance his audience from the drama by creating complex layers

---

<sup>53</sup> See Boyle (2006 195ff) for a description of how the declamatory style functions on the levels of both performance and metadrama: "Not that Seneca's rhetoric is merely a rhetoric of surface. In an age which reveled in exteriority and display Senecan bombast, paradox, word-play, epigram both parade that display and excavate it to exhibit states of mind and to create tragic character...Indeed, Seneca's predilection for self-presentational soliloquies or monologues, like his frequent use of the aside (a device, as was noted above, foreign to the more public world of Attic tragedy), signals far more than his dramatic *oeuvre's* debt to the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid; they index his play's concern with psychological interiority and with its theatrical and structural potential."

of narrative space within the texts. Rather than discussing how these distancing factors might have affected a hypothetical stage production, I will restrict my analysis to the challenges of interpretation presented by Seneca's framing techniques within the texts. To this end Alessandro Schiesaro's treatment of *Thyestes* will prove useful, as his analysis focuses on how certain authorial decisions function to create psychological space between Seneca's audience and the unfolding drama. His observations on the effects of *Thyestes'* metadramatic elements is particularly relevant to this discussion because I will be focusing largely on the implications of Seneca's narrative techniques for the viewer's experience:

I have argued that metadrama inevitably introduces a critical dimension, a distance between the events represented on the stage and the audience's perception of them. By complicating the structure of the play and directing the audience's attention towards its inner mechanisms, metadrama lures the audience to reflect on what exactly they are watching and how it is constructed.<sup>54</sup>

This "distance" that Schiesaro describes is precisely the effect that I will analyze in my readings. He notes how Seneca uses his characters to create plays within plays, causing the audience to realize that they are watching a drama rather than a real-life series of events and thereby encouraging the viewer to reflect on the tragedy rather than simply witnessing its scenes firsthand. These distancing devices prevent the audience from being forced into an the kind of immediate and unconscious reactions that can make the viewer emotionally invested in a particular point of view before the subtler implications of the individual scenes become apparent. Through a close analysis of several example narrative techniques, I plan to argue that Seneca's decision to relate his tragedies through multiple levels of framing keeps his

---

<sup>54</sup> Schiesaro (2003) 62.

audience grounded in the larger tragic tradition while allowing the viewer enough mental space for calm, rational analysis – even when such reflection might seem impossible. Ultimately, my discussion in this section will show how Seneca’s dramatic methods establish the uncontrollable passions of his protagonists as the fundamental source of his tragedies, a practice that will prove to be the primary point of divergence between Seneca and Gager.

### **iii. *Oedipus***

Of all of Seneca’s tragic protagonists Oedipus is among the most sympathetic, if such a term can ever be applied to a character in Senecan tragedy: he is mostly unaware of his crime (or at least claims to be) and inadvertently exposes himself to disaster while attempting to avenge his father’s murder and save his city from pestilence. Compared to Atreus, for example, who plots his deed purely out of anger, greed, and the desire to outdo his ancestors’ audacious sins, Oedipus seems for a good deal of his play to be the unlucky victim of fate and the subject of extreme dramatic irony. In this sense, Seneca is somewhat limited in his portrayal of Oedipus by the established mythological tradition. One aspect of the tragedy that Seneca does have complete control over, however, is the manner in which he relates the individual components of the familiar tale. In his gradual development of Oedipus’ character and the tragedy as a whole, we find an excellent example of how Seneca’s use of complex layers of framing changes the audience’s appreciation of a tale it likely knew well.

Before we examine the specific scenes and characters that Seneca uses to complicate his version of the drama, we should look to the subtler elements of



Oedipus' character that affect the play on a larger scale. One key critical lens for understanding Seneca's Oedipus is the inward focus of Senecan tragedy and its emphasis on the construction of self in its primary characters.<sup>55</sup> Charles Segal notes that the primary difference between Seneca and his Attic predecessors is the way that Senecan tragedy recedes from the world of real human interaction or divine conflict into the realm of a single tortured mind, and he attributes this contrast to a change in performance practices.<sup>56</sup> We also find evidence of Seneca's concern for psychological exposition in the narrative techniques through which he constructs his characters in the eyes of the audience: relevant to this point is the 1997 work of A.J. Boyle, who describes the psychological focus of the tragedies by analyzing the theatrical effects of Seneca's pervasive use of the aside or the extended soliloquy.<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> For recent commentary on self-representation in Senecan drama see the articles by Fitch & McElduff and Segal in *Seneca: Oxford Readings in Classical Studies* (ed. Fitch 2008). See also C.A.J. Littlewood's *Self-representation and Illusion in Senecan Tragedy* (2004). The critical approaches in both of these works represents an important aspect of my discussion in this section: Seneca's emphasis on the internal construction of identity is one of the narrative techniques that encourage the reader to judge the characters by the depictions of their mental processes rather than by their physical acts.

<sup>56</sup> See Segal (1986) 4: "Like the architecture of the theater itself, cut into the hillside and open to the sky, Greek tragedy is a public, outward-facing form. Seneca's tragedies were produced for a relatively small coterie in a vast autocratic empire where the majority is far removed from the center of power. Whether intended to be acted or recited, his plays are realized in more or less private circumstances, and they face inward. Even allowing for the frequent appeals to celestial or chthonic divinities or to quasi-divinized forces like Nature or Fortune, their world is less the Greeks' universe of warring deities and cosmic or social conflicts than the world of the soul."

<sup>57</sup> See Boyle (1997) 25: "One of the most conspicuous devices employed in Senecan tragedy is the aside, a device common in Hellenistic drama, but foreign to the more public world of Attic tragedy. Seneca's frequent use of it is a function of his drama's pervasive concern with psychological interiority – a concern most particularly and clearly exhibited in Seneca's predilection for self-presentational soliloquies or monologues, in which the focus is on the inner workings of the human mind, on the

This focus on the inner workings (and failings) of the protagonists' psyches allows the viewer to witness Seneca's characters composing their tragic roles in real time, roles that are inevitably warped by the passions that dictate the characters' every move. Several scholars have studied the rhetorical aspects of self-construction in the tragedies,<sup>58</sup> but John Fitch & Siobhan McElduff offer a general observation on the source of self-representation in Senecan tragedy that will be particularly relevant to my argument:

Self-construction has a special affinity with the genre of drama, not least with the masked drama of antiquity. The mask worn by the actor is unmistakably a front, a constructed version of identity. Senecan tragedy is centrally concerned with the processes by which the *dramatis personae* construct, adopt, and reinforce identities for themselves...The urgency of self-representation is fuelled by desire: desire for the approval and love of others, desire to wield power, desire to play an adult role. These desires distort any authentic sense of the self.<sup>59</sup>

In this chapter I contend that Seneca's dramatic techniques in *Oedipus* and *Agamemnon* guide his viewer's focus towards the passions that rule his protagonists from within. The connection described in the passage above between Senecan self-construction and the motivating desires of his characters is important for me because it establishes a relationship between the emotional undercurrents of the plays and the physical actions of the players. This perspective will allow me to argue that Seneca's narrative techniques create a dramatic space in which the audience is able to understand and reflect upon the destructive passions that are the source of his tragedies. Furthermore, my reading of Seneca through Gager offers a new

---

mind as *locus* of emotional conflict, incalculable suffering, insatiable appetite, manic joy, cognitive vulnerability, self-deception, irrational guilt."

<sup>58</sup> See Segal (1986) "Boundary Violation and the Landscape of the Self in Senecan Tragedy" and Star (2006) "Commanding *Constantia* in Senecan Tragedy".

<sup>59</sup> Fitch & McElduff (2008) 157-8.

perspective on this element of Senecan drama because of how greatly Gager's narrative approach differs from Seneca's.

As this chapter turns to Seneca's *Oedipus*, Boyle's commentary in his recent translation will supply important critical context for my discussion of the development of Oedipus' character and its implications for Seneca's version of the Theban myth. Boyle argues that Seneca's subtle adjustments to the Sophoclean tale portray Oedipus as a Roman-style ruler faced with the failure of royal power mechanisms (such as augury or the imperial edict) to counterbalance his own moral depravity.<sup>60</sup> Particularly relevant to my analysis is his point that the theme of spectatorship is central to this tragedy, as every character (and Oedipus in particular) acts as a spectator both of the dramatic action and the whims of fate.<sup>61</sup> The discussion in this section will return often to Seneca's construction of internal audience figures, though I hope to further develop Boyle's position by incorporating an allegorical reading of the basic concept of vision and blindness, physical as well as psychological. My primary point of contention with Boyle, however, lies in his assertion that Oedipus' ignorance of his deeds has no bearing on his guilt. Boyle

---

<sup>60</sup> See Boyle (2011) lxii.

<sup>61</sup> See Boyle (2011) lxxxiii. Boyle's general commentary in *Roman Tragedy* (2006) is also particularly illuminating for my discussion of spectatorship in Senecan drama: "The recurrent dramatisation of role-playing – in which characters become actors before the other characters as an audience...underscores Senecan tragedy's own conventions and artifice. So, too, the related focus on action as spectacle, on characters as *spectators* on human behaviour as self-dramatisation; or the staging in *Medea* and *Thyestes* of a character's own staging as character, actor, dramaturge and internal *spectator* of the climactic evil itself. Such features develop the metatheatrical dimension of all Roman tragedy into a constant preoccupation, a pervasive concern on Seneca's part not only to draw attention to his plays' theatricality but to make of that theatricality one of its most persistent and compelling themes."

argues that because Oedipus did indeed commit his crimes he is objectively guilty regardless of the state of his memories, and thus he concludes that, “Actions and their consequences – whatever the intention of the agent – are what matter.” I submit instead that Seneca’s focus on Oedipus’ psychological development distances the audience from the king’s ancient crimes, and brings the viewer’s focus to the mental distress that has led to the reemergence of long-buried evils. Oedipus’ guilt, I will argue, is no simple matter, as it is characterized by and exposed through levels of narration that illustrate to the viewer the moral complications brought on by literal and metaphorical blindness.

Much like his counterparts in the Senecan corpus, Oedipus is almost constantly visible, and a great deal of the play’s dialogue focuses on his own inner turmoil. Seneca sets the tone for his protagonist in the king’s speech that opens the play:

*parum ipse fidens mihimet in tuto tua,  
Natura, posui iura. cum magna horreas,  
quod posse fieri non putes metuas tamen.  
cuncta expavesco meque non credo mihi. (24-27)*

Hardly trusting myself I placed your laws,  
Nature, in safety. When you fear something great,  
you must fear even that which you do not think possible.  
I take fright at everything and do not trust even myself.

Shaken by the plague afflicting Thebes and the enigmatic prediction of the Delphic oracle, Oedipus enters the stage in this first act already fearing for his life and the safety of his rule. Fitch notes that Seneca’s initial characterization of Oedipus represents an immediate departure from Sophocles’ earlier version: “Sophocles’ Oedipus is initially a benign ruler...self-confident and determined. In complete

contrast, Seneca's Oedipus at the beginning of his play is isolated and already obsessed with anxiety and guilt."<sup>62</sup> This adjustment is representative of Seneca's focus on his hero's mental state, and it is perhaps the most noticeable way in which he draws the audience's attention away from the actual plot of the play. As the tragedy progresses we will see how Oedipus transitions from nervousness to fear and tyrannical anger before finally descending into abject guilt and self-loathing.

In a move that further frames the viewer's appreciation of Oedipus' mental condition, Seneca supplies several internal narrators whose perspectives make it difficult for anyone – Oedipus in particular – to distinguish fiction from reality. The first of these characters is Tiresias, though the weakness of his prophetic powers makes it necessary for us to consider also his oracular aides, Creon and Manto. Whereas Tiresias, despite his blindness, is typically an omniscient figure in the mythological tradition, in Seneca's play he seems crippled by his lack of sight and is unable to discover the identity of Laius' murderer as he does in Sophocles' version. In a drawn-out scene of animal sacrifice, Tiresias' daughter Manto does most of the talking as she describes the entrails of the bull to her blind father. From the audience's perspective, then, Tiresias' credibility is immediately called into question because his divinations are presumably only as accurate as Manto's account. Tiresias himself admits to his failure in the middle of the ritual when he responds to

---

<sup>62</sup> Fitch (2004) 5. Similarly, Boyle (2011 lvi-lvii) suggests that Seneca's revision draws on a Roman conception of the insecure tyrant: "Seneca confounds the Aristotelian paradigm. In stark contrast with Sophocles he begins his play with a more Roman Oedipus, isolated by his own power. Alone on stage at dawn, riddled with doubt and melancholy before the 'melancholy flame' of a 'doubtful' (*dubius*, 1) sun, preoccupied with power's deceitful allure (6 ff.), he is presented as a ruler racked by anxiety, guilt, and most of all, fear."

Manto as she relates the appearance of the sacrificial pyre: *Quid fari queam inter tumultus mentis attonitae vagus? quidnam loquar? sunt dira, sed in alto mala*(328-330)/ “What could I say, as I wander in a turmoil of amazement? What now should I say? The evils are terrible, but they are deep down.” With Tiresias’ frustration the viewer’s experience of the play begins to complicate: not even the great seer can discern the truth in this tragedy, and the details are coming to the audience through several layers of narration. Tiresias then turns to his other helper, Creon, and the auguries take on an increasingly foreboding tone.

With the animal sacrifice yielding no results, Tiresias advises the king to consult with the shade of Laius himself and Seneca moves into one of his famous necromancy scenes. The mere presence of this visit to the underworld is significant for the text because it is one of the few settings that Seneca uses in multiple tragedies. Atreus performs his human sacrifice with an audience of infernal shades in an imagined spectacle highly similar to the one described by Creon, and Medea likewise calls on the power of Dis when concocting a poison for Creusa. In all of these scenes, the very idea of breaking into the underworld and calling forth old evils is crucial to the impact of the tragedy. As Schiesaro observes, “what is personally and morally unacceptable is precisely what [the *Thyestes*] and its poetics are made of: re-enactment, repetition, obsessive return of, and return to, what could (and should) best be left unsaid.”<sup>63</sup> Just as Atreus is guilty of reviving and surpassing the ancient crimes of his house, Oedipus seals his fate when he decides to pursue the

---

<sup>63</sup> Schiesaro (2003) 28.

truth in the realm of the dead.<sup>64</sup> Oedipus is unable to see past his pride and understand that even a king does not need to know everything, and the reader begins to understand the real flaws in his character:

CREON: *Nescisse cupies nosse quae nimium expetis.*

OEDIPUS: *Iners malorum remedium ignorantia est. itane et salutis publicae indicium obrues?*

CREON: *Ubi turpis est medicina, sanari piget.*

OEDIPUS: *Audita fare, vel malo domitus gravi quid arma possint regis irat scies. (514-519)*

CREON: You will wish not to know that which you demand to learn.

OEDIPUS: Ignorance is a weak remedy for evils.  
Will you hide the cure for the public's health?

CREON: When the cure is foul, it disgusts one to be healed.

OEDIPUS: Tell what you have heard, or you will know,  
broken by pain, what the power of an angry king can do.

While Oedipus began the play as troubled and sympathetic, if somewhat weak, he transitions with this interaction into the stereotypical tyrant: blinded by desire for closure and a more stable rule, he goes to extreme lengths and oversteps the bounds of reason in his pursuit of the truth. He also exposes himself to his city's troubled past by demanding that Creon resurrect Laius' shade. Thus, the necromancy scene has multiple effects upon the audience. First, it brings forth a previously unseen side of Oedipus' character and complicates the audience's judgment of his responsibility in the tragedy.<sup>65</sup> In a broader sense, the association with the evils that have come

---

<sup>64</sup> See Boyle (2011) lxxvi: "In *Oedipus*, too, as in almost all the tragedies, fate/history is cyclic: the past repeated as the present, *semper idem*; and this cyclicity clarifies and underscores the play's determinism...It is a continuation [of the impious history of the house of Cadmus] which the play also shows – through Apollo's oracle (237), Manto's extispicy (321 ff., 360 ff.), Laius' Ghost (646), and the prescripts of the myth – has not yet ended."

<sup>65</sup> On the complexity that this scene lends to Oedipus' characterization see Boyle (2011) lxxvi: "Within the play's cycle of sin and fate Oedipus' 'guilt' is notoriously

before reminds the viewer that this play is merely one piece in a self-perpetuating cycle of human tragedy: the characters allow themselves to be tortured by the past and thus invite disaster into the present, a cautionary tale for any morally-conscientious viewer.

As critical as Creon is to revealing Oedipus' tyrannical side, however, his importance to the audience's experience of the play is not limited to simple contrast with the king's questionable logic. As I have previously mentioned Creon is one of the play's internal narrators, tasked with communicating crucial information to both Oedipus and the audience. His role is even more significant than Tiresias' or Manto's, though, because of the particular scene that Seneca relates through his eyes. The consultation with Laius' shade takes place not only offstage but *procul ab urbe*/"far off from the city"(530), with Creon and an old priest as the sole witnesses. Seneca could easily have given these lines to Tiresias, another priest, or an anonymous *nuntius*, and his choice of Creon as the narrator carries significant implications for the audience. A reader familiar with the myth might take Creon's words at face value, but the fact that the accusation comes through Creon and not directly from the shade of Laius (as in Sophocles) lends some credibility to Oedipus' furious retort:

*iam iam tenemus callidi socios doli:  
mentitur ista praeferens fraudi deos  
vates, tibi que sceptrum despondet mea.*(668-670)

Now finally we have the allies in this deceitful scheme:  
the prophet lies, proffering the gods in his trick  
and pledges my scepter to you.

---

problematic. It is also central to the play's dramatization of imperial impotence. Oedipus is and is not guilty."



Had the audience witnessed the necromancy firsthand, it might easily dismiss Oedipus' accusations as the desperate attempts of a guilty man. Considering the source of the evidence, however, the viewer has grounds to wonder whether Creon is indeed scheming to retake his family's throne. Whether or not Seneca actually means to suggest such a conspiracy is immaterial: his decision to set Creon as the narrator of the necromancy scene adds an additional layer of uncertainty to the tragedy and causes the audience to question the reality of all it has seen thus far. With so much ambiguity surrounding the true circumstances, the audience has no choice but to focus on the psychology of the characters – the only truly “visible” element of the play – as portrayed by their words and actions.

Let us now take a step back and consider what effects these framing efforts have on the audience's experience of the tragedy's conclusion and the play as a whole. Despite his initial suspicion of Creon's motives, Oedipus becomes convinced of his guilt upon hearing the accounts of Phorbas and the old man from Corinth (additional narrative figures in their own right) and imposes blind exile on himself after deciding that death is too light a punishment. Regardless of the viewer's opinions on Oedipus' guilt, the distance placed between the onstage action and the audience creates a degree of uncertainty that colors Oedipus' self-inflicted suffering in an entirely new way. Harrowed by his indistinct memories and the damning evidence provided by those around him, Oedipus flees the reality of the visible realm and enters “a no-man's-land between the world of the living (characterized by

light and sight) and the dead.”<sup>66</sup> Unlike Sophocles’ Oedipus, who blinds himself because he cannot bear to look upon his crimes any longer, Seneca’s Oedipus seeks to live in a place where his literal and moral confusion can be fittingly attributed to his lack of sight.<sup>67</sup> This makes sense to the audience, as Oedipus is now in the exact same place that the viewers have been for the entire play: they have been effectively blind to the action of the plot and reliant on internal narrators, and thus they are less confident in their own moral judgments of Oedipus. Rather than portraying Oedipus as conclusively guilty, Seneca’s framing devices give his audience ample leeway to reflect on the complexities of the tragedy and draw conclusions independently. Furthermore, the distance placed between the viewer and the most objectively horrifying parts of the play – Laius’ murder, the necromancy scene, and Oedipus’ gruesome self-blinding – prevents the audience from the type of passionate, emotional reaction that could cloud its judgment of the tragedy and its characters.

From the perspective of a moral educator, Seneca’s efforts to distance his audience from the most shocking acts of his plays work well if he believes that direct exposure to immoral acts gives rise to anger, which when unchecked hardens a

---

<sup>66</sup> Fitch (2004) 8.

<sup>67</sup> See Boyle (2011 lxvi) for a similar characterization of the difference between Oedipus’ self-inflicted punishment in Seneca and Sophocles: “The final two acts rewrite the Sophoclean ending. In the Greek play the Messenger describes how Oedipus blinds himself with the pins of Jocasta’s dress, which he snatches from her hanging corpse. Seneca’s Messenger emphasizes the blinding as an act of self-punishment carried out with Oedipus’ bare hands and spurred on not by Jocasta’s death (she is still alive) but by his own moral revulsion and shame...The Sophoclean Oedipus’ instant reaction is transformed into Senecan fusion of *furor*, *ira*, and *ratio* violent passion and precise calculation, a highly deliberated act of self-punishment, in which the *poena* itself, figured as both exile and castration, responds directly to the crimes of parricide and incest.”

person against human nature. This is a sentiment that can be found in the prose works attributed to Seneca,<sup>68</sup> though the focus of those texts is on man's reaction to real life events rather than theatrical scenes. I do not mean to imply that we should view this aspect of Seneca's philosophy as a handbook for his dramatic style, but rather that the views on passion and anger in the *De ira* provide a theoretical framework that can help us understand why Seneca the playwright may have felt responsible for the moral constitution of his audience. In the *De ira* Seneca the philosopher accepts that anger is a natural reaction to degenerate actions but asserts that it must be controlled, as unbridled passion can create destructive tendencies that were not present before. If a playwright were to apply this philosophy to stage drama, then, he might attempt to expose the audience to immorality so that they might recognize and guard themselves against it, but not in a way that risks shocking them into a state of raw emotion. Were one to view the murder of Thyestes' children firsthand, for example, it might be difficult to put aside the horrific nature of the scene and reflect in a reasonable manner on the implications of the crime. Thus the separation between the audience and the action has multiple effects: it encourages the viewer to focus on the psychological distress of the characters and analyze their decisions rationally while simultaneously shielding the audience from the harmful effects of uncensored tragedy. This is not to

---

<sup>68</sup> See Nussbaum's discussion of *De ira* (1994) 422-423: "What [Seneca] suggests, however is that [becoming angry at injustices] is not without its consequences for the human spirit. For a person who notes and reacts to every injustice must, in reacting to them all with anger, become, in the end, similar to the raging and furious people against whom he reacts. Anger hardens the spirit and turns it against the humanity it sees. And in turning against humanity, in evincing the rage and disgust of the angry, one then becomes perilously close to the cruel and aggressive types who arouse the disgust."

say, however, that framing automatically prevents the viewer from having a passionate reaction. It is perfectly plausible, for example, that an audience member might be immediately horrified by the murder of Thyestes' children even though it is never acted out onstage. What the internal narration does, however, is act as an intermediary between the audience and the tragic scenes: just as we naturally stage the plot of a novel in our minds as we read, we are forced to form our own mental picture of Seneca's most shocking scenes instead of watching passively as they play out on the stage. This process of imagination creates a cognitive distance between the viewer and the play, permitting the audience to envision the most graphic scenes in any way it sees fit. In this way, Seneca's framing techniques place the audience into a situation of subconscious reception that necessitates some degree of reflection, an approach that makes sense if Seneca hoped that his viewer would evaluate the moral implications of his more graphic scenes before having an emotional reaction instead of reacting passionately first and then attempting to make sense of the tragedy.

#### **iv. *Agamemnon***

Before turning to Gager and his narrative methods, an additional example from the Senecan corpus will shed further light on a point referenced only briefly in my treatment of *Oedipus*. I have mentioned that Seneca's tragedies are often driven by the crimes of previous generations: we need to look no further than the "ghost scenes" that open *Thyestes* and *Agamemnon* to see how the plays draw on the past to initiate new tragedies. Ancient evils quite literally spring from the earth and inspire the newest generation to deeds of even more horrifying magnitude. In this way, the

tragedies are more than isolated incidents of evil: they are the products of a cycle marked by revenge and anger, emotions that arise repeatedly from “the relentless conflicts that plague successive generations.”<sup>69</sup> *Agamemnon* is particularly interesting in this respect because it takes place immediately after an event of enormous mythological significance – the Trojan War. In the introduction to his 2004 translation, Fitch notes that the multiple perspectives within the play provide the audience with several different views on the causes of the tragedy unfolding onstage, thereby complicating both the actual plot of the play and the means by which the viewer might interpret it.<sup>70</sup> Tarrant also notes the importance of variations in frames of reference and suggests that it is Agamemnon’s conspicuous absence from his own play (he is onstage for a mere 26 lines) that causes the reader to analyze the king and subsequent murder through the perspectives of each other character in the play.<sup>71</sup> Both of these approaches to *Agamemnon* and its moral outcomes will inform my reading in that I will treat individual characters as

---

<sup>69</sup> Schiesaro (2003) 64.

<sup>70</sup> See Fitch (2004) 118f: “The play’s multiple viewpoints offer multiple ways of understanding events. For Thyestes, the coming murder represents revenge on Atreus’ descendant; for Clytemnestra, revenge on Agamemnon himself; for Aegisthus, the crisis of his life, a desperate throw of the dice; for Cassandra, a recompense for Troy’s doom, which at the same time seals her own fate. None of these ways of understanding appears authoritative, in the sense of excluding others. This situation corresponds to the fact that none of the dramatis personae is central or dominant in the play – least of all Agamemnon himself, who is onstage for only 26 lines. Authority is decentered both in the events of the play and in ways of understanding them.”

<sup>71</sup> See Tarrant (1976) 4: “The insignificance of Agamemnon is striking. If it is taken as part of Seneca’s design, important consequences follow, for it is clear that, on a notional rather than a theatrical level, Agamemnon (or, more precisely, his death) is the central and unifying point of the drama. Every figure in the play is affected by it and reacts to it, each from a distinct and personal point of view...These attitudes are presented *seriatim* and largely in isolation; the autonomous outlook of each character is carefully preserved, and the play does not compel choice among them.”

elements of Seneca's unique narrative method. A close reading of two characters in particular – Eurybates and Cassandra – will show how they function as framing elements that highlight the inevitability of human tragedy and foreshadow its imminent consequences while simultaneously reminding the reader that the protagonists – as well as the victims – of tragedy are condemned as soon as destructive passion enters their minds.

Eurybates is the herald of Agamemnon's ship, and he enters the tragedy at Act III to announce the imminent arrival of the king. Aegisthus and Clytemnestra have spent the previous act debating and plotting their next move, and it seems that a trap has already been set for the helpless Agamemnon. Eurybates does not only bear good tidings, however: at Clytemnestra's prompting he relates the tale of the storm that destroyed most of the fleet and took the lives of many Greek captains. This story has no real significance to the plot of the tragedy, and thus the expansive plot space that Seneca allows for it – 158 uninterrupted lines directly in the middle of the play – seems somewhat unusual.<sup>72</sup> Familiarity with Seneca's framing techniques, however, allows us to analyze more effectively this scene and its implications for the surrounding tragedy.

---

<sup>72</sup> Tarrant's brief description of Eurybates' function provides support for my analysis in this section. See Tarrant (1976) 4f: "The first two acts present Agamemnon's murder in a familial setting; the themes stressed, known to us from Aeschylus, are the self-perpetuation of crime and the danger of high position. The second part of the play, from the entrance of the Trojan chorus (589), places the murder against the background of Troy's fall, developing a Euripidean equation of conqueror and conquered and so demonstrating the emptiness of power under another aspect. Between these main sections comes Eurybates describing Agamemnon's return from Troy to Greece (421-578); since it has no close connection with the action in either of the phases, it is an apt transitional element."

The first aspect of Eurybates' story that marks it as significant for the play as a whole is the way that his language connects his tale to the events of other Senecan tragedies. Though Eurybates initially claims that the fleet fell victim to *sors maris*/"the lot of the sea" (407), it quickly becomes clear that this was no mere squall. At the onset of the storm, Eurybates describes how the gathering storm clouds obscured all light from the day:

*nox prima caelum sparserat stellis, iacent  
deserta vento vela. tum murmur grave,  
maiora minitans, collibus summis cadit  
tractuque longo litus ac petrae gemunt;  
agitata ventis unda venturis tumet:  
cum subito luna conditur, stellae latent.  
nec una nox est: densa tenebras obruit  
caligo et omni luce subducta fretum  
caelumque miscet. (465-474)*

An early night scattered the sky with stars,  
the sails lay deserted by the wind. Then a deep groan,  
threatening worse things, fell from the high hills  
and the shore and cliffs moaned with a long sound;  
Waves swelled, tossed up by approaching winds:  
when suddenly the moon was covered and the stars were hidden  
Nor is it night alone: a dense shade covered the darkness  
and having stolen all light it mixed up sea and sky.

Here, as in other Senecan tragedies, the upheaval of the natural world portends great evil for the players. Compare the language of the passage above to the chorus' description of the natural phenomena in *Thyestes* following Atreus' murder of the children: *Solitae mundi periere vices; nihil occasus, nihil ortus erit*/"The normal cycles of the heavens are lost; there will be no sunset, no sunrise (813-814)." Similarly, the chorus in *Medea* encourages Phoebus to flee in the face of Medea's terrible plot:

*Nunc, Phoebe, mitte currus  
nullo morante loro,  
nox condat alma lucem,*

*mergat diem timendum  
dux noctis Hesperus. (874-878)*

Now, Phoebus, send your chariot  
with no delay from the reins,  
let blessed night hide the day,  
and let the fearful day be concealed  
by Hesperus, leader of the night.

Seneca's protagonists have the ability to disrupt the most basic laws of nature, and such unnatural occurrences become harbingers of terrible crime. The way in which Eurybates describes the storm connects it to the rest of the tragic cycle and reminds the viewer that the impending murder of Agamemnon is not an isolated, inexplicable event.

The other significant attribute of Eurybates' narration is his portrayal of the storm as an act of divine vengeance. First he tells how the four winds descended upon the fleet as sentient beings, intent on destruction (474ff). Then, in a more direct act of supernatural intervention, Pallas Athena herself takes up one of her father's thunderbolts and with Poseidon's help strikes down Ajax, who was standing amidst the storm boasting of his invulnerability (528ff). No reasons are given for this fury of the gods until the end of the passage, when Eurybates describes the abatement of the storm:

*cecidit in lucem furor;  
postquam litatum est Ilio, Phoebus redit  
et damna noctis tristis ostendit dies. (576-578)*

The rage subsided in daylight;  
After the debt was paid for Ilium, Phoebus returned  
and the grim day showed the misfortune of the night.

While we must assume that this is Eurybates' own interpretation of the disaster, it is important that he characterizes the storm as retribution for the events at Troy.



Apparently even those who escaped the battles must eventually pay the price for participating in the sack of Troy, just as Agamemnon soon will. In a way, the deaths at sea are in fact even worse than those at Troy because the sailors die a coward's death compared to their comrades who fell on the battlefield. Eurybates tells how the men at sea bemoaned their misfortune as they drowned: *quisquis ad Troiam iacet felix vocatur, cadere qui meruit gradu, quem fama servat, victa quem tellus tegit*/"All who lie at Troy are called lucky [by the sailors], those who deserved to fall on their feet, those whom fame preserves, those whom the conquered walls protect (514-516)." In this way Eurybates connects the impending tragedy not only with the violent history of the house of Tantalus but also with the epic saga of bloodshed and destruction at Troy. The passage also contains an allusion to *Aeneid* I that would have been quite clear to Seneca's audience, and thus Eurybates' words relate the *Agamemnon* not only to the Homeric cycle but also to the epic tradition of imperial Rome.<sup>73</sup> The associations come easily into the minds of the audience and remind them that this story is just a small part of a continuously unfolding tragic cycle, and that individual acts of evil only beget more evil through the desire for revenge. Most importantly, a sense of the cyclical nature of human tragedy adds urgency to the audience's analysis of the *Agamemnon*: the viewers must learn from the characters onstage and their fates in order to avoid falling into similar misfortunes. The fates of the Greek sailors and later of Agamemnon himself become warnings against the

---

<sup>73</sup> Compare Eurybates' lines to Aeneas' opening speech at *Aen.*I.94ff: *O terque quaterque beati, quis ante ora partum Troiae sub moenibus altis contigit oppetere!*/"O thrice and four times blessed, those who died before the faces of their ancestors beneath the high walls of Troy!"

danger of submitting to courses of action motivated by passionate and immoral emotion.

Cassandra is the other character who functions as a framing device for Seneca, and she is even more interesting than Eurybates because of her place in the mythological tradition. She is, of course, the constantly ignored prophetic of Apollo, and indeed in the *Agamemnon* her predictions continue to go unheeded. Cassandra's most significant contribution to the tragedy is her narration of Agamemnon's murder at the beginning of Act 5. Like Eurybates she connects the murder to both Troy (*bene est, resurgis, Troia*/"Good, Troy, you are rising again" (870)) and the ancient crimes of Agamemnon's house (*uterque tanto scelere respondet suis: est hic Thyestae natus, haec Helenae soror*/"Each looks back to their own with so great a crime: he is Thyestes' son, she the sister of Helen" (906-907)). More interesting, though, is the particular way in which she observes the murder. Once again, Seneca could have used a nameless *nuntius* or any other eyewitness to stage the crime, but his placement of the narrative within Cassandra's mind has profound implications for the audience. Having already reminded the viewer of this tragedy's place in the cycle of crime and revenge, Cassandra's vision brings the audience's focus back into the true source of all these misfortune – the mind. The psychological focus of Seneca's tragedies, discussed above, is reinforced here as the audience witnesses not a direct staging of the murder but rather a creation of the mind: Cassandra relates the murder as it appears in her prophetic consciousness and simultaneously the scene plays out in the imagination of each viewer. Cassandra herself recognizes the source of her anguish, as she ascribes the vision to her *own*

madness: *anime, consurge et cape pretium furoris*/"Rise up, my spirit, and take the reward of your madness (868-869)." She has committed no crime directly, but she knows that simply by being involved in the tragedy she has exposed her mind to *furor* and is therefore doomed. In a way, then, Cassandra is shielding the audience from the murder by allowing it to impact her own psyche directly: she witnesses the crime firsthand so that the viewer does not have to, allowing the audience to learn from the tragedy from a 'safe' cognitive distance while she submits her consciousness to destructive passion in the viewer's stead. This brings us back to the idea of framing as a way to prevent the audience from direct exposure to scenes that might cause harmful emotion and passion. In this case, Seneca's narrative decisions provide the audience with space to reflect while simultaneously reminding them that despite the play's connections to history and the physical world, the true source of tragedy remains the human psyche.

In the final scene of the *Agamemnon*, Cassandra provides one of the most lucid moments of any character in the Senecan corpus. Clytemnestra is attempting to destroy every member of Agamemnon's house in her murder-fueled madness, and when she commands her servants to drag Cassandra away for execution the prophetess objects merely to the manner of her capture:

*Ne trahite, vestros ipsa praecedam gradus.  
perferre prima nuntium Phrygibus meis  
propero: repletum ratibus eversis mare,  
captas Mycenae, mille ductorem ducum,  
ut paria fata Troicis lueret malis,  
perisse dono, feminae sturpo, dolo.  
nihil moramur, rapite, quin grates ago:  
iam iam iuvat vixisse post Troiam, iuvat. (1004-1011)*

Do not drag me, I will walk before you myself.

I am eager to reach my Phrygians as the first messenger;  
the sea filled with capsized ships, Mycenae captured,  
the leader of one thousand leaders, how he perished  
in a fate equal to the sufferings of Troy,  
killed by a gift, by the lust of a woman, by a trick.  
Let us delay no more, hurry, I even give you thanks.  
Now finally I am happy to have lived longer than Troy.

Cassandra's words are more than simply a Stoic acceptance of her fate: unlike every other character, she is perfectly aware of her place in the tragic cycle and knows that her involvement in the events of the play has assuredly doomed her. With this speech Cassandra displays her understanding of the tragedy and her place in it, and her eager acceptance of death thus becomes a rational response to the inescapable nature of the tragic cycle. She knows that she cannot save herself and instead looks forward to relating her experience to her fellow deceased Trojans, who will become her new audience once she exits Seneca's stage. In this sense, Cassandra is a textual parallel for Seneca's viewer in that she knows that this crime will eventually destroy its perpetrators, though she is unable to communicate this to the other characters.<sup>74</sup>

Thus her final words – the last line of the play – ring in the viewer's ears as the tragedy comes to a close: *veniet et vobis furor*/"madness will come to you as well

---

<sup>74</sup> Fitch notes that Cassandra's desire for death reflects a theme common to the Senecan corpus. See Fitch (2004) 123: "Cassandra too sees death as freedom and safety (796-797). It is the one understanding widely shared in the play. Indeed it is shared in other plays also, notably in *Trojan Women*. From one viewpoint it seems a tragic understanding, perhaps the darkest of all *Agamemnon's* dark visions. Yet Seneca as philosopher held and taught it as a source of strength, in an era when death could come at any time to slave or senator." Though my discussion does not treat the Senecan prose works as Fitch's does, his observation that Cassandra's statements on the relative preferability of death would have resonated with a Roman audience is significant. Her powerlessness in the face of this tragedy underscores the impossibility of controlling passion through rationality, and when we examine Gager's narrative techniques we will see how his adaptations provide a more optimistic outlook than Seneca presents in this passage.

(1012).” The audience is well aware of what will happen to Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, but Cassandra’s prediction seems to suggest more than just the inevitable punishments of the villains. As a result of Seneca’s framing efforts, the viewer understands the psychological catalysts of tragedy as well as its ability to engender further crime. Cassandra’s closing lines can thus seem a warning to the audience itself: Clytemnestra and Aegisthus are lost because they will never believe Cassandra’s prophecy, but the viewer is yet able to take her words to heart and equip himself against the maddening effects of passion.

#### **v. Gager’s Narrative Technique**

As we turn now to Gager’s dramatic techniques we should recall our earlier discussion of Gager’s appreciation of his tragedies’ moral implications. The evidence drawn from the adjustments he makes to the *Phaedra* as well as the details of his debate with Rainolds suggest that Gager was, at the very least, well aware of his plays’ potential effects on the viewer’s moral constitution. If we assume that moral education was indeed one of Gager’s influences in producing tragedy, we can consider any major changes that he makes to Seneca’s form in relation to the adaptation’s intended effect upon the audience’s moral development. As mentioned above, Gager’s most pronounced deviation from Senecan style is his decision to eliminate Seneca’s framing devices and foreground the action of his tragedies. Indeed, Gager does away almost entirely with internal narrators such as the *nuntius* and opts instead to actively stage all but the most graphic scenes. Again, it is easy to write this difference off as a move towards more entertaining and watchable stage drama, but such a reductive approach overlooks the broader implications that

Gager's staging decisions have for his adaptation of Senecan form. Through a close analysis of one tragedy's narrative techniques, I will show how Gager places significant developmental demands upon his characters while suggesting a reversal of Seneca's treatment of his audience's moral conscience. Specifically, I plan to argue Gager's effort to develop multiple characters – including the protagonist and his victims – helps the audience to better understand the tragedy by allowing the viewer to consider the play's moral implications from multiple perspectives.

#### **vi. *Ulysses Redux***

Of Gager's full-length tragedies *Ulysses Redux* is the most expansive, edging out *Meleager* by 150 lines of dialogue. The play's length is testimony to Gager's comprehensive adaptation of his epic model, as he condenses the second half of the *Odyssey* into a five-act tragedy with impressive attention to detail. Yet while the configuration of *Ulysses Redux* clearly imitates its Senecan models – with its five-act structure and moralizing citizen chorus – its content could not be more different. This play in particular receives undivided treatment in the following section because it best illustrates how Gager's reinvention of Seneca's narrative technique can fundamentally change the nature of a tragedy and its effect on the audience. By tracking the development of both the tragic hero and the "victims" of *Ulysses Redux*, we will see how Gager's surface changes result in a deeper revision of Senecan form: his focus on the characters and their actions reverses Seneca's method of psychological explication and adds an appreciation of human agency to the audience's moral judgments of all the play's tragic figures.

Books 12-24 of the *Odyssey* are particularly well suited to the genre of tragedy because, on the most basic level, Ulysses' defeat of the suitors is very similar to a revenge drama. Ulysses is a powerful king who feels deeply wronged, and he must develop a detailed plan in order to carry out the brutal slaughter that is his revenge and his ultimate victory. Yet unlike Seneca's protagonists, who are immediately prepared to commit their incredible crimes, the Ulysses of Gager's drama must undergo significant development before he can slaughter the suitors. This is a crucial difference in narrative technique and, as my study of Ulysses' character will show, it is the primary means by which Gager brings his audience's attention away from the psychological states of the players and towards the each character's actions and the consequences thereof. Whereas Seneca's dramaturgical methods – such as the framing devices described above – keep the viewer focused on the passions and emotions driving the hero's madness, the developmental demands placed on Ulysses remind Gager's audience that this protagonist is ultimately human and operating in the same world as each viewer.

It is important to note first that Ulysses begins his own tragedy at his lowest point and is initially powerless to exact his revenge. Gager signals his hero's impotence as soon as the curtain lifts, tagging the first scene of the opening act with the stage direction ULYSSES SOLUS. This decision carries significant implications for the viewer or the reader, as both greet the eponymous hero in his weakest state – alone and confused on a seemingly foreign shore. Even after learning from Minerva that he is indeed in Ithaca, Ulysses confirms his fragile psychological condition when he affirms his inability to retake his throne by himself:

*O triste fatum, sorsque crudelis mea!  
manebit, eheu, me domi Atridae exitus,  
nisi tu prohibeas, diva; tu praestes opem,  
solitumque robur pectori inspires meo,  
animumque reddas, qualis in Troia fuit  
olim eruenda. Solus haud metuam aggredi  
iuvante te, Minerva, ter centum procos. (180-186)*

O sad fate, my cruel lot! Alas,  
the fate of Atreus' son waits for me at home,  
unless you prevent it, goddess; give me aid,  
breathe into my breast the usual strength,  
give me back my spirit, just as it once was  
at the sack of Troy. With your assistance, Minerva,  
I should hardly fear attacking three hundred suitors alone.

In this manner unbecoming of an epic hero, Ulysses freely admits his impotence and shows that he is in no way ready to assume his role in the drama. Throughout the first act Gager characterizes Ulysses in this way so as to set up his hero's development into a figure worthy of the tragic hero's mantle. This is the critical moment of departure from the Senecan model, as Gager will put Ulysses through a series of trials not required of any Senecan heroes.

Ulysses' progression towards his revenge scene begins in Act II with his boxing match against Irus, the boastful palace beggar, an encounter that represents his first rite of passage as a potential tragic hero. Unlike Seneca's heroes, who are immediately able to plan and carry out their crimes, Ulysses must first prove himself in combat before even gaining admittance to the site of his revenge. Gager lays out the terms of the contest through Antinous' wager:

*audite iuvenes, iste sit pugnae exitus.  
uter ecce victor fuerit, huic semper dehinc  
pingues licebit esse nobiscum dapes,  
nec habeat alium nostra mendicum domus. (645-648)*

Listen, men, let this be the result of the battle.



Let whoever is the winner be always allowed  
to be with us at our lavish banquets,  
and let this house then have no other beggar.

The implications of the fight are clear: Ulysses is currently no better than the resident beggar, and before he can engage with the suitors he must prove himself worthy to panhandle at their tables. This is a remarkable debasement of the tragic hero, and it shows that Gager intends to build Ulysses into a worthy figure from the ground up. The boxing match is just the first in a series of tests Ulysses must pass in order to defeat the suitors and achieve his homecoming.

From a broader perspective, the boxing match also initiates a second developmental track for Ulysses. The very fact that Gager chooses to stage the incident clashes with Senecan form because it places the tragic hero into a decidedly non-tragic situation: not only do Seneca's characters not have to prove themselves to anyone, but they also never engage another character in physical combat. In this sense, Ulysses' bout with Irus represents a departure from the genre of tragedy itself into an almost comic setting. Only the audience is aware of Ulysses' true identity, making Irus' arrogant challenge and horribly misguided characterization of Ulysses wholly amusing: *vetulae miser rubiginosae similis*/"the wretch is like a wrinkled old dodderer" (636-637). Ulysses contributes to the parody by debating in an aside the audience how best to bring an end to the ridiculous affair: *incertus haeret animus ignavo statim an impudentiam verberibus animam auferam leviterve caedam*/"my mind is uncertain whether to immediately kill the coward with my hands or strike him lightly" (672-674). Everyone is aware of the mismatch except Irus and the suitors, though they quickly realize their mistake when Ulysses easily

dispatches the beggar and throws him out of the palace by his foot, symbolically recapturing his own threshold and gaining for himself the unlikely position of chief vagrant. Gager's placement of Ulysses within a comic context is significant because it implies that not only has Ulysses not yet shown himself worthy of the tragic hero's role, but he has yet to even enter the domain of tragedy itself.

In addition to introducing Ulysses' developmental challenges, the boxing match provides an opportunity for the suitors to evolve as individual personalities. Through their commentary on the fight, some of the suitors display a potential for maturation that puts them on track to become sympathetic characters in the eyes of the audience. Eurymachus and Amphinomus, who represent the more rational and sympathetic of the suitors, recognize Ulysses' power and hint at their potential for salvation from the impending disaster by paying him appropriate respect.

Eurymachus is the first to point out the beggar's hidden talents, breaking briefly from the customary arrogance of the suitors to compliment their new guest:

*En veste lacera quale crus miser extulit!  
Et quale pectus! Quos lacertorum toros,  
humerosque quales! Fronte iam vereor sibi  
famelicus Irus grande contraxit malum. (676-679)*

Behold what a leg the beggar shows through his torn clothes!  
And what a chest! What muscles on his arms and shoulders!  
I fear now that hungry Irus has drawn great evil with his cheek.

Eurymachus admits that Ulysses can inspire fear (*vereor*) and praises him after the fight, handing him a prize for his *virtutes* (687). Amphinomus likewise offers a toast to Ulysses' health and prosperity, prompting unexpectedly kind words from Ulysses, who advises him to escape the palace before its master returns (692ff). These two suitors thus generate a degree of sympathy from both the audience and Ulysses,

who reflects sadly that Amphinomus' association with the others will doom him despite his innate virtue (721ff). In this way Gager initiates the moral development of some of Ulysses' victims and foreshadows their contrition, creating a characterization not usually granted to Senecan characters until *after* their punishment. This scene marks the beginning of Gager's build-up to a morally complex climax that departs from the conventions of its Senecan model.

The next major narrative decision Gager faces comes in Act IV when he puts on the famous contest of the bow. Interestingly, Gager makes one of his rare departures from the Homeric model when he separates the contest from the slaughter of the suitors. Whereas in the *Odyssey* the stringing of the bow leads immediately into the battle in the palace hall, Gager isolates the scene and places several brief conversations between the contest and the climactic carnage. From the audience's perspective, this decision heightens the dramatic tension and once again imposes a rite of passage upon the hero. Having already established himself as a beggar worthy of the palace's scraps, Ulysses must now prove himself among the suitors before he can finally carry out his revenge. In contrast to the Irus scene, however, there is nothing comic about the bow contest: Penelope designates the bow as the ultimate measure of the suitors' worth, promising to marry whoever might string it (1301f), and the stage direction indicates that Eumaeus and Philaetius should weep visibly as they carry it into the hall. Gager's embellishment of the presentation of the bow signals Ulysses' transition into the tragic realm, and the ease with which he strings the bow denotes his decisive assumption of the hero's role. This extra trial of strength makes Ulysses seem even more worthy of his

eventual triumph, suggesting that Gager wants the slaughter to seem absolutely justified from every possible perspective.

Just as Ulysses asserts his dominance over the suitors through the contest, the scene also provides another opportunity for the suitors' admissions of inferiority to Ulysses – with the conspicuous exception of Antinous. Eight minor suitors try the bow in quick succession, and each signals his defeat with a brief line bemoaning his own weakness and the strength of the bow. Eurymachus is the last to try, and in his failure he gives voice to the implications of the other suitors' failure: *viribus Ulyssi tam sumus longe impares*/"in strength we are far unequal to Ulysses" (1351). Eurymachus' recognition of their inadequacy to replace Ulysses is a fairly surprising sentiment, considering the arrogance he and the suitors famously display in Homer, and it furthers his development into a character worthy of redemption. Antithetical to Eurymachus' progress is Antinous, who represents the worst of the suitors and the pride that will ultimately lead to their demise. Once he sees all of his comrades fail he refuses to even attempt the bow lest it damage his reputation, and instead begs off the challenge by claiming that Diana will not permit the contest on her feast day (1353ff). After this show of cowardice he further displays his faults by mocking Ulysses' request to try the bow. He threatens to kill Eumaeus if he hands Ulysses the string (1397f) and curses Ulysses despite his success, vowing to retreat with the others until they devise a remedy for this injustice (1428ff). In every sense that Eurymachus becomes a more sympathetic character Antinous proves himself increasingly guilty, and by juxtaposing their attitudes Gager creates a complicated view of the suitors for the audience. Clearly the suitors will all eventually die, but

Gager's complex characterization of this generally vilified group suggests to the audience that not all the victims are equally culpable, and that moral responsibility in tragedy is rarely as simple as it may seem.

With his protagonist appropriately qualified and the victims separately characterized, Gager finally brings the play to climax and dispenses justice carefully. Through the staging of this critical scene we see Gager's modification of Senecan form come to fruition in a way that challenges the reader's conception of the tragic hero as well as the nature of crime and punishment. The massacre begins, of course, with the ignominious murder of Antinous; not only is he refused his final words, but he does not even die in battle and instead perishes ingloriously while helping himself to yet another cup of Ulysses' wine. Antinous' cowardly death fits his character perfectly and, unlike many of Seneca's victims, his fate seems completely justified. Eurymachus' murder, however, is no less inevitable than Antinous' yet significantly more complicated. Unlike Antinous, Eurymachus is given a chance to speak to Ulysses and attempts to stay his hand, which he does by admitting his crime and placing the responsibility squarely on Antinous (1649ff). This explanation would seem like desperate cowardice had Gager not taken care to develop Eurymachus as a sympathetic character capable of contrition. Because Eurymachus has already displayed his respect for Ulysses and his reservations about the suitors' actions, the audience can react positively to his pleas and hope in vain the Ulysses might give Eurymachus the opportunity to pursue a more virtuous life. The pathos of this exchange also develops Ulysses further as the tragic hero in how he brutally denies Eurymachus' reasonable request for reprieve. His invective is distinctly

Senecan, putting him on par with the likes of Atreus in his furious refusal of mercy and his dissatisfaction with a simple revenge: *non iste numerus scelera tot penset tamen. Unum iuvat, quod nemo vitabit malum*/"not even the whole number [of suitors] can repay this crime. One thing pleases me, that none will survive this evil" (1674-1675). Gager employs Senecan language now that Ulysses has finally become the tragic hero, but Eurymachus' self-eulogy is an device of Gager's that complicates the nature of the play's climax. It is a detail that broadens the audience's experience of the tragedy – rather than judging the suitors as one immoral whole, they must evaluate the characters separately – but simultaneously reminds the viewer that Eurymachus is guilty, and no amount of contrition can save him.

Once the primary suitors have been dispatched, Gager makes several interesting narrative decisions in his treatment of the remaining deaths. Whereas the most important characters are killed in full view of the audience, the rest of the suitors meet their demise behind the closed doors of the banquet hall and under the cover of a loud drum beat – a device that the stage direction employs *ut decorum inserviantur*/"so as to preserve decorum." At the end of the massacre the doors open to reveal the gore within, an allusion to *Thyestes* that draws attention to the slight differences between Ulysses and Atreus' revenge.<sup>75</sup> Whereas death is never enough for Atreus and the rest of Seneca's protagonists, Ulysses is satisfied in simply killing

---

<sup>75</sup> Compare Gager's stage direction *peracta caede, fores stragemque pandunt, iacentibus transfixisque procis, et ora manusque sanguine respersis, eversa ac cruentata mensa.*/"When the slaughter is complete, the doors reveal the carnage, the suitors lying transfixed, with bloodied hands and faces, the tables overturned and smeared with gore" to Atreus' verbalized stage direction when he eagerly demands to witness Thyestes' punishment: "*Turba famularis, fores templi relaxa, festa patefiat domus*/"You, crowd of servants, unlock the doors of the temple, let the feast of the palace become visible. (901-2)

most of the suitors; this distinction makes Ulysses' revenge seem a triumph rather than a crime, as he exacts retribution but refrains from the horrific, unnatural methods characteristic of Senecan protagonists. Ulysses cannot completely restrain his rage, however, as he saves Melanthius for a more gruesome fate of torture and death by slow dismemberment and orders his attendants to round up the traitorous maidservants to be hung (1753ff). This detail adds an element of depravity to Ulysses' justifiable revenge, as Gager does not allow his hero to be completely free from fault. As Gager mixes elements of Senecan madness into a scene that also involves a great degree of very reasonable sympathy for the victims, the audience begins to understand that human tragedy is never simple and that the moral character of everyone involved should be examined based on their actions and the consequences they eventually face.

### **vii. Conclusion**

It would not be unreasonable to assume that the major stylistic differences between *Ulysses Redux* and its Senecan models result, at least in part, from Gager's attempt to adapt epic source material into an actable tragedy. Indeed, he points out the implications of his revisions in his *Prologus ad Academicos* when he admits that his audience "will hear nothing grand, nothing written in the pen of Sophocles or Seneca."<sup>76</sup> Simply by referencing his dramatic paragons in the prologue, however, Gager reminds his audience that they are about to witness his modern vision of the ancient form. While his dramaturgical adaptations are quite striking, as we have seen, they do not all imply wholesale revision of Seneca's aims. Just as Seneca's

---

<sup>76</sup> 29-30: *nil audietis grande, nil Sophoclis stilo Senecaeve scriptum.*

framing devices encourage his audience to evaluate his tragedies calmly and without distracting emotions, Gager's narrative decisions forestall simplistic or emotional reactions on the audience's part and allow his viewers to consider the moral implications of his plays from multiple perspectives. The key difference is that Gager's techniques force the audience to evaluate the characters and their fates by directly witnessing their actions as well as their reactions to the performances of the other players. Furthermore, Gager's efforts to foreground the action of his plays raises the possibility that he disagrees with Seneca's views on responsibility and guilt in human tragedy. Seneca's focus on the psychology of his tragic heroes implies to his audience that their physical crimes are simply extensions of their destructive passions, and that the true dangers to human morality lie in the inability to control emotions such as love or anger. While Gager also gives his characters ample space to justify their actions through rhetoric and display the development of their psychological states, he ultimately concentrates on actions when dispensing justice – just as, perhaps, his audience will when drawing moral lessons from his plays. Gager's characters quite literally live and die by the inherent morality of their acts, and thus his staging decisions are far more than exciting spectacles on the modern stage.



## Chapter III – The Citizen Chorus: Character, Spectator, Philosopher

### i. Introduction

For a first-time reader of Gager's tragedies, the end-of-act choruses might be among the most noticeably Senecan aspects of the plays. Gager's choruses take the stage at the close of each act and speak, usually in a meter distinct from the dialogue, about relevant philosophical subjects or the details of the previous scenes. Like Seneca's choruses they are vaguely identified as citizens of the kingdom and occasionally interact briefly with real characters – particularly when a messenger or aide is describing offstage action. Furthermore, Gager's handling of his chorus is similar to Seneca's in that the chorus is a multipurpose dramatic tool, sometimes endowed with knowledge of the tragic conclusion and able to foreshadow future events while at other points ignorant of all but the most apparent details of the situation at hand. The chorus is also where Gager occasionally includes some of the more abstract discussions of nature and fortune, along with some other Senecan subjects like the nature of responsible kingship or the virtue of a humble life. Overall, Gager's choruses appear – at least on the surface – to function just like Seneca's, but closer examination reveals some key differences.

First, and most noticeably, Gager's choruses are considerably reduced in length when compared to Seneca's: Seneca's choruses tend to average more than seventy lines per ode, while Gager's rarely exceed twenty-five. This is a significant adjustment on Gager's part that can hardly be attributed to an attempt at brevity, since Gager had no qualms about expanding the line numbers of his tragedies from

the Seneca's typical lengths. The shorter odes give the chorus less space to expound on their philosophical topics, and sometimes the chorus offers no more than simple recap and exposition of the preceding act. Furthermore, Gager's tragedies include far more "sub-choruses," inventions of Gager's that will be key to our understanding of the choral role in his tragedies. Whereas Seneca rarely employs more than one distinct chorus in each play – the Trojan women of the *Agamemnon* being a notable exception – Gager's tragedies feature additional choral odes performed either by single characters or groups of cast members. I will refer to these odes as "sub-choruses" because they are clearly separated from the dialogue by meter and content. Unlike the dialogue that accounts for the majority of Gager's lines, which are almost exclusively delivered in iambic trimeters, the sub-choruses feature a variety of lyric meters including Greater Alcaics,<sup>77</sup> Anapaestic dimeters,<sup>78</sup> and Sapphic hendecasyllables.<sup>79</sup> The sub-choruses also present a definite break in the action of the plot in that they take up abstract subjects that are related to the play but do not discuss the details of the tragedy. The hymn to chastity in Act III of *Ulysses Redux* is an example of this distinction. Thus "sub-chorus" is the most appropriate term for these odes because their meter and subject matter connects them with the traditional chorus rather than the dialogue.

Though it may seem that Gager's alterations to the choral role serve merely to spread out the philosophical discourse of the tragedies over several different choral figures, the true function of his odes is more complicated. In this chapter I

---

<sup>77</sup> e.g. the *Carmen* at *Ulysses* III.774ff.

<sup>78</sup> e.g. Iopas' *Hymnus* at *Dido* II.321ff.

<sup>79</sup> e.g. Phemius' *Hymnus* at *Ulysses* V.1780ff.

plan to show how Gager's use of the chorus helps to transfer the moral weight of his tragedies from the abstract discussions of the chorus to the characters and their actions, which are happening in real time before the audience's eyes. I will argue that Seneca's choruses, which act as a surrogate audience of sorts, are key aspects of the distancing effects that create space for rational reflection on the viewer's part and provide the theoretical framework for such criticism. Gager, on the other hand, removes this responsibility from his main choruses and thereby brings his audience's attention closer to the actions and consequences playing out onstage. By contrasting Gager's use of the choral ode with Seneca's, I hope to show how Gager's adaptations minimize the importance of the chorus in guiding the viewer's understanding of the tragedies' moral issues and encourages the audience to draw its conclusions independently by evaluating the behavior of the characters in each scene.

## **ii. The Senecan Chorus: Critical Approaches**

Before we analyze specific plays, it will be useful to look at a few common ways that Seneca uses the chorus in his tragedies. First of all there is how Seneca sets up the chorus as an onstage model for the audience, a group within the play whose reactions and emotions could conceivably mirror those of the actual viewer.<sup>80</sup> Since the chorus is rarely given an identity, we generally assume that it is made up of a group of common citizens who are directly affected by the events of

---

<sup>80</sup> See Littlewood (2004) for a discussion of the chorus as an onstage audience, particularly 172ff: "the tragic chorus, traditionally as much spectator as actor, offers a model of audience response so representations of spectacles and spectators are formal devices through which actual readers and spectators are made to reflect upon their response to the dramatic events."

the tragedy but never in control. When I discuss the psychological effects of Seneca's tragedies this aspect of the choral role will be crucial. The idea of spectatorship is very important to Senecan tragedy, as the multiple levels of narration within the texts cast the characters as spectators alongside the audience. The most shocking scenes, like Atreus' sacrifice of Thyestes' children or Agamemnon's murder, are not staged but rather related through a third party speaking to the chorus. Thus the chorus functions in part to allow for lengthy descriptions of offstage action that would otherwise violate the space between the players and the audience.<sup>81</sup>

Perhaps the most noticeable aspect of the Senecan chorus is its tendency towards philosophical commentary on subjects such as the instability of kingship or the whims of Fortune. These abstract odes generally have some relevance to the tragedy at hand – like *Thyestes'* second chorus, which discusses the dangers of kingship just after Atreus describes his fear of losing the throne – and provide a theoretical framework for the audience as it reacts to the unfolding drama. The chorus' response to the actions of the protagonists represents the natural reaction of a group of concerned observers, but as the chorus never has any discernable effect on the plot its philosophical discussions can offer no more than an outsider's perspective on the moral issues at hand.<sup>82</sup> As we will see, the chorus occasionally

---

<sup>81</sup> In his discussion of the chorus in the *Troades*, Hill (2000) argues that the choral role is practical as well as aesthetic, in that it serves as means of informing the audience without breaking down dramatic form. See esp. 581ff: "Surely, the real purpose of Talthybius' speech is to convey horror and information to the audience; the presence of the chorus allows Talthybius to speak naturally with the audience overhearing as bystanders. If Talthybius addressed the audience directly, it would tend to break the suspended disbelief."

<sup>82</sup> The problems inherent in treating the chorus as an authoritative figure are treated often in Senecan scholarship, and several critics' observations of the effects

displays fundamental misunderstandings of the onstage events and thus precludes itself from acting as the authorial voice within the play. Rather than reading the chorus as an authoritative source of moral understanding, I hope to show how Seneca's odes function to contextualize the events of his tragedies for the audience and provide a more effective exploration of human psychology.

Finally, it is important to note that Seneca's choruses are almost never privileged with the final word on the tragedy: indeed, only *Hercules Oetaeus* ends with a fifth-act choral ode.<sup>83</sup> In a structural sense, this decision further undermines

---

of the chorus' debasement will inform my discussion. Tarrant (1985 45) acknowledges the chorus' impotence within the plot of *Thyestes* but notes that "the breadth of [the chorus'] perspective and the dignity of its ultimate response give the play its only moments of moral sanity." See also Schiesaro (2003) on the chorus in *Thyestes*, 175-176: "The chorus's lack of defining traits, its constant mood of doubt and uncertainty, its tendency to misinterpret, the feebleness of its emotional responses – all these factors conspire to subtract a great deal of dramatic and moral appeal from its noble-sounding and apparently inspired ethical considerations. Thus the solutions it offers on a variety of levels – the 'true' nature of power or the preference for a retired, ataraxic life, its faith in the gods' presence and providence, the certainty of retribution – are all fatefully undermined." Both of these critical approaches will be relevant later in my discussion when I examine the effects of the chorus' lack of authority on the audience's understanding of the philosophical discourse within the odes.

<sup>83</sup> It should also be noted that this distinction is one of several that has led some critics to believe that *Hercules Oetaeus* is a work of Senecan imitation rather than Seneca's own. As Fitch notes, *Hercules Oetaeus* is unique in scale relative to the Senecan corpus and consistently borrows phrases and passages from other Senecan tragedies – *Hercules furens* in particular. Furthermore, its optimistic conclusion and "positive Stoic overtones" (Fitch (2004) 332) are significant departures from the rest of the tragedies attributed to Seneca. See Fitch (2004) 332-3. It is not clear whether Gager and his contemporaries held similar suspicions of this play's authorship but *Hercules Oetaeus* was nonetheless included in the Senecan corpus at the time, suggesting that early modern scholars at least saw the tragedy as a Senecan-style work (though perhaps an atypical example). Regardless of Gager's opinion on this debate, however, *Hercules Oetaeus* likely showed him how the presence of a final-act chorus can change the audience's experience of the tragedy relative to the rest of the Senecan chorus and thus could feasibly have influenced Gager's decision to grant his choruses the final word.

the chorus' authority in the eyes of the audience. By the fifth act the viewer would be accustomed to seeing the chorus come out at the end of the scene and comment on the proceedings, and so the abrupt departure from this pattern is jarring for the audience. Seneca's fifth acts usually feature some of the most emotionally evocative scenes, and it stands to reason that the viewer might be looking forward to hearing the chorus make some sense of the tragedy before the curtain drops. When the chorus fails to appear (leaving it symbolically speechless for the first time), the audience is left wondering whether or not one could possibly come to terms with such terrible events simply through reason. Furthermore, the chorus' disappearance casts doubt upon the authority and relevance of its earlier odes. The absence of the chorus in the final act gives the viewer a sense of the hopelessness of rationality in the face of destructive passion while simultaneously placing the burden of reflection directly on the minds of the audience members.<sup>84</sup> Bereft of an explanatory choral ode, the viewer necessarily begins to form his own judgments about both the chorus and the tragedy as a whole. As we will see in the choruses examined below, Seneca's

---

<sup>84</sup> Schiesaro argues that the choral absence in the final act serves to confirm the irrelevance of the philosophical discourses in the preceding odes. See Schiesaro (2003) 176: "The chorus's feelings and thoughts are only voiced between events, whether or not these have been directly witnessed or even correctly understood. Not even in structural terms does the chorus enjoy a privileged platform. It is small wonder, then, that its recipes for a better life appear in the end to be more of an exercise in abstract morality than a compelling indication of viable options." Though I will argue that Gager's use of the chorus also undercuts its authority and transfers the responsibility of interpretation to the viewer, Gager's methods and their effects on the audience will show the distinctions between his approach and Seneca's. Whereas Seneca's lengthy philosophical odes shape the viewer's understanding of the tragedies' central issues and ultimately illustrate the impotence of moral reason in the tragic realm, Gager's general reduction in the role of the citizen chorus draws the audience's attention from the intangible emotional and philosophical factors that drive Senecan tragedy and instead forces the viewer to draw conclusions from the conduct of the characters and the repercussions that they experience.

use of this dramatic mechanism is highly varied depending on the situation at hand, but there are some common themes to his choral roles across the corpus. I plan to show how Seneca's choruses, particularly those that feature philosophical discourse, provide a model of spectatorship and theoretical framework for the audience while contributing to the development of the dramatic space that encourages rational reflection on the viewer's part.

### iii. *Phaedra*

We turn first to the citizen chorus of *Phaedra* as an example of the choral type most common to the Senecan corpus. The identity of the chorus members remains ambiguous throughout the play and its commentary in the odes rarely strays from abstract philosophical discussions. In comparison to the Trojan women examined above, this type of chorus gives Seneca much more freedom in his construction of the content of the odes: the chorus does not have a specific identity, and thus the audience is not required to consider the odes through the lens of a particular perspective.<sup>85</sup> This reading of *Phaedra's* chorus will inform my discussion in that I will analyze each ode based on its position in the play and how it affects the audience's experience of the drama up to that point. I hope to show how Seneca's use of the choruses in this tragedy provides the audience with a helpful theoretical framework yet undercuts its own authority to the point that the viewer has grounds to question the relevance of moral reasoning in the world of tragedy.

---

<sup>85</sup> Hill notes that the chorus' ambiguous identity allows its discussions to shift relative to the demands of the plays. See Hill (2000) 565: "By divorcing [the chorus] from a specific identity, Seneca liberates them to draw out whatever mood or argument is especially relevant at particular moments in the drama."

The first choral ode of the *Phaedra* is a lengthy discourse on the remarkable power of love, particularly in how it has power over men, beasts, and gods alike. As this passage follows Phaedra's anguished description of her passion for Hippolytus and her inability to ignore this love despite its impropriety, the chorus serves mostly to set the tone for the rest of the tragedy in the audience's eyes.<sup>86</sup> Phaedra's love is certainly unnatural and morally reprehensible, but the choral ode reinforces the fact that the queen is in the grips of uncontrollable passion and is in no position to resist. The chorus details the many gods and famous men who have fallen victim to Cupid, building up its vision of love's power at great length before finally connecting the discussion to the situation at hand:

*Vindicat omnes natura sibi,  
nihil immune est,  
odiumque perit, cum iussit amor;  
veteres cedunt ignibus irae.  
quid plura canam?  
vincit saevas cura novercas. (353-357)*

Nature conquers all for itself,  
nothing is immune,  
even hatred dissipates when love commands it;  
ancient angers yield to its fires.  
Why should I sing more?  
Such cares conquer even harsh stepmothers.

These final lines are crucial to the effect of this ode, as they bring the audience's attention back to Phaedra and her hopeless lot. The chorus identifies passionate

---

<sup>86</sup> See Boyle (1987 20f): "The choral ode on sexual passion which follows at 247ff. – the first choral ode of the play – is crucial. It serves to place in a larger metaphysical framework not only Phaedra's dilemma and the inevitability of her destruction but Hippolytus' sex-excluding commitment to Diana and its deluded basis." Boyle's point here is important to my discussion of the tragedy's fundamental sources. The chorus shows the audience through an illustration of the power of sexual passion that both victims are doomed by their misguided and passionate states of mind, elements that are in place long before the actions that cause their deaths.



love as the tragedy's primary subject while simultaneously softening the viewer's initial perception of Phaedra – if Phoebus and Hercules were unable to resist Cupid then what hope does Phaedra have, no matter how unnatural her love? In this way the first ode shapes the audience's understanding of the queen's part in the tragedy and sets up its own role for the remainder of the play.

Just as the chorus' first appearance frames the audience's impression of Phaedra, the second ode provides context for Hippolytus' ascetic life in nature. In Act 2 Hippolytus and the nurse debate the relative merits of living in the city around people versus a life of solitude in the wild, with the nurse subtly pressing for Hippolytus to consider marriage the natural course of human life. At the end of the act Phaedra makes her advances and Hippolytus flees in horror, prompting the nurse to plan the lie that will ultimately destroy the prince. The chorus follows this critical scene with a description of Hippolytus' flight and his beauty in general, reflecting that even alone in nature he will not be safe from nymphs and goddesses. The point of the ode seems to be that Hippolytus is doomed by his beauty because he does not understand the effect that it has on those around him:

*Raris forma viris (saecula perspice)  
impunita fuit. te melior deus  
tutum praetereat, formaque nobilis  
deformis senii monstret imaginem. (820-824)*

Beauty in men rarely goes unpunished,  
look throughout the ages. Let some kinder god  
leave you safe, and may your famous beauty  
display the image of a wretched old age.

Though the ode does not discuss at any great length the details of the preceding act, its general comments on Hippolytus' character guide the audience as it forms its

moral judgments. Though Hippolytus seems rational, if somewhat naïve and stubborn, the chorus points out that his position is untenable and thus weakens his character in the eyes of the viewer. Fitch relates this process succinctly in the introduction to his translation: “The unreality of Hippolytus’ understanding of nature is confirmed by the choral odes. Ode 1 recognises the power of *amor* among wild animals as well as among humans and gods; ode 2 warns that Hippolytus’ beauty will not be safeguarded by forests, since Dryads and Pans are hardly unsusceptible to beauty.”<sup>87</sup> Thus we see in this ode some continuity in the chorus’ role: it continues to provide a lens for the audience’s evaluation of the real characters while maintaining a degree of detachment from the plot, lending itself credibility as a critical spectator and model audience.

Act 3 depicts the crucial interaction between Theseus and Phaedra, and the king’s rash decision that results in Hippolytus’ gruesome death. This scene is the emotional and literal centerpiece of the tragedy, yet its accompanying choral ode is surprisingly brief and rather weak compared to the earlier choruses. To a reader familiar with the Senecan corpus the ode is fairly typical in that it describes the random whims of nature and Fortune, concluding that Fortune is a cruel master who doles out gifts and punishments with no sense of justice (*Res humanas ordine nullo Fortuna regit sparsitque manu munera caeca peiora fovens* / “Fortune reigns over human affairs with no order and scatters gifts with blind hand, favoring the worst” (977-980)). I find Hill’s assessment of this chorus as a respite from the

---

<sup>87</sup> Fitch (2002) 440.

passionate third act to be at least partially correct,<sup>88</sup> as the ode's vague subject matter certainly draws the viewer's focus away from the preceding scene and allows for a moment of quiet reflection. I would also argue, however, that this ode plays another metadramatic<sup>89</sup> role: the chorus displays a very limited understanding of the situation, weakening its authority over the audience and dissociating the chorus from the all-knowing authorial persona. The chorus' focus on the whims of Fortune seems to imply that the characters are not at all responsible for their fates when, as the first two acts have shown, this is simply not the case. Hippolytus' debased understanding of nature has put him in harm's way while the audience would likely see Theseus' violation of the underworld as at least partially damning for him and his household. The chorus displays its ignorance of these details by attributing the tragedy's climax to random strokes of fate and thus affirms for the audience that the choral odes cannot be the authoritative voice within the text. This separation of the chorus from the poet establishes the chorus as a separate entity endowed with no special knowledge beyond the natural reactions of any audience. This characterization, as mentioned above, serves to undercut the importance of the chorus' moral perspective and suggests to the audience that, for all its conservative rationality, the chorus is hopelessly out of its depth in the tragic setting. The

---

<sup>88</sup> See Hill (2000) 572: "But, like so many of Seneca's choruses, [the third chorus] lacks the intensity of personal involvement. This gives the audience time and a philosophical framework within which to come to terms with their own reactions to the passionate scene just ended."

<sup>89</sup> For the purposes of this section, the "metadramatic" functions of the chorus refer to the elements of its role that have relevance beyond simple plot development. That is, certain aspects of chorus' role draw the audience's attention away from the actual events of the plot and remind the viewer that he or she is in fact watching a play, thereby mentally distancing spectator from stage and encouraging reflection and analysis.

weakening of choral authority speaks to the impotence of reason in the face of tragedy's true driving forces – *ira, furor*, and all-consuming passion.

#### **iv. *Troades***

Whereas the chorus of the *Phaedra* represents the choral type most common to Senecan tragedy, the *Troades* contains one of the more dynamic choruses in the Senecan corpus. Unlike in most of the other tragedies, the chorus of the *Troades* seems at times to be a real character in the way that it interacts extensively with the rest of the cast. For example, there is no real choral ode in the first act, as the chorus engages in a lengthy conversation with Hecuba about Priam's terrible fate. Its character is not consistent, however, and it strays back to the more conventional choral role later in the play when it delivers several philosophical odes, two of which seem to stand at odds with one another. The chorus of the *Troades* is certainly a confusing one, as its identity and themes seem to shift at several points throughout the play. D.E. Hill's commentary on this tragedy's chorus is particularly helpful in freeing us from reading the chorus as a single, unchanging entity: "Quite simply, Senecan practice seems to assume an ever-present, or usually present, chorus which does not necessarily represent any continuity either of identification or of knowledge gleaned from their witnessing of the play."<sup>90</sup> If we consider the chorus to be fluid and of ambiguous identity, then, we are able to analyze each ode in isolation before considering how it connects to the other choruses. I plan to argue that this shifting characterization presents the audience with multiple perspectives and psychological approaches to dealing with the tragedy. As we will see, Seneca's

---

<sup>90</sup> Hill (2000) 581.

diversification of choral attitudes will provide a thorough overview of the philosophical issues at hand and allow the viewer to reflect on them without needing to unpack the identity of the chorus.

The other major role of the chorus in the *Troades* is a more practical one. Its appearance (and disappearance) coordinates the audience's spatial perception of the tragedy. C.W. Marshall, arguing under the assumption that Senecan tragedy was written to be staged in a three-sided setting, contends that in the *Troades* "the three on-stage locations and the transformation of the stage space are defined by choral movements."<sup>91</sup> He demonstrates that as the chorus moves on and off the stage – directions that can be gleaned from the chorus' knowledge of the events and other details of its odes – the audience perceives a physical shift in setting. Whether or not we accept the idea of staged Senecan drama, the chorus does seem to play a role in defining the structure of the tragedies. Their odes clearly mark off the act breaks and coordinate the flow of the scenes, but in a more complicated way the chorus' perception of the tragedy controls the audience's experience of the plot regardless of whether the play is staged or simply read: unlike most of Seneca's choruses, the chorus in the *Troades* is granted a unique identity and through its characterization the choral odes become more complex and meaningful to the viewer.

The first appearance of the *Troades*' chorus comes early in the first act, when it begins to interact with Hecuba at line 67. The immediate involvement of the chorus is in itself significant, as most of Seneca's opening acts either end with a choral ode or do not feature one at all. What distinguishes this particular chorus,

---

<sup>91</sup> Marshall (2000) 41.

however, is its concrete identity. The heavy use of first-person verbs and pronouns reminds the reader that this chorus is not an ambiguous dramatic entity but rather a specific group of individuals. Before they even speak, Hecuba gives them a definitive character when she addresses the chorus as *turba captivae mea*/"my crowd, captive women." (63) The chorus thus becomes more than the standard tragic chorus: it is a band of Trojan women seized by the Greeks and preparing to enter a life of slavery. Its subsequent exchange with Hecuba in which the women mourn the death of their king takes on additional significance as a result of their characterization. They are not simply citizens of Troy bemoaning the fate of the city but rather the eponymous subjects of the tragedy, as powerless now as they were in the male-dominated world of the *Iliad*. When they imagine Priam wandering blissfully in Elysium, then, and declare *Felix Priamus dicimus omnes*/"Lucky is Priam, we all say," (156) they are consoling themselves along with their queen, as some of them surely lost husbands or sons in battle as well. Seneca's specific characterization of this chorus from the beginning of the play presents the audience with a more complex perspective than the ambiguous and detached chorus of his other plays would, and as we will see the chorus' identity will continue to have significant implications in later acts.

The chorus' next major contribution comes in the form of a brief ode at the end of Act 2, and it is one that seems rather confusing at first glance. When we last saw the chorus at line 156 it was picturing the dead Trojans as happy shades who have passed on to a better place. The second ode displays a complete reversal of this belief and denies the existence of an afterlife entirely. The question that opens the ode marks it as the type of philosophical discussion common in Senecan tragedy:

*Verum est an timidos fabula decipit  
umbras corporibus vivere conditis,  
cum coniunx oculis imposuit manum  
supremusque dies solibus obstitit  
et tristis cineres urna coarctat? (371-375)*

Is it true or is it a myth that deceives the cowardly  
that shades live on once the bodies are buried,  
when the spouse places a hand over the eyes  
and the final day blocks out the coming suns  
and the bitter urn confines the ashes?

Though the chorus here expresses a degree of doubt, the second half of the ode makes it clear that the chorus members do not believe in life after death. The ode compares a dead soul to smoke scattered by the wind (392-393) and concludes *mors individua est, noxia corpori nec parcens animae* "death is indivisible, fatal to the body and not sparing of the soul" (401-402). This is a remarkable shift for the chorus from the first act, and if we assume that this is indeed the same group of Trojan women then the subject matter creates a serious issue of interpretation. Hill reads this ode as abstract meditation and denies any specific connection to the characters, arguing that "the second chorus invites us to relate the plot to our general view of the world; it is a vehicle for philosophical speculation, not for the expression of grief endured by characters in the play."<sup>92</sup> Marshall approaches the passage differently and states that the philosophical reversal displays character development on the part of the chorus: "Seneca gives lines to his characters that allow the performers to demonstrate doubt and hesitancy to the audience. The revised philosophical opinion in the second choral ode functions as what would

---

<sup>92</sup> Hill (2000) 584.

today be called a ‘coping mechanism.’”<sup>93</sup> I submit that the true effect of this choral ode incorporates elements of both arguments. From the audience’s perspective, the first two choruses provide a comprehensive view of the philosophical issue and create a theatrical environment more conducive to rational reflection that does not necessarily have to focus on the identity of the chorus.<sup>94</sup> Based on the characterization of the chorus in the first act, however, the viewer can also see this ode as a realistic rendering of the grieving process: thus, the audience can draw valuable moral conclusions whether or not it incorporates the chorus’ identity into its analysis of the odes.

After Ulysses comes to the Trojan camp to fetch Astyanax from Andromache in Act 3, the chorus enters and delivers a lengthy ode in which the women enumerate the various Greek cities to which they each will soon be taken. From a philosophical standpoint it is not a particularly interesting passage, and the

---

<sup>93</sup> Marshall (2000) 37.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Fantham (1982 84f), who argues that the second ode represents direct intervention by the author in order to present his own point of view: “But set at this point, the message of the [second] ode contradicts the beliefs, the dramatic experience, and even the explicit description of the Trojan women...I would suggest that just as the ode contains no Homeric allusion but only Roman practice, so its affirmations should be taken as the belief, not of the Trojan women, but of Seneca himself. The chorus should be understood as the poet’s own manifesto.” My reading resists Fantham’s implication that an inconsistent choral tone necessarily represents authorial intervention and not simply because, as Fantham later admits, “There is, to be sure, no parallel for such an editorial intrusion in Seneca’s other tragedies, and it is difficult to see how such a distinction could be presented.” I submit that the chorus of the *Troades*, when read as a comprehensive entity, creates a more compelling experience of the play’s moral and philosophical issues than would a passage of direct authorial instruction. Fantham’s reading makes Seneca’s narrative technique uncharacteristically heavy-handed and oversimplifies his use of choral discourse and its effect on the tragedy.



somewhat dull list structure recalls similar catalogues in the Homeric tradition.<sup>95</sup> Its effect becomes clearer, however, when read in conjunction with the fourth ode. At the end of the list in Act 3, the chorus addresses its queen directly:

*Quod manet fatum dominusque quis te,  
aut quibus terris, Hecabe, videndam  
ducet? in cuius moriere regno? (858-860)*

What fate and master waits for you,  
and to which lands will he lead you, Hecuba,  
to be put on display? In whose kingdom will you die?

The women have just spent fifty lines wondering in trepidation where they might be enslaved yet the ultimate focus of the ode remains on Hecuba, one of the play's protagonists and among the more sympathetic figures for the audience. The emotional climax of the tragedy follows this ode, as Hecuba breaks down and admits to her daughter Polyxena that she is preparing to be sacrificed rather than married. At this point the audience is wholly focused on the plight of Hecuba and her family, so it is interesting that the fourth chorus returns to its own situation and reflects on how miserable people are comforted by the presence of other mourners. The juxtaposition of Hecuba and the nameless chorus women as partners in grief has multiple effects upon the audience. First, the odes break up the emotionally taxing middle acts and give the viewer some respite from the passionate rhetoric of Hecuba and the other characters.<sup>96</sup> The choruses thus provide a shield for the audience and create an opportunity for reflection on the terrible events of the tragedy. More specifically, however, the identity of the chorus members shows the

---

<sup>95</sup> e.g. the description of the Argive army in *Iliad* 2.

<sup>96</sup> See Hill (2000) 585: "Both odes certainly provide respite from the harrowing scenes that precede, separate and follow them; both odes seem, in style in content, to be most implausible as expressions of the feelings of captive women."

viewer that this crisis affects the common Trojan as much as it does the queen and her family. It is a reminder of the universality of tragedy: just as the Trojan war itself destroyed the lives of all the Trojan women, the aftermath will have terrible implications for everyone (un)lucky enough to have survived. Thus, the chorus' focus on its own situation along with Hecuba's points out to the audience that real human tragedy destroys everyone it touches, not just the most visible and important players.

As we have seen in the examples from these two plays, Seneca's use of the chorus varies widely both across and within his tragedies. The only consistent effect of the chorus is that no matter how abstract or specific its discussions are, they always have some bearing on the audience's perception of the tragedy and its characters. In this sense Seneca uses the chorus as an authorial tool that can serve multiple purposes depending on the context of the play, and most importantly he shows that the chorus does not always need to have a consistent, authoritative message: the chorus is sometimes prescient and sometimes as ignorant as the audience, and only rarely does it seem to be a mouthpiece for any specific philosophical doctrine. Overall, Seneca's various uses of the chorus come back to one central concept – the chorus is a mirror for the audience within the text and its reactions to the events of each play help the viewer understand the broader implications of the tragedies. The odes represent the real-time reactions of a spectator within the text, and the chorus' theoretical discourses help to frame the audience's approach to reflecting on and learning from the tragic circumstances. Ultimately, however, the inability of the chorus to control (and even understand) the

events of the tragedies as well as its symbolic exclusion from the final act carries rather pessimistic implications for the plays' moral theory. The disastrous passions that drive Senecan drama override the scrupulous yet ineffectual rationality of the chorus, reminding the viewer that since tragedy has its roots in the human psyche it cannot always be controlled through moral reasoning, however righteous and well-constructed it may be.

#### **v. Gager's Chorus**

As mentioned above, Gager's use of the chorus seems rather conservative in comparison to Seneca's approach: he drastically reduces the size of the choral odes relative to Seneca's and seems hesitant to deliver much serious philosophy through the chorus. Even though Seneca's choruses, as we have seen, do not necessarily provide authoritative moral precepts or exert any real control over the plays, the odes at least treat relevant philosophical issues at significant length. Gager's choruses, on the other hand, only occasionally stray into abstraction and usually remain grounded in the details of the plot of each play. Indeed, some of his choruses seem merely to remind the audience that the act has come to a close – functioning as dramatic signposts of sorts – or otherwise provide a brief reaction to the preceding scenes. Then there is the matter of his sub-choruses, the breaks in dialogue that look and read like choruses but come from the mouths of specific characters. Though these additional odes appear to be modeled on the Senecan chorus in meter and function, the decision to transfer them to individual characters is an invention of Gager's. It could be argued that Gager, who knew that his plays had to entertain a Renaissance audience, did not think that Seneca's lengthy, abstract choruses would

play well on the Oxford stage. I plan to show, however, that Gager's adaptation of the chorus has implications for more than simply the entertainment value of his plays. I will analyze the use of the chorus in two tragedies – *Meleager* and *Ulysses Redux* – so as to show how the adapted role brings the audience's focus away from abstract philosophical engagement and encourages the viewer to draw moral conclusions from the actions of the cast members and the consequences faced by each.

#### **vi. *Meleager***

It will be useful to look first at *Meleager*, as it is the play features the most Senecan-style choruses of any in Gager's corpus. The choruses of *Meleager* keep to general philosophical topics just like most of Seneca's odes, but the method of discussion is markedly different. Gager's adaptation lies in the nature of his chorus' arguments, and I plan to argue that the chorus' more practical approach creates for the audience an experience entirely different from that of the chorus in Senecan tragedy.

The first appearance of the chorus is an interesting one, as it partially connects the chorus to the author's voice while positioning itself both within the text and simultaneously outside of the plot itself. On the surface it is a brief description of the Calydonian boar, ending with a plea for Meleager and the other heroes to kill the boar and save the city. The ode would seem rather straightforward had Gager not taken care to establish the boar as a metaphorical figure during Act 1. Meleager lays out this concept when Philemon presses him for the source of his poorly concealed grief:

*erras, Philemon. quem putas esse unicum,  
is geminus est.*

....  
*ille per agros et laeta grassatur sata,  
hic propius urget. intus est, intus furit  
indomitus, ardens. quodque mireris magis,  
cui nulla procerum sufficiat unquam manus.* (156-164)

You are mistaken, Philemon. That which you think is one is actually double.

....  
that boar rages through the fields and happy crops he presses close by. The other is within, he rages inside unconquered, burning. Furthermore, more remarkable, no hand of a prince could ever quell that sort.

Here we learn that the boar, which never actually appears onstage, is both a literal beast and the physical representation of passion and lust. Thus when the chorus details the boar's destructive nature at the end of the act the reader already understands that the ode is not just about the actual boar but also the uncontrollable emotions driving the tragic events. This detail makes the chorus something of an authorial tool, as it contributes to the metaphor that Gager is in the process of constructing. Furthermore, the chorus displays some prescience when it predicts that Meleager will be the one to deliver the deathblow to the boar (469), suggesting perhaps that it is no mere chorus of common citizenry. In this brief first ode the chorus establishes itself as operating above the play and foreshadows its role in the rest of the tragedy.

After the hunters depart for the forest at the end of Act 2, the chorus delivers an ode that appears to be closely modeled on the typical Senecan chorus. It begins as an ode to *Pax*, peace personified as a daughter of Jupiter, and notes how the gifts that she bestows engender such disastrous traits as *Superbia* and *Impietas* which eventually destroy those who previously benefitted from *Pax*. What differentiates

this chorus from the Senecan model, however, is the element of human agency present in Gager's ode. In this situation Seneca's chorus might simply have bemoaned the fact that good things never last and happy times inevitably give way to complacency and disaster, but Gager's chorus hints at man's ability to overcome this cycle:

*contra, quot misere cladibus afficis,  
uti muneribus si male caeperint!  
huic primogenita est filia Copia,  
sed matris petulans filia sobriae,  
mollis, blanda, fluens, dedita luxui,  
quam ni contineat dextera parcior,  
in quodcunque nefas proruit improba. (771-775)*

Yet how miserably do you afflict them with death  
if they are to use their gifts poorly!  
To [Peace] the firstborn daughter is Abundance,  
but she is the stubborn daughter of a calm mother,  
soft, smooth, flexible, given to luxury,  
unless a strong hand governs her,  
she plunges unrestrained into all manner of evil.

The most important phrases here are *uti muneribus si male caeperint* and *quam ni contineat dextera parcior*, as they suggest that men have some degree of control over this disastrous cycle. The chorus believes that humans are not necessarily destined to suffer at the hands of Fortune as long as they know how to use their gifts properly, a sentiment rarely seen in Senecan odes. In this chorus as well as in the subsequent odes, we begin to see how Gager diverges from the Senecan model and moves towards a focus on human agency. Gager's chorus allows for a certain degree of control over one's destiny, prompting the audience to focus on the actions of the characters when making judgments on their respective fates.

Jumping forward now to the fifth and final act, we find two choruses with markedly different identities and styles. The first chorus, identified as the *Matres Calydonides*, is the only sub-chorus of this tragedy and recalls the chorus of Trojan women in Seneca's *Agamemnon* and *Troades*.<sup>97</sup> The Calydonian mothers take the stage to mourn Meleager's untimely death, describing him in glowing terms and detailing their own bitter mourning process. As beloved as the prince may have been in his city, the grief of this ode seems somewhat effusive and fits into the text rather awkwardly as the scene transitions from Oeneus' plight to the nurse's description of Althaea's suicide. Just as Seneca's identification of the *Troades* chorus as a group of Trojan women changes the audience's perception of that group, however, the naming of this sub-chorus has important implications to Gager's viewer as well. In the Calydonian Mothers we see a true representation of an audience within the text: the real chorus has remained aloof and concerned primarily with abstract concepts throughout the tragedy, whereas the Calydonian Mothers display a "real" reaction to the tragic downfall of Oeneus' house. Unconcerned with the philosophical underpinnings of the tragedy, the Calydonian Mothers behave as any mother would at the death of a young son, giving the audience a realistic model of response to supplement the philosophical discourse of the primary citizen chorus. The transfer of this 'surrogate audience' role to a specifically identified group is a significant move on Gager's part because it

---

<sup>97</sup> That is, the *Calydonian Matres* are a chorus of distinct identity whose ode represents the reaction of an emotionally invested yet powerless group. The parallel with the Trojan Women of the *Agamemnon* is particularly strong, as both choruses appear only once and reflect on the sweetness and freedom of death in the face of such tragedy.

reinforces the separation of the main chorus from the rest of the cast. The audience still looks to the end-of-act odes for a theoretical framework but focuses on the real characters when evaluating the psychological effects of the tragedy.

In perhaps the most noticeable departure from the Senecan chorus model, the chorus of the *Meleager* is granted the final word at the end of Act 5 and does not hesitate to comment generally on the moral lessons of the tragedy. Just as the second chorus focused on the practical aspects of the play's philosophical lessons, this final ode suggests that the audience receive the tale as a sort of advice-to-princes scenario. The chorus opens with the directive *reges, timete numina, cavete divos temnere*/"Kings, fear the gods, and beware scorning them" (1860-1861) and suggests that the preceding tragedy was in large part the result of Oeneus' decision not to honor the gods. The ode goes on to point out how those in lofty towers are more susceptible to lightning strikes than those living in low valleys (1869ff), but even this observation is overshadowed by the implication that kings and princes have the power to avoid such misfortune. In this chorus Gager signals an adaptation critical to the role's effect on the viewer's overall experience of the tragedy: the fact that the chorus has the final word underscores its importance in the eyes of the audience, and its focus on human agency reinforces the play's insistence on actions as the source of tragedy or success. Whereas Seneca's choruses are often given lines that weaken their own authority and are normally absent from the final act, Gager's fifth-act odes enhance the chorus' influence and encourage the viewer to subscribe to its optimistic view of moral agency.

### **vii. *Ulysses Redux***



If Gager were looking for an opportunity to experiment with new choral forms, then the *Ulysses Redux* would seem like an excellent forum. Gager himself admits that the play is not really a tragedy for a variety of reasons, including its comic elements and its happy conclusion.<sup>98</sup> Indeed, as we have seen in previous chapters the *Ulysses Redux* is the least traditional in form of Gager's tragedies, though its basic structure shows that at the very least it was an attempt to adapt Homeric material to the world of classical tragedy. In *Ulysses Redux* we find the greatest number (two) of Gager's sub-choruses in a single play, and the additional odes supplement a traditional chorus that operates closer to the Senecan model. By analyzing these two choral types alongside one another I plan to show how Gager's expansion of the chorus controls the audience's experience of the tragedy while keeping the actual chorus separate from the authorial persona.

The standard chorus of the *Ulysses Redux* – that is, the one that is explicitly named *Chorus* – is identified vaguely in the *dramatis personae* as *Chorus Ithacensium*, implying a citizen chorus but offering little additional detail. Just as in my earlier discussion of *Troades*, the question of choral identity is key to our reading of the first two odes in *Ulysses Redux* because our understanding of their respective subjects can be shaped in part by the characterization of the chorus members. The first choral ode is very similar to the opening ode of *Meleager*: it recaps the situation in Ithaca and offers a prayer for Ulysses' return just as the chorus of *Meleager* describes the boar and expresses hope that the Calydonian princes will save the city. This ode, while not particularly complicated or detailed, establishes the *Chorus*

---

<sup>98</sup> See Sutton (1994) 3f.

*Ithacensium* as the typical group of interested but passive citizens. Like the audience, the chorus members are profoundly affected by the situation in Ithaca but powerless to do anything but observe, reflect, and comment. While this first ode does little more than characterize the chorus as the audience model within the text, when we read it in conjunction with the second ode the chorus' role becomes clearer. The second choral ode follows Ulysses' first interaction with the suitors, some of whom were vicious and disrespectful while others showed some capacity for compassion. In a rare moment of self-characterization, the chorus delivers an ode that bemoans the degenerate tendencies of this new age in comparison to the moral righteousness of older generations. The ode discloses the identity of the chorus with its opening lines:

*ecce iuventus nostra modestae  
priscas vitae solvit habenas.  
...  
frugi esse pudet, clarae passim  
aere alieno cecidere domus. (728-734)*

Behold, our youth has released  
the old reins of modest life.  
...  
it is a shame to be frugal for them,  
and everywhere famous homes collapse under debt.

These are sentiments that could only be delivered by a group of older citizens, giving the chorus an air of wisdom or, at the very least, experience. These are men who have witnessed the degradation of Ulysses' illustrious house and now long for a return to the days before the Trojan War. The connection to Troy is also key, as the chorus points out in its final lines: *non sua talem Ithaca ad Troiam misit*

*Ulysem*/"nor did Ithaca before send its Ulysses to Troy" (745-746). In this way the

chorus shows the audience that Troy is the true source of this tragedy in that were it not for the war, Ulysses would still be in Ithaca. The first two odes thus present the choral identity and establish its credibility by the breadth of experience it demonstrates in the odes.

Before we examine the remaining choral odes let us turn to the sub-choruses and see how these added roles affect the audience's experience of the standard chorus and the tragedy as a whole. In all, the tragedy features three appearances by a sub-chorus: two songs by the palace bard, Phemius, and one ode labeled *Carmen* delivered by the attendants of Penelope in Act 3. Both of these invented choral roles are important in that they represent significant departures from the Senecan model, however they are also very different from one another in both detail and function.

On the level of character type, Phemius is intriguing because he represents the poetic element within the text: he is a bard and, presumably, a composer just like Gager, Seneca, and Homer. Phemius' songs, all delivered in Sapphics, look very much like choral odes except for the fact that they are thrust into the middle of Acts 2 and 5 at seemingly random moments. Frederick Boas argues convincingly that the placement of Phemius' songs is at least partially a practical move on Gager's part.<sup>99</sup> The acts of the *Ulysses Redux* are very long and contain some high-energy scenes, and Phemius' pleasant songs would certainly have relieved some tension while giving the audience a respite in which it might reflect upon the violence and turmoil

---

<sup>99</sup> See Boas (1914) on the second song of Phemius: "This seems at first a curiously inappropriate substitute for the cleansing of the polluted chamber, for which the Homeric hero gives directions. But Gager doubtless wished to soothe, by a musical interlude, the emotions which must have been highly wrought up by the preceding scene, and at the same time to give an opportunity for the stage to be cleared for the final episodes." (216-217)

of the preceding spectacles. I submit, however, that Phemius' role goes beyond simply acting as a breaking point between heavy scenes. His identification as a bard is significant in that he speaks from the perspective of artistic creation and stands for the role of poetry in a tragic setting.<sup>100</sup> Thus when he comes on in Act 5 and delivers a hymn of thanks to Phoebus for the gift of song, which he assumes has saved him from Ulysses' slaughter, his words have broader implications than perhaps he is even aware of. In his praise of Phoebus, Phemius concludes that he owes his life to his talent for poetic creation: *quod spiro, totum muneris est tui. tu nomen ingens, tu mihi spiritum das entheum*/"That I am alive at all is wholly your gift. You give me a great name and the creative spirit" (1800-1801). Phemius' belief that his song has saved him from the tragedy – or at least that his role as the bard frees him from association with the suitors – holds significance for the audience's understanding of poetry's power to insulate men against moral depravity. The fact that Phemius is spared and then given opportunity to sing shows that good poetry has the ability to heal and protect a person's moral constitution: were it not for Phemius' profession, Ulysses might have judged him guilty by association with the suitors just as he condemns the slave girls. From the audience's perspective, then, Phemius' role reminds them of stage drama's true purpose: as witnesses of the

---

<sup>100</sup> Gager's characterization of Phemius may also be partially based on the bard's role in Homer. In Book 1 Telemachus defends the poet's position when Penelope commands Phemius to cease his sad songs: μήτηρ ἐμή, τί τ' ἄρα φθονέεις ἐρήρον ἀοιδὸν τέρπειν ὄπη οἱ νόος ὄρνυται; οὐ νύ τ' ἀοιδοὶ αἴτιοι, ἀλλὰ ποθὶ Ζεὺς αἴτιος/ "Why, mother, do you begrudge the excellent singer his pleasing himself as his thoughts drive him? It is not the singers who are to blame, it must be Zeus is to blame." (*Od.* 1.346-8. trans. Richard Lattimore (1967)). Later, the narrator notes that Phemius had been performing for the suitors "by compulsion" (ἀνάγκη (*Od.* 22.331)), thereby removing him from complicity with the suitors' plot.

tragedy they have the opportunity to learn and improve themselves in the same way that Phemius, protected by the aegis of poetry, was able to avoid the fate of the suitors.

The other sub-chorus, the aforementioned *Carmen*, comes at the beginning of Act 3 just before Ulysses' first interaction with Penelope. Penelope directs her attendants to sing the song of chastity, and even points out its composer: *cantoris ecce Phemii Carmen canta, quod castitati nuper is sacrum edidit*/"Come, sing the song of Phemius the bard, which he recently composed in honor of chastity" (772-773). Phemius, as we have seen, is the poetic persona within the text and thus his name lends the *Carmen* a degree of authority. The song is a brief one and is entirely concerned with the wonderful virtue of chastity, but not the extreme type of chastity favored by Hippolytus in the *Panniculus*:

*O fons et almae norma propaginis  
et sancta lecti regula, castitas!  
tu belluis nos unica dividis,  
formae satelles nobilis et comes.  
quod quisque prolem legitimam videt  
certamque stipem, muneris est tui. (780-785)*

O chastity, font and measure of wonderful reproduction,  
sacred law of the marriage bed!  
You alone separate us from the beasts,  
servant and ally of noble beauty.  
It is by your gift that a man sees his progeny legitimate  
and his bloodline certain.

This is a specific brand of chastity, and one that would certainly have been favored by the conservative, religious audience at Oxford in the sixteenth century. Moreover, these lines are located specifically for the audience, both in the pen of Phemius and the mouths of Penelope's faithful attendants. Had the *Chorus Ithacensium* delivered

these lines it might have seemed as didactic and detached as the ode about the degeneracy of the new generation, but by giving the *Carmen* to a group of real characters<sup>101</sup> Gager brings the audience's focus to the actions of those involved relative to the moral guidelines of the song. When Melantho and the suitors die gruesomely later in the play, the audience is prepared to judge them as guilty because, relative to the authoritative moral precepts of Penelope and Phemius, Ulysses' victims were certainly in the wrong.

As the tragedy proceeds the conventional chorus – that is, the chorus that performs at the end of each act – broadens its focus to more abstract subjects, twice delivering odes to Penelope's chastity and once to the cycle of increasingly weak generations of men. With the introduction of Phemius and the *Carmen*, however, the authority of the *Chorus Ithacensium* has been weakened: the citizen chorus is not made up of any discernable characters and argues in such abstract terms that the sub-choruses by comparison seem like much more reliable resources for the viewer's theoretical framework. Whereas the *Chorus Ithacensium* primarily discusses the plight of Ithaca and the general degeneracy of successive generations, the sub-choruses (in particular the *Carmen*) identify the specific moral issues driving the tragedy – chastity and loyalty. Thus we can see how Gager uses the sub-choruses to transfer the most important philosophical content from the abstract discourses of citizen chorus to the mouths of characters who are actively involved in the play. This shift further underscores the importance of human agency in Gager's

---

<sup>101</sup> That is, characters who are given specific names and non-choral lines of dialogue. Though Penelope's attendants come together as a choral entity to sing the *Carmen*, Gager's assignment of individual identities to the attendants differentiate them from the vaguely-defined *Chorus Ithacensium*.

tragedy, as the audience draws on the words and actions of specific characters when forming its moral judgments instead of simply being instructed at length by an authoritative main chorus.

The primary chorus' most interesting contribution to the second half of the play comes in Act 5 when Gager once again gives it the privilege of delivering the final word. After praising Penelope's chastity at length, the chorus concludes with the observation that the queen's best traits will undoubtedly be passed down through generations:

*Vivet Penelopes post sua funera  
ingens perpetuo Gloria nomine,  
excedatque senis tempora Nestoris,  
pluresque invenias Penelopae pares. (1994-1997)*

Penelope will live on after her death  
Great and glorious in her enduring name,  
she will exceed the time of old Nestor,  
and you will find more women equal to Penelope.

This final ode is remarkably hopeful, especially when compared to the Senecan choruses that connect each play to the tragic cycle and underscore the general hopelessness of warding off misfortune. Here, Gager's chorus expresses the wish that women remember Penelope throughout the ages as a model of chastity and goodness, learning from her and aspiring to her example. The manner of its delivery is also important: we have already seen how Phemius' songs established poetry as a method of moral development, and thus the chorus' final words remind the audience to step back and apply the events of this tragedy to their own lives. This is a fitting conclusion for the chorus, as it ties together the multiple choral roles of the play. The *Chorus Ithacensium* remains a detached commentator yet shows the

influence of Phemius and the *Carmen*, and the final ode brings the audience's focus back to Penelope, the moral barometer of the play, and her chaste actions. The audience would have left this production with Penelope on their minds, perhaps wondering how best to emulate her moral example.

### **viii. Conclusion**

What, then, are the most important differences between Gager and Seneca's choruses, and what implications do these changes have for our understanding of the two authors' works? First and most noticeably, Gager reduces the choral odes in length and transfers some of the moralizing or philosophical discourses to the mouths of the actual characters. This adaptation contributes to a larger process that we have seen in Gager's use of other devices: from the audience's perspective, the minimization of the choral role throws the rest of the characters into the spotlight and forces the viewer to focus on the onstage events, using the chorus' brief interruptions as helpful context but not relying on them for lengthy explanations of moral issues. Here we again see how Gager's tragedy tends to identify action rather than psychology as the source of a tragedy. Whereas Seneca's choruses are agents of abstract discourse and psychological exploration, Gager's end-of-act odes function more as brief diversions from the text that occasionally provide some theoretical framework for the audience's reception of the play.

For Gager's part, his use of the chorus suggests that he was concerned with keeping the author separate from the text and avoiding the exhortative effects of some Senecan choruses. Gager's choruses do not seem particularly authoritative and sometimes even display ignorance of the play's details, such as when the chorus in



*Ulysses Redux* prays for the return of Ulysses even though he is already within the palace walls. This characterization of the chorus avoids giving the audience any sort of rigid guidelines for interpreting the plays, suggesting that the viewer must instead experience the events of a tragedy firsthand and then come to conclusions without being told what they should be. The chorus occasionally helps by pointing out the major moral issues at hand, but it stops short of making conclusive statements on how one ought to interpret the tragic events. On the whole Gager's approach to the chorus provides the audience with a version of tragedy that relies on real-life actions and consequences rather than lengthy philosophical instruction, and the reduced focus on the choral odes leaves the viewers with no choice but to look to the characters and their actions as the primary sources of moral education within the play. In this shift in focus we find the most important implication of Gager's revised use of the chorus: he removes the elements of the chorus that might seem like authorial sermons and encourages the audience to form moral judgments through evaluation of the characters themselves, providing just enough of a theoretical framework to guide the viewer's experience without dwelling on any particular perspective. Perhaps Gager felt that the moral exhortation characteristic of homilies or academic addresses in his time was not the only method of inspiring personal development within an audience. By refusing to deliver philosophical discussion from the elevated, detached position of the Senecan chorus, Gager reminds the viewer that a man's actions are the true determinants of his moral constitution and that the real lessons of tragedy lie in the actions and fates of each individual character.

## Chapter IV – Bit Parts and Bad Advice: Gager’s Expanded Use of the Senecan Attendant

### i. Introduction

The concept of a “stock” character is one that spans literary genres and artistic forms. Whenever we encounter a new text or work of art we draw upon our experience with similar pieces and search for recognizable features in an attempt to orient ourselves to the unfamiliar material. As Senecan drama features small casts and treats a wide variety of mythological subjects, it is difficult to track recurring character types such as the queen or the *nuntius* across the corpus. One role that consistently appears in some form, however, is that of the Attendant – the faithful confidant and advisor who most often takes the shape of an old nurse. Though the Attendant does not always display the same personality traits or rhetorical style, certain attributes mark this role as a regular dramaturgical device of Seneca’s. First, and most importantly, the Attendant is attached to a single main character to whom he or she is always subordinate in social status. Typically this is a master-slave or ruler-subject relationship, but it could also simply be a primary character paired with an unnamed commoner (like the *senex* of the *Troades*). Of course, this is not to say that every socially inferior character who interacts with the tragic hero is necessarily an Attendant figure – only rarely do Seneca’s dramas feature supporting characters equal in status to the hero. What makes the Attendant distinct from the other minor figures is the way that this faceless character from a lower social class seems to have the ear of the tragic hero in. The Attendant is never granted an identity and is rarely linked to a role from the mythological tradition, so we must

infer a special relationship of some kind when a nameless character like the *satelles* is allowed to openly question Atreus' plans. Another distinguishing characteristic is that the Attendant interacts almost exclusively with his or her corresponding main character and often has little to no discernible effect on the action of the play. There are a few notable exceptions, such as Phaedra's *nutrix*, but most often the Attendant is in place solely for the tragic hero's benefit. Examples of this character include the *nutrices* of the *Phaedra*, *Medea*, *Agamemnon*, and *Hercules Oetaeus* as well as the *satelles* of the *Thyestes*. Since the identity of the Attendant differs from play to play, I will refer to the character type generally as the Attendant so as to avoid confusion and more easily link the examples of the role in the plays discussed below.

Unlike the Senecan devices and practices examined above, wherein we saw Gager make significant alterations to Seneca's form, the Attendant role in Gager is a mostly faithful imitation of its Senecan model. Nearly all of Gager's primary characters receive advisor counterparts who share the essential traits of the Attendant, and many of his Attendants speak and act much like their Senecan models. Clearly Gager found this character type useful and did not feel that it was in need of any serious remodeling. However, he did not stop with merely reproducing the Attendant. Through a close examination of Attendant characters from both authors I hope to show several different ways that Gager expands and modifies elements of the Attendant role, with various effects on the audience's understanding of the tragedies. Gager uses the Attendant character in a manner similar to Seneca's but also develops his own versions of the role that explore dynamics of the master-slave relationship not found in Seneca. As a result, Gager's Attendants present the

audience with several different perspectives on the nature of a counselor figure, and this approach encourages the viewer to think critically about the effect of advice and friendship on one's own moral constitution.

## **ii. Seneca's Attendant**

In order to fully understand the impact of Gager's adaptations, we must first take a detailed look at Seneca's use of the Attendant role. If one were to evaluate Seneca's characters solely by perceived impact on the progression of the plot, then it would be difficult to place any real importance on the Attendant. Despite occupying what often amounts to a great deal of important stage-time, the Attendant rarely has much effect on the action unfolding in the tragedy. It seems that the primary purpose of the standard nurse-type, such as Atreus' *satelles* or Medea's *nutrix*, is to put up token resistance to the master's furious scheming and subsequently fold beneath faulty logic and passionate rhetoric. The nurses of Clytemnestra and Deianira – in *Agamemnon* and *Hercules Oetaeus*, respectively – are excellent examples of the Attendant-type: both begin the play as the voice of moderation and rationality but quickly succumb to their mistresses and either cease to oppose their queen's plans or go a step further and actively participate in the crime. Not all of Seneca's Attendants are quite so one-sided, however: the *nutrix* of Phaedra shows how Seneca uses the master-slave relationship both to explore questions of moral agency and to frame his audience's perception of his tragedy and its players.

Another important role of the Senecan Attendant echoes that of Seneca's chorus. As we have seen in the preceding chapter, the Senecan chorus acts as a surrogate audience of sorts, providing a model reaction to the events onstage and

distancing the viewer mentally from the shocking details of the tragedies. The Attendant performs a similar function, but on a smaller scale: the Attendant's close relationship to the protagonist affords a privileged perspective on the hero's tortured psyche, and thus the audience often experiences the psychology of Atreus or Hecuba as seen through the eyes of the Attendant. A.J. Boyle notes this aspect of the Attendant role in his analysis of the *Medea*.<sup>102</sup> He points out that the opening monologues of Acts 3 and 4, both delivered by the *nutrix*, are simply narrative renderings of Medea's *ira* and *furor*. Boyle argues, "Each of these descriptions distances both the Nurse and the audience from Medea, transforming the Nurse herself into an audience to Medea's theatre of magic."<sup>103</sup> For the purposes of my discussion, this reading of the Attendant will be important because it interacts directly with the framing effects described in Chapters 2 and 4. Insofar as the Attendant is one of Seneca's internal audience figures, the character type is another device that creates psychological space between the dramas and the audience and encourages the viewer to focus on the passions that drive the progression of each plot.

Like Seneca's chorus, the Attendant figure performs a variety of functions that depend on the circumstances of each tragedy. It is useful to look at the Attendant's role in a general sense, however, as we will be able to see how Seneca's Attendants have similar effects on the audience's experience of their tragedies. Through a close reading of two example Attendant characters – one of the type most common to Senecan tragedy, followed by Phaedra's more enigmatic nurse – I plan to

---

<sup>102</sup> See Boyle (1997) 129ff.

<sup>103</sup> Boyle (1997) 130.

show how Seneca's use of this stock role affects the audience's understanding of Seneca's protagonists as well as the general conflict between *ratio* and *furor* in the tragedies. Most important to my discussion of Gager's Attendants, however, will be the way that Seneca's use of the character type complicates the viewer's moral judgments and prevents the audience from forming simplistic opinions of guilt and innocence. Through contrast with Gager's Attendant figures, we will see that the differences in the two authors' approach ultimately return to the question of the sources of moral responsibility in tragedy.

### **iii. *Thyestes***

#### **a. Critical Approaches**

We turn first to *Thyestes* and the master-advisor relationship that most conspicuously displays the powerlessness of the Attendant role. I have chosen Atreus' counselor, the *satelles*, because his swift and noticeable transition from moral righteousness to ignoble complicity provides the clearest display of the characteristics shared by other Attendants. The *satelles* is a prominent character yet is simultaneously cut off from the rest of the tragedy, interacting only with Atreus in the second act and never managing to cause the king even to question his course of action, let alone change it. Like Clytemnestra's *nutrix*, who fades into the background as Orestes enters the stage after her futile attempts to calm the queen, the *satelles* appears for a single scene and serves mostly to show how maddened Atreus has truly become. Though ostensibly a real character, perhaps a political aide of sorts, the *satelles* seems little more than a personification of Atreus' feeble conscience, propped up onstage only to be flattened by his master's impassioned

rhetoric. Indeed, the *satelles* contributes to the tragedy mainly as a dramatist's tool: through his dialogue with Atreus the *satelles* draws out the king's frenzied mindset and questionable logic, showing the audience exactly how the events of the play have come to pass.

From a theoretical perspective, the *satelles* plays another important role for Seneca. Unlike many of Seneca's heroes, Atreus never once expresses to his advisor any hesitancy at committing such an awful crime: rather, the king spends the first half of the tragedy planning the act and deliberating over the most extraordinary method of carrying it out. He is the play's internal author, plotting out the tragic conclusion before the reader's eyes, and the *satelles* is his helpless audience.<sup>104</sup>

Atreus is completely intent on writing a new chapter of human tragedy, and his primary concern is not that his actions are dangerous or immoral but that that his crimes will fail to outstrip those of his ancestors. The *satelles* thus plays two roles in his brief appearance alongside Atreus. First, as the play's internal audience he supplies an additional layer of distance between the actual viewer and Atreus' horrible acts, enabling the viewer to avoid feeling complicit and thereby

---

<sup>104</sup> Schiesaro (2003) notes how Atreus acts as the driving element of the tragedy, forcing the rest of the cast to simultaneously participate in and witness the crime that he is planning: "Despite its title, *Thyestes* is of course a play about Atreus, whose fundamental role in articulating its plot is matched by his consistently overpowering presence on stage. The designation of Atreus' counselor as *satelles* is metaphorically most fitting: other characters revolve around the larger-than-life royal protagonist with the limited, virtually non-existent autonomy of satellites locked in a gravitational field that they cannot control." (139) This is an important observation to my discussion of the *satelles* as an internal audience figure because Atreus' role as the creative mind behind the unfolding crime establishes an author-reader or actor-spectator relationship between the king and his servant. Atreus actively plans out his atrocities before the *satelles* and then acts them out, and his deeds cannot attain the infamy that he so desires unless the *satelles*, and by extension the real audience, is there to witness it all.

encouraging the audience to reflect rationally upon the events of the play.

Furthermore, the *satelles* acts as the spokesperson for the moral perspective and shows the audience through his swift defeat how easily men can overcome conscience and morality when gripped by overwhelming passion.

For the purposes of this discussion I will treat the *satelles* in isolation, analyzing only the details of his single interaction with Atreus and his effect (or lack thereof) on the subsequent events. Some authors, however, have identified the *satelles* as a component of the larger struggle between advocates of *nefas* and *ratio*, a conflict that controls the course of the tragedy from the first act. Alessandro Schiesaro notes in *The Passions in Play: Thyestes and the Dynamics of Senecan Drama* that the tragedy dramatizes a conflict between opposing forces of *furor* and *ratio*, though the later group is tragically ill-equipped to contain the former:

The whole tragedy thus hinges on the antithesis of two sets of functionally similar characters: on the one hand, the Fury, Atreus and Tantalus, on the other, Tantalus' shadow, the *satelles* and Thyestes. The two groups possess different degrees of textual knowledge and stand in different positions *vis-à-vis* the metadramatic aspect of the play...The moving forces of the tragedy, *furor*, *nefas* and *furor*-inspired poetry, are embodied by consummate deceivers, against whom Tantalus', Thyestes' and the *satelles*' moralizing attempts are completely ineffectual, partly because they are predicated on an incomplete, flawed knowledge and assessment of the events.<sup>105</sup>

This characterization of the *satelles* will be crucial to my reading because it connects the Attendant's inability to control the tragedy with the general powerlessness of reason and moderation in *Thyestes* and the world of tragedy. When we turn to Gager, then, we will see how his adaptations encourage a more optimistic vision of human agency in the tragic setting: whereas the *ratio* of Seneca's Attendants serves

---

<sup>105</sup> Schiesaro (2003) 47-48.



only to display its own failure, Gager's Attendants help to suggest that men have the ability to save themselves from moral destitution by learning from the examples presented to them. Like Schiesaro I will read the *satelles* primarily as a metadramatic figure rather than as an integral part of the actual stage action: that is, I will focus on the effects of his character upon the audience's perception of the play and its moral issues instead of discussing the *satelles'* relevance to the plot or the mythological tradition. I have opted to restrict my arguments to the *satelles'* role alone, however, so as to contrast more clearly Seneca's morally righteous characters with their counterparts in Gager's tragedies.

For my treatment of the complications of locating the true source of the tragic events in Seneca's plays, Martha Nussbaum's study of the *Medea* is particularly illuminating. Nussbaum observes that because of Seneca's extreme emphasis on Medea's psychological development, the actual murder of her children seems somewhat secondary in the context of the entire play:

The blame of Medea is almost always focused upon her psychological states – her audacious temper, her mad furor, the unstable vicissitudes of her passion. The physical murder of the children is characterized as a “votive offering” to her *dolor* – as if the *dolor* itself was the really important and ruling thing, the thing toward which our attention should really be directed.<sup>106</sup>

Nussbaum's point here is relevant to my analysis of Phaedra's *nutrix* because it implies an attempt on Seneca's part to frame his audience's judgment of the tragic hero's responsibility in the tragedy. As Nussbaum observes, Medea's physical crime is simply the natural progression of her *dolor*, the corollary in the *Medea* to Phaedra's incestuous desire for Hippolytus. Just like Phaedra, Medea seals her fate

---

<sup>106</sup> Nussbaum (1994) 475.

the moment she allows passion to enter her psyche, and despite her inner vacillation she never truly seems capable of redemption. Seneca uses the Attendant character to show that uncontrolled emotion is the true source of human tragedy and, as we will see, it is on this point that Gager's adaptations of the Attendant will prove to be most significant.

Also relevant to my discussion of the role of *ratio* in both Seneca and Gager is Boyle's study of moral cynicism in Renaissance and Senecan tragedy. Boyle points to the impotence of Attendant-type characters in both traditions as evidence of authorial concern for the failure of man's moral constitution in the face of violent passion.<sup>107</sup> Furthermore, he argues that, despite the inability of moralizing advisors to affect any change on the plot, the one-sided debates between Attendant and master have significant implications for the audience's experience:

Often in such debates – again as in Seneca – central ideas of the plays are focused upon in a manner which reveals their ambiguity or polyvalence (compare the disputatious use of 'nature' in *Grobouc* or *King Lear* with that of *natura* in *Phaedra*), and the uncertainties attending their employment in human discourse and human life. What results is not simply an airing of moral or political issues, but an increasing complexity in the audience's dramatic experience and a correspondingly complex and problematic tragic frame.<sup>108</sup>

The complexity of the viewer's experience that Boyle notes here is precisely the effect that I will analyze in both Seneca and Gager. When the audience sees Seneca's

---

<sup>107</sup> See Boyle (1997) 187: "At the heart of Renaissance and Senecan pessimism is the impotence of reason. The pointed irrelevance of the extensive moral debate between Pyrrhus and Agamemnon in Seneca's *Troades*, between the Nurse and Hippolytus in *Phaedra*, between Thyestes and his son in *Thyestes*, is mirrored time and again in Renaissance drama: the arguments of Malecche to Sulmone (*Orbecche* 3.2), the unsuccessful speeches of Antony in Lodge's *The Wounds of Civil War*, of York in *Richard II* (2.1.186ff.), of Hippolyte in Racine's *Phedre* (esp.4.2/1087ff.) have no effect on the dramatic action."

<sup>108</sup> Boyle (1997) 187.

moral ambassadors defeated and corrupted by the protagonists' madness, it naturally begins to question the efficacy of the ethical principles advocated by the Attendant as well as the relevance of such precepts outside the world of tragedy. Thus the Attendant helps to make Senecan tragedy more than shocking tales of crime and passion: the plays become complicated examinations of how unchecked emotion can destroy man's moral constitution and override any ingrained sense of *fas* or *iustitia*. By reading Gager's Attendant through this critical lens I will show how Gager creates characters who, like Seneca's, are unable to use moral reasoning to escape their tragic fates: Gager's adaptation, however, lies in the way that he develops the Attendant's role to suggest that it is ultimately possible to protect one's sense of morality through reason and action, a sentiment foreign to the world of Senecan tragedy.

### **b. The *satelles***

Onstage for a single scene and scarcely one hundred lines of dialogue, the *satelles* undergoes a noticeable development that is remarkable in both its nature and its swiftness. He begins as the responsible advisor, pointing out the disastrous political implications of killing Thyestes when he asks *Fama te populi nihil adversa terret?*/"Does hostile talk among the people not scare you?" (204) This type of advice is a common initial approach of the Attendant character: Deianira's *nutrix* in *Hercules Oetaeus* begins her debate with the queen by advising her against killing a man fathered by the gods<sup>109</sup> and the nurse of Medea repeatedly points out the

---

<sup>109</sup> *Perimes maritum, cuius extremus dies primusque laudes novit et caelo tenus erecta terras fama suppositas habet? Argea in istos terra consurget lares, domusque soceri prima et Aetolum genus sternetur omne*/"Will you kill this husband, for whom the

danger of attacking a king.<sup>110</sup> At this point, then, the *satelles* seems a reliable and knowledgeable character, supportive of his master but also conscientious and protective. Atreus counters that as king he need not fear the judgment of his subjects, and the *satelles* dispenses what is perhaps his most perceptive bit of wisdom when he explains the difference between forced and genuine praise:

*Quos cogit metus  
laudare, eosdem reddit inimicos metus.  
at qui favoris gloriam veri petit  
animo magis quam voce laudari volet (207-10)*

Those whom fear compels to praise  
fear also turns into enemies.  
But he who pursues the glory of honest favor  
wishes to be praised by the heart rather than the tongue.

Here, as is typical of Seneca's Attendant characters, the *satelles* establishes himself initially as the voice of moderation and moral rectitude. The audience would certainly be in agreement with his well-reasoned objections, and Atreus' disregard for them shows only the king's inability to think rationally through his madness. As he is repeatedly ignored, however, the *satelles* begins to change his approach and weaken his character in the eyes of the audience. First he argues that responding to a crime with a crime is always the wrong decision (*Nefas nocere vel malo fratri puta*/"It is wrong to harm even a wicked brother" (219)) and then appeals to *pietas*, a fundamental element of Roman morality (*Nulla te pietas movet?*/"Does no piety

---

beginning and end of the day renew glories and holds fame above earth and reaches heaven? The Argive land will rise against your homes, first the house of his father-in-law and then the whole Aetolian race will be laid low." (*Hercules Oetaeus* 315-320)

<sup>110</sup> *Quam multa sint timenda, si perstas, vide. Nemo potentes aggredi tutus potest.*/"See how much there is to be feared if you persist. No one is able to attack the powerful in safety." (*Medea* 429-430)

move you?" (248)). In both cases, the *satelles* abandons his position so quickly that he seems merely to give lip service to these elements of moral philosophy, and his swift defeat on both points sets up his final slide into complicity with Atreus' plans. Having given up the debate so easily, the *satelles* begins to plan the crime actively along with his master, a character shift so dramatic that one wonders how much the *satelles* believed in his earlier objections – if at all.<sup>111</sup> With lines such as *Quonam ergo telo tantus utetur dolor?*/"What, then will such unconquerable grief use as a weapon?" (257)<sup>112</sup> the *satelles* encourages Atreus to develop his plan further and seems almost eager to witness (and perhaps take part in) Thyestes' grim demise. Over the course of such a brief argument the *satelles* has transitioned from moralizing objector to an almost sadistic participant, and even goes so far as to point out a hole in Atreus' scheme, lest it come together with anything less than its full, horrific potential (*Sed quibus captus dolis nostros dabit perductus in laqueos pedem? inimica credit cuncta*/"But by what tricks will he come into our traps, captured and led by his own feet? He believes enemies to be everywhere" (287-9)). The *satelles* seems here to show concern not for his master or the kingdom but rather for the success of the terrible crime Atreus is planning. It is a remarkable question for him to ask, and one that definitively signals the *satelles*' surrender of the morally just position. Furthermore, and most significantly, the terrible scheme

---

<sup>111</sup> See Schiesaro (2003) 163: "Of course Atreus held [the *satelles*] hostage and could have easily punished any resistance; but the play does not give any indication that this might happen, and portrays instead the *satelles*' parabolic descent from resistance to complicity."

<sup>112</sup> Compare with the *nutrix* of *Hercules Oetaeus*: "*Perimes maritum?...Ferrone?...Si nequis?...Quis iste furor est?/Will you kill this husband?...With the sword?...And if you cannot?...What is this impossible rage?*" (436-9)

that was at first wholly Atreus' (SATELLES: *Facere quid tandem paras?*/"What, then, are you planning to do?" (267)) has suddenly become "ours" (*nostros* (288)). In a very short span of dialogue the *satelles* has become entirely complicit and seems ready to take credit for his own part in planning the crime. Through these subtle fluctuations in the *satelles*' language we can see how his moral perspective is quickly broken down and reversed by Atreus' irresistible passion.

With the *satelles* now wholly on board with Atreus' plan and excitedly ushering it forward, he makes one final resistance that serves only to underscore his newfound complicity with the tragedy:

*Alios ministros consili tristis lege.  
peiora iuvenes facile praecepta audiunt;  
in patre facient quidquid in patruo doces.  
saepe in magistrum scelera redierunt sua.*(308-11)

Choose other agents for your terrible plan.  
Young men listen easily to corrupted precepts;  
whatever you teach them in their uncle they will do to their father.  
Crimes often return upon their own teacher.

This statement might seem at first to be a moral objection to Atreus involving Thyestes' innocent children in the plot, but closer examination tells a different story. While the *satelles* initially balks at the idea of using the children in such a deceitful and potentially harmful manner, his explanation shows that his concern is actually for Atreus' continued rule *after* defeating Thyestes. Just as Clytemnestra's *nutrix* worries that her queen's rule will become untenable after Agamemnon's murder,<sup>113</sup>

---

<sup>113</sup> *Ultrix inultum Graecia hoc facinus feret? Equos et arma classibusque horrens fretum propone et alto sanguine exundans solum, et tota captae fata Dardaniae domus regesta Danais!*/"Will avenging Greece bear this crime unavenged? Imagine horses, weapons, and the sea bristling with ships and the ground flooding deep with blood,

the *satelles* is troubled primarily by the possible threat of Tantalus and Plisthenes. The *satelles* fears that if Thyestes' sons learn such tricks from their uncle they might in turn use these tactics to depose Atreus in the future. As the audience views the corruption of innocent children with horror the *satelles* thinks about long-term implications, about how his master might perfectly get away with his crime. This is the final sign of the *satelles*' corruption: he and the audience have the same reaction to Atreus' statement, but for entirely different reasons. Thus, Atreus has completely subjugated his conscience and removed the final obstacle to his crime.

For the audience, the scene has been illuminating in several ways: they learn the precise reasoning behind Atreus' inexplicable madness while simultaneously witnessing the utter powerlessness of the morally correct perspective in the face of Atreus' passion. The *satelles* has functioned for Seneca primarily as a mode of explication, as the vehicle through which the audience might understand Atreus' madness and the inability of his conscience to control his actions. In a relatively short scene Seneca uses the *satelles* to frame his audience's understanding of the moral issues within the play as well as its perception of the power of moral reasoning. The *satelles* paints a rather pessimistic picture for the conscientious viewer, and his inability to resist Atreus (not to mention his hasty conversion to the king's attitude) implies that once passion grips the mind of a man he is beyond the help of *ratio*. This is an important aspect of Seneca's Attendant for our discussion of Gager's, as Gager will use the character type to suggest an alternate vision of the struggle between *furor* and *ratio*.

---

and the whole fate of the captured Dardanian house returning upon the Danaans!"  
(*Agamemnon* 220-225)

#### **iv. *Phaedra***

##### **a. Critical Approaches**

If the relationship between Atreus and the *satelles* is the most straightforward example of Seneca's Attendant character, then the one between Phaedra and her nurse is certainly among the more complex. Phaedra's *nutrix* is arguably the most important character in the *Phaedra*, and her role extends far beyond simply drawing out the details of Phaedra's madness for the benefit of the audience. Not only does the *nutrix* actively participate in her mistress' crime when she offers to soften Hippolytus to Phaedra's advances, but she also perpetrates the fraud that results in Hippolytus' gruesome death. On the surface level, then, the *nutrix* could be easily be blamed for the tragedy, but through the nurse's many lines of dialogue Seneca shows that the truth is far more complicated. Though her actions are reprehensible, they are not portrayed as the product of an inherently corrupt mind: it seems that the *nutrix* sets the tragedy into motion out of respect and love for Phaedra and not because of a wicked desire to witness grief and destruction. She recognizes that her reason is powerless to end Phaedra's madness and thus attempts to help her queen in the only way that she can, lest Phaedra kill herself in desperation. The careful manner in which Seneca develops the *nutrix* character shows his concern for the viewer's understanding of moral agency: he characterizes the nurse so that despite her objectively guilty actions, the audience views her sympathetically and places the blame for the tragic events primarily upon Phaedra. While acknowledging the Nurse's participation in the crime, I hope to show that her relationship with the queen so complicates the question of guilt in this tragedy that



the audience views the nurse with more understanding than it did the *satelles*. Seneca's intricate characterization of the *nutrix* establishes her as the personification of Phaedra's moral conscience: thus instead of turning the *nutrix* into the play's primary villain, the Nurse's participation in the conspiracy serves to further emphasize the queen's inability to control her passion through moral reasoning. The inadequacy of *ratio* in the face of emotion becomes *Phaedra's* central theme and, as I plan to argue, encourages the viewer to locate the roots of tragedy in the mental processes of its characters rather than in the physical manifestations of their emotions.

Several critical approaches to *Phaedra* and its *nutrix* will prove relevant to my discussion of this Attendant. In the introduction to his 1987 translation, Boyle discusses how Seneca shifts his audience's sympathy between characters throughout the play, noting that "the unstoic virtue of compassion"<sup>114</sup> is the play's central theme. He states that Phaedra, initially the object of the viewer's sympathy, becomes increasingly reprehensible through comparison with the choral odes and her interactions with Theseus and Hippolytus. In the end, all the characters seem to share the blame for the tragedy while still deserving sympathy from the audience.<sup>115</sup> As we will see, this oscillation of sympathy and guilt for each character is critical to the viewer's understanding of the play, and Boyle rightly argues that for Phaedra it

---

<sup>114</sup> Boyle (1987) 33.

<sup>115</sup> See Boyle (1987) 35-36: "There are no villains in *Phaedra*. Each character, even the Nurse (e.g. 138f.), receives at various moments in the play sympathetic presentation...the dramatic focus falls on the profoundly tragic nature of Phaedra's life, and simplistic moral judgments are averted. Compassion is integral to both presentation and elicited response."

is her “moral consciousness and the violation of integrity”<sup>116</sup> that ultimately condemns her in the eyes of the audience. In his analysis of Phaedra’s character, however, Boyle does not discuss the role of the *nutrix* in drawing out the details of the queen’s passion and contextualizing it within the play.<sup>117</sup> As I plan to argue, the *nutrix* plays a central part in shaping the audience’s understanding of guilt and moral agency in *Phaedra*.

Just as the *satelles* shows his audience the conflict between *furor* and *ratio* in *Thyestes*, Phaedra’s nurse draws out in *Phaedra* a similar contest, but one that is even more clearly delineated.<sup>118</sup> Through contrast with Phaedra’s frenzy the Nurse

---

<sup>116</sup> Boyle (1987) 36.

<sup>117</sup> In his 1997 work *Tragic Seneca*, however, Boyle does describe briefly how the Nurse’s moralizing objections show the audience Phaedra’s progression from helpless and distraught realism to a fantasy world in which her passion can indeed have a positive outcome. See Boyle (1997) 62ff.: “The Nurse’s abstract moralizing and interrogatory rhetoric (129ff., 195ff.) serve only to allow Phaedra to become more confirmed in her sense of helplessness, until she moves into wish-fulfillment (Theseus will not return, 219-21) and fantasy (Theseus will pardon her, 225), as the urge for the hunt, described with alarm in her opening soliloquy (110-12), explodes into a fantasy image of an erotic hunt for Hippolytus in the wild (233ff.), Phaedra seeking to take control, if only in fantasy, of her life. When Phaedra’s fragile optimism, her fantasies and delusions founder on the Nurse’s emotional appeal (246-9), her talk of shame, honor and death (250ff.) only succeeds in drawing the Nurse into the fantasy of a successful Hippolytan hunt.”

<sup>118</sup> Armstrong (2006) connects the Roman authors’ engagement of Cretan women with a popular concern for effects of unchecked female sexuality on the moral constitution of Roman society: “Under Augustus, a famous (or infamous) raft of moral reforms was passed, making adultery and the toleration of adultery a criminal offence. Personal morality became intimately linked with the preservation and strengthening of Roman society. In the context of Augustan Rome, women such as Pasiphae, Phaedra, and Aerope (and even Ariadne, on some accounts) come to represent not just the wildness of the sexual impulse, or even women’s proverbial lustfulness, but an alternative lifestyle which is at once diametrically opposed to the Augustan ideal and, presumably in a slightly less extreme form, all too prevalent at Rome.” (15ff.) Segal (1986) provides a helpful characterization of this conflict between moral reasoning and passionate emotion within the context of *Phaedra*: “In the *Phaedra* Seneca creates a dialogue, and sometimes a disjunction, between the

initially stands as the voice of moderation and self-restraint, and in her well-reasoned speeches she displays intellectual and moral superiority over both Hippolytus and Phaedra. Despite the nurse's wise counsel and clear grasp of the situation, however, she is ineffective in the face of Phaedra's passion and Hippolytus' obdurate will, and she eventually takes an active role in the play's gruesome conclusion. Roland Mayer observes that Hippolytus' romantic ideals and Phaedra's *furor* make a rational solution impossible because each character holds vastly different conceptions of rational action and "there is no resolution between the alternative models of what is natural behaviour."<sup>119</sup> Mayer argues that the absence of divine agency in the tragedy affirms the theme of passion triumphing over reason:

There is no divine scheme which sets the agenda for the human actors. Everyone in [*Phaedra*] acts as they choose to; passion overwhelms reason, but the passion is not imposed or directed from above. So the human soul is not besieged by some external enemy, rather it becomes the battle-ground of an internal, civil war. The characters work against themselves and each other, but not against a god. This is in effect a new kind of tragedy, operating upon a purely human plane.<sup>120</sup>

In this passage Mayer establishes the minds and emotions of each character as the sources of this tragedy, and when we turn to Gager's Attendants this psychological focus will be a critical point of comparison. After examining how Seneca's *nutrix*

---

figurative language of the heroine's passions and the philosophical argumentation of the Nurse. This counterpoint between poetic imagery and moral precept is especially marked in Phaedra's first scene, where it helps define the deeply emotional nature of her trouble." (43) The ability of *ratio* to contain the effects of *furor* will be central to my discussion of the Attendant figures in both Seneca and Gager, though I will argue that the two authors offer very different opinions on protecting one's moral constitution against passionate emotion.

<sup>119</sup> Mayer (2002) 39.

<sup>120</sup> Mayer (2002) 46.

encourages the audience to see the human psyche as the fundamental source of the tragedy, I will show that Gager's use of the character type reverses Seneca's approach and brings the viewer's focus to the actions of the players rather than their thoughts and emotions.

While this section will of course focus primarily on the *nutrix*, any treatment of the *Phaedra* necessitates a discussion of its eponymous queen. Moreover, the intimate relationship between Phaedra and her *nutrix* forces any analysis of the Nurse's moral agency to incorporate a stance on her master's level of responsibility as well. To this end, Rebecca Armstrong's reading of Phaedra in *Cretan Women* (2006) will be particularly illuminating. Armstrong's characterization of Phaedra draws on the common Senecan theme of an inherited predisposition towards sinfulness and the cyclical nature of destructive immorality within households and nations, not to mention mythological traditions. Just as Seneca's Medea "becomes" over the course of her play the figure that she was always meant to be,<sup>121</sup> Phaedra attributes the inevitability of her destruction to her dysfunctional family history and that of her husband.<sup>122</sup> Furthermore, Armstrong argues that Phaedra's profession of divine retribution as the source of her misfortune (*Phaedra* 175ff) is "contested, if not wholly undermined" (296) by the objections of the *nutrix* and by the fact that the gods appear in Phaedra's mind rather than onstage (as in Euripides' version). Thus the true nature of supernatural involvement is left ambiguous and gives the viewer grounds to question Phaedra's self-characterization as the helpless victim. As will

---

<sup>121</sup> See *Medea* 910 *Medea nunc sum: crevit ingenium malis*/"Now I am Medea: my genius has grown through evils," and later *coniugem agnoscis tuam?*/"Do you recognize your wife?" (1021)

<sup>122</sup> See Armstrong (2006) 286ff.

become apparent, my argument will take up this fluid and complex reading of Phaedra in an attempt to locate the sources of the tragedy from the viewer's perspective. My discussion of the *nutrix* will supplement Armstrong's analysis of Phaedra in that it will show how the audience's evolving judgment of the Nurse changes its understanding of the queen and, more generally, of the fundamental forces driving the events of a tragedy.

### **b. The *nutrix***

In the first scene between Phaedra and her *nutrix*, it is immediately clear that this will not be the typical mistress-servant relationship. The *nutrix* dominates the conversation and displays a considerable degree of influence over her queen, yet throughout the conversation Phaedra's wildly fluctuating rhetoric suggest that her madness and emotion will ultimately win out over the Nurse's calm rationality.<sup>123</sup> The *nutrix* introduces herself with a lengthy speech in which she begs Phaedra to

---

<sup>123</sup> Fitch observes in his introduction that while the Nurse's *ratio* easily refutes Phaedra's insanity defense, the queen's emotional complexion renders her Attendant's reason futile. See Fitch (2002) 441ff.: "Though Phaedra's claim to be a helpless victim of Venus is exploded by the Nurse's vigorous commonsense, it is clear that [Phaedra] has an inherited predisposition to sensuality...Seneca presents dramatically a woman of intense emotions, but weak-willed, a woman who veers wildly between one impulse and another, even in the space of a few lines." Fitch's characterization of Phaedra's "predisposition to sensuality" will also contribute to my analysis of moral responsibility in this tragedy: in Phaedra's interactions with the *nutrix* the audience discovers that Phaedra's actions are driven by unexplainable passion rather than reason or moral judgment, and thus the viewer identifies Phaedra and her uncontrollable emotions as the true cause of the tragedy. Similarly, Segal (1986) argues that the Nurse's interactions with Phaedra help to assign to the queen the moral responsibility for the tragedy: "Initially [the Nurse] speaks the voice of reason, society, sanity, and the laws of nature. But at another level her diction and imagery turn Phaedra back upon the symbolic correlates of her desire. Thus she judges Phaedra as even more culpable than Pasiphae, for the latter's crime was due to "fate" whereas Phaedra's derives from moral character (*fatum, mores*, 143f)" (43).

disregard her passion, citing several reasons why this love will end in disaster. Phaedra immediately acknowledges her nurse's wisdom, yet remains resigned to her fate: *Quae memoras scio vera esse, nutrix; sed furor cogit sequi peiora*/"I know that what you say is true, nurse; but frenzy forces me to follow a worse path" (178-80). With this opening exchange, Seneca signals a different sort of relationship between these characters than the one that we saw between Atreus and his *satelles*. Whereas Atreus was never in doubt and his advisor never in control, Phaedra's *nutrix* retains the moral high ground and displays real authority over her mistress' wavering spirit. Clearly we are dealing with an entirely new moral conflict: these two characters are in full agreement that they are on the wrong path, but follow it nonetheless because the alternative (Phaedra's destruction at the hands of her own passion) is unthinkable. Compared to the example from *Thyestes* examined above, the relationship between Phaedra and her nurse is much more complex because Phaedra respects and actively seeks her Attendant's opinion, though both the Nurse and the queen ultimately accept that the *nutrix's* morally responsible rationale can offer little resistance to Phaedra's uncontrollable passion. Through extensive dialogue Seneca builds out this complicated relationship in order to shape his audience's judgment of the *nutrix* and, by extension, its appreciation of personal agency in human tragedy.

Throughout this initial debate the *nutrix* continues to advocate moderation and suggest alternatives, implying that Phaedra can yet be saved (*precor, furorem siste teque ipsa adiuva: pars sanitatis sanari fuit*/"I pray you hold this rage and be your own savior: it is part of health to wish for healing" (248-9)). When she realizes

that Phaedra is beyond reason she decides to aid her mistress' madness, but not in the reprehensible way that her counterpart in the *Thyestes* does:

*Solamen annis unicum fessis, era,  
si tam protervus incubat menti furor,  
contemne famam: fama vix vero favet,  
peius merenti melior et peior bono.  
temptemus animum tristem et intractabilem.  
meus iste labor est aggredi iuvenem ferum  
mentemque saevam flectere immitis viri.(267-74)*

Mistress, only solace of my tired years,  
if so heavy a madness lies upon your mind  
forget your reputation: reputation scarcely favors the truth,  
more so for the less worthy and worse so for the good.  
Let us test out his spirit, harsh and intractable as it is.  
It is my task to approach that wild youth  
and turn aside the harsh mind of the stubborn man.

Rather than enthusiastically joining forces with her mistress' evil plot, the *nutrix* decides to sacrifice her own integrity in hopes of saving Phaedra's life. Thus while her actions are immoral the audience understands her motivations and does not necessarily judge her as a morally corrupt character. This is a critical moment for the *nutrix*, as it is the point at which she transitions from the moderate and rational perspective into the role of unwilling accomplice.<sup>124</sup> The key difference is that while Seneca allows the *satelles* to become a guilty party at the corresponding moment in

---

<sup>124</sup> Armstrong's reading of the Nurse's involvement provides support for my characterization of the *nutrix*. Armstrong argues that it is out of loyalty to the queen that the *nutrix* submits to Phaedra's morbid acceptance of her own place in her family's tragic history, and furthermore that in doing so the *nutrix* becomes the physical representation of her master's passion. See Armstrong (2006) 294: "A combination of love (Phaedra's passion, the Nurse's care for her charge) and resignation breaks down the resistance offered by shame and sense, to force *both* women to approach Hippolytus, and *both* to connive in making a false accusation. For all the early strength of her arguments, the Nurse becomes almost absorbed by her mistress, and, as a good tragic nurse should, falls into her own 'pre-ordained' role as the would-be procuress, servant of royal desire."

the *Thyestes*, his characterization of the *nutrix* makes her position considerably more understandable to the audience than does that of the *satelles*. Whereas no definitive explanation for the way that the *satelles* suddenly abandons his moral stance, the Nurse's slide into complicity is presented as a rational decision. Forced to choose between either watching Phaedra commit suicide to escape her passion or aiding the queen in her incestuous desire, the *nutrix* chooses the only path that does not involve certain death for her mistress.<sup>125</sup> Because the *nutrix* is presented with an impossible choice between two immoral paths, the audience retains some sympathy for her even though it is clear that her decisions will soon lead to disaster.

From this point, the nurse's involvement with the action of the play becomes increasingly complicated. In her next appearance onstage she engages Hippolytus in a debate that seemingly runs counter to the advice she has just given to Phaedra. Lest this scene discredit his key character, Seneca prefaces the argument with a soliloquy in which the *nutrix* attempts to exonerate herself in the eyes of the audience and reminds them who is really to blame:

*quid dubitas? dedit  
tempus locumque casus: utendum artibus.  
trepidamus? haud est facile mandatum scelus  
audere, verum iusta qui reges timet  
deponat, omne pellat ex animo decus:*

---

<sup>125</sup> Mayer reads the Nurse's decision as a choice between abandoning reason for one of two paths that, conversely, are both governed by madness. See Mayer (2002) 43: "Paradoxically, once the queen agrees [to put a stop to her madness], but realizes that only death will ensure her chastity, the Nurse regards that line of action too as an instance of 'madness' (*mentis effrenae impetus*, 'the impulse of an unchecked mind', line 255) and comes down in favour of the madness of love (line 268)." My analysis of this scene is similar to Mayer's in that I do not argue that the *nutrix* is wholly exonerated in the audience's eyes: rather, I submit this passage complicates the Nurse's characterization in that it portrays her complicity as a rational decision with immoral consequences.



*malus est minister regii imperii pudor.* (425-30)

Why do you hesitate? Chance has given  
the time and place: my skills must be used.  
Do we tremble now? It is not easy to dare a crime,  
even when ordered, but he who fears royal power  
must put aside the truth and drive honor completely from the mind:  
shame is a poor servant for royal authority.

In these five lines Seneca allows the *nutrix* a chance to justify her actions to the audience (an opportunity granted to no other Attendant character), since her decisions are based on loyalty to and love for her mistress rather than on the unexplainable enthusiasm of the *satelles*. Though the *nutrix* is the one who actually plans and carries out the deception that leads to Hippolytus' death, the care that Seneca takes to explain the Nurse's decisions to the audience prevents the *nutrix* from assuming all of blame for the tragedy. Instead of happily aiding in her master's nefarious plot like the *satelles*, the *nutrix* recognizes the immorality of her actions but participates out of commitment to Phaedra. Thus the Nurse seems less an autonomous agent of *nefas* and more a physical extension of the queen's royal power and blinding passion.

Similarly, it is important to note that during the debate the *nutrix* never actually suggests to Hippolytus that he yield to Phaedra's love. She attempts to soften his obdurate will and argues against his preference for the country life over the city, but these arguments are simply attempts to remind Hippolytus of what he has been missing while living in chaste isolation. Nonetheless, the true nature of the Nurse's guilt remains complicated. Despite her altruistic intentions she is ultimately the one who encourages Phaedra's lust and carries out the plan that results in the deaths of both Phaedra and Hippolytus. I would argue, however, that an

understanding of the Nurse's role does not necessitate a definitive statement on her guilt and even precludes such analysis: the convoluted characterization of the *nutrix* prevents the audience from latching onto an easily identifiable villain and reminds the viewer that unchecked passion can pervert even reason and good intention.

When Hippolytus refuses Phaedra's advances and exposes the queen's incestuous desire, the *nutrix* commits the error in judgment that puts her at the greatest risk of becoming as guilty and evil as Atreus in the eyes of the audience:

*Deprensa culpa est. Anime, quid segnis stupes?  
regeramus ipsi crimen atque ultro impiam  
Venerem arguamus. scelere velandum est scelus;  
tutissimum est inferre, cum timeas, gradum.  
ausae priores simus an passae nefas,  
secreta cum sit culpa, quis testis sciet? (719-724)*

Her guilt is exposed. Spirit, why do you stand idle?  
We must redirect the crime onto that man and argue  
the impious love of another. Crime must be covered up with crime;  
It is safest to attack when you are afraid.  
What witness will know whether we first dared the crime  
or suffered it, since it came about in secret?

This is extremely charged language for the play's only emotionally stable character, and for a moment she recalls Atreus when she decides to answer one crime with another (*scelere velandum est scelus*). The difference between her and the villains of *Thyestes*, however, remains that she is trying to protect her mistress and not feed her own passion. The situation is an unfortunate one and bound to end in trouble, but the *nutrix* cannot be completely condemned by the audience because she is simply doing everything possible to protect her queen. Thus when the confusion caused by the nurse's plan results in Theseus' ill-fated curse, the audience does not know exactly who to blame yet does not immediately assign all guilt to the *nutrix*.

Though the nurse's actions were her own, they were driven by the passion of her master and cannot make her morally culpable for the entirety of the disaster that follows. Seneca uses the *nutrix* to locate the source of the tragedy for his audience and remind the viewer that moral judgment is never simple, as unjust actions can sometimes arise from positive moral intentions.

The play's terrible conclusion remains the result of Phaedra's unnatural passion despite the fact that Hippolytus' death stems more directly from the *nutrix*'s plan. Though the *nutrix* initially constructs the fictitious rape, it is crucially important that Theseus' curse in Act 3 stems directly from *the queen's lie* (885ff) after the Nurse refuses to deceive Theseus directly (854ff).<sup>126</sup> Ultimately, everyone involved suffers in some way: the *nutrix* fails at her only responsibility in life, Phaedra succumbs in suicide to her passion, and Theseus sees his house destroyed by his hasty demand for justice. From the audience's perspective, however, the *nutrix* maintains a level of innocence that is not granted to any other advisor-type in the Senecan corpus. Seneca departs from the standard characterization of the

---

<sup>126</sup> Armstrong (2006 142ff) points to Phaedra's exchange with Theseus as the moment that puts "the seal on her irreversibly bad reputation" and reads the queen's speech as an act of criminal and immoral fraud: "Phaedra's speech is a masterpiece of deception. She slowly forces Theseus to draw the (false) inferences himself, recalling in heavily ironic fashion the earlier slow and reluctant revelation of Hippolytus' name to the Nurse by Euripides' second Phaedra. How better to convince than by feigning *pudor*, an unwillingness to reveal the shameful 'facts'?" Though my discussion focuses on the Nurse's involvement in the deceit, it is important to note that in the end Phaedra herself delivers the critical lie to Theseus. I do not mean to suggest that this passage absolves the *nutrix* entirely, as she encourages Theseus to learn the "truth" from Phaedra directly (860-2), but Phaedra's active participation prevents the blame from falling entirely on her Nurse's shoulders. Seneca could conceivably have allowed the *nutrix* to tell Theseus of the rape herself (just as she does with the citizens of Athens at 725ff), and so Phaedra's lie signals the queen's irreversible submission to her own passion.

Attendant in order to make an important point to his viewer about the intricacies of human agency in tragedy: although all the players will invariably be hurt if they do not succeed in preventing the catastrophe, responsibility falls primarily upon the characters whose actions can only be explained by passion rather than reason. Returning to Fitch's point that the Nurse's argumentation stymies Phaedra's claims to innocence through insanity (see n.20), we see in the play's conclusion how the characterization of the *nutrix* throughout the tragedy complicates the audience's judgment of its characters. Though the *nutrix* commits the physical acts that destroy Theseus' family, her motivations are explained and the rationality that she displays, despite the eventual corruption of her moral reasoning, lends her character a degree of credibility not granted to Phaedra or Hippolytus. Once again Seneca presents the conflict of *furor* and *ratio*, and while the *nutrix*, the play's physical representation of *ratio*, seems the sole perpetrator of the actual crime her portrayal prevents simple objective judgment and transfers considerable moral responsibility to the characters gripped by *furor*.

#### **v. Gager's Attendant**

As mentioned above, Gager's imitation of the original Attendant role is quite faithful, as his main characters all receive advisor counterparts who function just like their Senecan correspondences. In the *Dido* we meet Anna, the queen's faithful sister and confidante who, like Phaedra's *nutrix*, attempts to facilitate her sister's disastrous love for Aeneas after realizing that the queen has become impervious to reason. Althaea's nurse in the *Meleager* represents the more traditional version of the Attendant, completely removed from the rest of the cast and powerless to stop

her mistress' crime, modeled perhaps upon the *satelles* or the nurse in Seneca's *Medea*. Gager's careful replication of the original role indicates that he was satisfied with Seneca's construction of the character and felt that it fit easily into his own version of Senecan tragedy. In addition to imitating Seneca's Attendants, however, Gager develops the character type in the Attendant characters he creates outside of the standard role. By applying the advisor role to more than just the tragic hero and placing the Attendant in positions besides that of moral righteousness, Gager develops the character into one that more fully captures the intricacies of the master-advisor relationship. Furthermore, Gager's adaptations of the Attendant contribute to his tragedy's focus on human agency and action rather than passion and psychology.

The *Meleager* is the best example of Gager's expanded use of the Attendant role, as the play features no fewer than four advisor-style characters: one each for Althaea and Oeneus, who also share a soothsayer fitting the Attendant's type, and one for Meleager, the eponymous hero/victim of the tragedy. It is this last Attendant that we will focus on here, as he represents the most noticeable departure from the Senecan model. Philemon, Meleager's friend and perhaps servant, presents a problem for the reader immediately because his character is not part of any extant version of the Meleager myth. With the rest of the play based closely on Ovid's version, Philemon stands out straightaway and forces us to wonder why Gager felt the need to invent his role. As we observe him interacting with Meleager, however, effect of Philemon's insertion into the plot becomes clear. He is certainly built in the model of the Attendant character, as he interacts almost solely with Meleager and

engages him in the type of rapid-fire debate characteristic of the advisor-master relationship. Unlike the Senecan Attendant, however, Philemon rarely displays concern for the moral implications of Meleager's actions. Rather, he functions more as an accomplice to and supporter of Meleager's passion for Atalanta. His only objections are pragmatic ones, such as when he initially advises Meleager to forget about Atalanta because of her stubborn refusal of all men:

*quis huius unquam pectus indomitum domet?  
exosa prorsus nomen exhorret viri,  
vitat himenaeos, caelibem vovit torum.  
proin, negatum sperne, iuvenilem impetum  
ratione fraena. quam cupis, frustra cupis.  
quod vis ubi vetant fata, quod possis velis (199-204)*

Who might conquer a heart so stubborn as hers?  
The very name of "husband" terrifies her, shuddering,  
as she shuns the marriage chamber and pledges a celibate bed.  
Therefore forget what is denied you and harness your youthful  
petulance with reason. When the fates forbid that which you want  
you should wish for that which you can have.

Here Philemon seems reasonable and credible to the audience, though Meleager has yet to challenge his friend by suggesting a morally reprehensible plan. Thus when Atalanta approaches, Philemon sees no harm in making an attempt at softening the headstrong girl's heart. He finally assumes the moralizing stance after Atalanta has rebuffed their approaches and Meleager decides that he will take her by force if she continues to spurn him. Philemon invokes the sacred laws of hospitality when he asks *hospitia violabis furens?*/"will you violate hospitality in your madness?" (428) and warns Meleager that such a crime would invite divine retribution, but his words seem little more than vague admonitions. This is a subtle but crucial distinction, as it represents a departure from Seneca's construction of the Attendant and its effect on

the tragedies. Whereas the failed moral reasoning of Seneca's attendants implies that his protagonists are doomed from the moment of their passion's inception, Philemon focuses on Meleager's potential actions rather than his immoral thoughts and suggests that the prince can control his fate by refraining from acting on his emotions.<sup>127</sup> He objects not to the idea of raping Atalanta but rather to the potential consequences of the act itself. Philemon's parting words, his final significant contribution to the drama, sum up this position succinctly: *quam gravia sint timenda, si rapias, vides*/"You'll see what great things are to be feared if you rape her" (434). He does not attempt to rectify his friend's moral constitution – which is clearly debased but not dangerous until acted upon – and focuses instead on the acts that he knows will expose Meleager to forces of justice both human and divine. Thus Gager's addition of Philemon serves two purposes. First, it develops Meleager as a character and encourages the audience to consider the tragedy from multiple perspectives when making judgments and assigning blame. Though Meleager is ostensibly the victim, Gager uses Philemon to draw out aspects of Meleager's character that place a certain degree of responsibility on the prince's shoulders, a move that fits with Gager's practice of encouraging his viewer to appreciate the tragedy through the lens of multiple characters instead of through one tragic protagonist. From a broader perspective, Philemon's rhetoric signals a departure from the inward-facing world of Senecan tragedy. Unlike Seneca's Attendants, whose characterizations show that the protagonists are doomed as soon as they

---

<sup>127</sup> Even the *satelles*, who argues primarily against the political ramifications of killing Thyestes, also appeals to the moral ideal of *pietas* in his debate with Atreus: *Nulla te pietas movet?*/"Does no piety move you?" (*Thyestes* 248)

allow passion to develop in their minds, Philemon implies that his master can still be saved if he avoids acting on those emotions.

Though Philemon's character is certainly an addition to the original role, he is still a very familiar Attendant part in function and dialogue. Perhaps Gager's most interesting additions to this device, then, are the added characters who very much appear to be advisor-types but act in completely unexpected ways. A hallmark of the Senecan Attendant is that, for better or for worse, the character always acts in the best interests of his or her master. While Gager clearly finds the original Senecan character type useful, two of his Attendants show that he also considers the standard advisor role somewhat limited. Gager uses the characters of Achates and Pandarus to broaden the range of the Attendant role and urge a deeper, more realistic analysis of the advisor-master relationship.

#### **vi. Achates and Pandarus**

To the well-educated audiences at Oxford in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Achates would have been a familiar face: the faithful companion of Aeneas and his closest friend and confidant throughout Vergil's epic. Considering Achates' prominent role in the original tale, then, Gager's viewers may have been surprised at his relatively minor contribution to the *Dido*. Achates remains at Aeneas' side throughout the play yet participates significantly in only one scene, a substantial reduction in the role that suggests a carefully orchestrated maneuver on Gager's part. By distancing Achates from the visible action of the play, Gager is able to use him primarily as an authorial tool and as a vehicle for Gager's commentary on human agency in tragedy. Achates' major contribution comes in Act III Scene vi, when he debates with Aeneas about the



proper course of action following Mercury's visit to Carthage. Aeneas is conflicted about whether to stay in Carthage and honor his commitment to Dido or abandon her and pursue his fate in Italy. Achates steps in and convinces Aeneas to flee, but in a rather unexpected way. Like most Attendant characters, he starts out with a well-reasoned and sensible argument:

*magnanime Troum ductor, et captae unicum  
patriae levamen, comprime affectus precor  
teque obsequentem nuntio praebe Iovis.  
minus elegendum est cum duo occurrunt mala. (Dido 677-80)*

Great-hearted leader of the Trojans, and sole hope  
for our captured nation, I pray that you calm your emotion  
and follow the order of Jupiter's messenger.  
When twin evils occur, the lesser should be chosen.

This is perfectly rational advice, and had Achates simply stuck to this argument he would share no responsibility in the audience's eyes for the impending disaster. The conversation takes an unexpected turn, however, when Achates offers instructions on how exactly Aeneas should undertake his flight. Even after Aeneas has decided to leave Dido, Achates abandons his calm rationality and advises Aeneas to desert Dido in the cruelest manner possible:

*at Mnesteia Coanthumque rectores iube  
ut arma taciti colligant, classem instruant,  
ex urbe socios ad suas cogant rates,  
novique causam fronte consilii tegant. (715-9)*

But order the captains Mnester and Coanthus  
to gather together the weapons in silence, and prepare the fleet,  
and call their comrades to the ships from the city,  
and conceal the sign of the new plan from their faces.

The inherent heartlessness of this plan is nothing new, as the Trojans prepare their fleet secretly in Vergil as well, but Gager's use of Achates is a small yet crucial

adaptation. In Vergil it is Aeneas who plans his covert flight and instructs his captains in the deception.<sup>128</sup> In fact, Achates is not even present during the equivalent scene in the epic and Vergil explicitly references Aeneas' internal planning process.<sup>129</sup> Gager's decision to transfer the plan to Achates thus becomes a significant alteration to the Vergilian version with commensurate effects on the audience's perception of the scene. Though Achates and Mercury both give Aeneas the same advice, the hero only communicates directly with his aide and does not set the plan into motion until Achates has convinced him of every detail. Had Aeneas responded positively in dialogue with Mercury or immediately prepared the fleet after receiving divine instruction, the viewer might associate the subsequent events with the commands of Jupiter and thus consider Aeneas merely a captive instrument of fate. By placing the responsibility for Dido's death solely on Achates and Aeneas, Gager prevents the audience from attributing any part of the tragedy to the whims of some all-powerful and detached divine impulse. True human tragedy, Gager implies, is the result of real-life actions and not the indefinable compulsion of gods or the confused emotions and motivations of the characters. Furthermore, the cowardly and callous nature of Achates' plan only serves to heighten Dido's anguish and increases the fury with which she calls down a curse on Aeneas and his descendants, a curse that she seals with her own death. Thus Achates functions in part to develop and heighten the drama of the tragedy, and his responsibility for the

---

<sup>128</sup> See *Aeneid* IV.279ff.

<sup>129</sup> *atque animum nunc huc celerem nunc dividit illuc in partis que rapit varias perque omnia versat.* / "And now [Aeneas] turned his frantic mind this way and that, seizing upon each alternative in turn and considering every option." (*Aen.* IV.285-6)

escape plot affirms the primacy of human agency over divine intervention in driving the progression of the tragedy.

Though Achates' advice is unquestionably misguided, his poor counsel pales in comparison to the type offered in the *Panniculus* by Pandarus, whom Dana Sutton characterizes as "a depraved sophist arguing a thoroughly wicked case."<sup>130</sup>

Pandarus does not appear in Seneca's *Phaedra* and is thus his inclusion in this myth an invention of Gager's,<sup>131</sup> and as he never actually interacts with Phaedra it remains unclear whether or not he is actually one of her Attendants. The commentaries of Sutton and J.W. Binns are particularly relevant to my analysis of this unusual character. Binns argues that the addition of Pandarus – as well as the entire scene in which he appears – functions to augment the importance of Hippolytus and his chaste perspective. He contends that Theseus' vehement rejection of Pandarus' approaches "show [Hippolytus] to be noble minded and upright" and the scene as a whole makes Hippolytus into "a more spirited and admirable character"<sup>132</sup> than he is in Seneca's version. Sutton challenges Binns'

---

<sup>130</sup> Sutton (1994) 186.

<sup>131</sup> Though Pandarus is a new character in Gager's version of the Phaedra myth, it should be noted that he is a prevalent figure in the Homeric tradition as well as in Renaissance literature. In *Iliad* 4 Pandarus, at the urging of a disguised Athena, launches the fateful arrow that wounds Menelaus and breaks the initial cease-fire. He later wounds Diomedes, who subsequently kills him. Pandarus also appears in the two famous modern versions of the Troilus and Cressida story: Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (1370) and Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* (1609). In both accounts, Pandarus is a cunning figure who uses smooth argumentation to bring lovers together and encourage lecherous behavior. Pandarus' role as the promoter of illicit sexuality in Chaucer and Shakespeare gives us the modern verb "pander," and the similarities in characterization between Gager's and Chaucer's Pandarus figures suggest that Gager may have modeled this Attendant on its early modern predecessor.

<sup>132</sup> Binns (1970) 160.

analysis as overly simplistic and states that Hippolytus' interaction with Pandarus serves instead to portray Hippolytus' rejection of the Naiad negatively and characterize him as a foolish misogynist.<sup>133</sup> As discussed above (see Chapter I Section iii), I am inclined to agree with Sutton's subtler reading of Gager's second added scene. However, neither author analyzes the significance of Pandarus' addition in terms of its effects on the audience's understanding of the Attendant type and its role in shaping the audience's understanding of the tragedy's moral implications. In the following section I will focus on Pandarus himself in order to show that his character has an effect on more than just the viewer's characterization of Hippolytus: in Pandarus Gager presents his audience with an Attendant more unquestionably wicked than any in the Senecan corpus, and through this example the viewer sees that the advice of counselors or friends can sometimes have treacherous motivations.

The fact that Pandarus appears only in Gager's scene and interacts with just one of the characters from the Senecan version (Hippolytus) makes interpreting his place in the tragedy immediately problematic: he is a familiar character from classical and modern literature (see n.131 above), yet he appears in the Phaedra myth unexpectedly and makes his exit from the stage permanently in the middle of Gager's final added scene. Pandarus' role in the mythological tradition, however,

---

<sup>133</sup> See Sutton (1994) 186: "Many readers might choose to disagree with [Binns'] appraisal. It could go unchallenged if Gager had only written the interview with Pandarus, who is a depraved sophist arguing a thoroughly wicked case. But it is palpably wrong when applied to the subsequent interview with the Naiad. She is winsome, wholesome, and thoroughly attractive, and Hippolytus' abrupt and somewhat hysterical rejection of her suit shows him in a very unpleasant light...he gives plenty of evidence that his rejection of the Naiad's advances and his broad-bore misogyny are pathological."

makes him the ideal counterpart for Phaedra's *nutrix*. Both Attendants seem to be agents of love who use reason and amorous rhetoric to bring together a forbidden romance. Pandarus' established characterization and the lack of any contact between him and the queen gives us grounds to wonder if he is indeed an Attendant figure and not simply a mythological allusion of Gager's. I plan to argue, however, that the contrast Pandarus provides with Seneca's *nutrix* carries more significant implications for Gager's overall adaptation of Senecan form if we analyze him in terms of the Attendant's role instead of as an independent character from the literary tradition. As will become apparent, Pandarus' scene allows Gager's viewer to experience Seneca's *nutrix* in a new way (relative to Seneca's original audience) and complicates the audience's understanding of outside counsel and its function in tragedy. If we read Pandarus as nothing more than a cameo by a well-known character we risk overlooking his importance as a foil for the *nutrix* and for the Senecan Attendant in general. Thus I will refer to Pandarus as one of Gager's Attendants so as to connect him explicitly with Seneca's *nutrix*, allowing me to use the differences in their characters to further delineate Gager's expanded use of the Attendant role.

Though it may seem initially that Pandarus and the *nutrix* of the Seneca's *Phaedra* are allies in their efforts, closer examination of Pandarus' rhetoric shows that he is actually the diametrical opposite of Phaedra's nurse. First of all, Pandarus never interacts directly with Phaedra or expresses any kind of interest in the well being of the queen. As we have seen, it is the nurse's love for and loyalty to Phaedra that balances her own guilt in the Senecan tragedy, but Pandarus seems to have no

such concern. More significantly, in his attempt at softening Hippolytus to Phaedra's advances, Pandarus employs exactly the type of argumentation that the *nutrix* takes care to avoid. He begins by distorting stories about Theseus and his crimes against his own household, going so far as to suggest that Theseus killed Hippolytus' mother so as to keep Hippolytus from inheriting the throne (*si quaeris ubi sit, Thesei gladio iacet, nec eam iugali iunxit is taeda sibi. cur? nisi paterna regna ne caperes nothus*/"you ask where she is, she is laid low by Theseus' sword, nor did he take her in formal marriage. Why? Lest you, a bastard child, seize his kingdom" (124-6). After incepting these fictions, Pandarus proceeds directly to a description of Phaedra's love for Hippolytus and attempts to frame it as beautiful and sexually appealing rather than incestuous and morally repulsive. To this end he employs faulty logic and plays on Hippolytus' love of the wilderness in hopes of mollifying him to Phaedra's lewd desires:

*mundi parentem si ducem libeat sequi,  
indulsit illa non modo Venerem omnibus  
hanc coniugalem, sed vagam sylvae feris  
promiscuamque. nata fit cervo patri  
coniunx, et utero dama, quem peperit, subit.  
quanquam feruntur esse quoque gentes, ubi  
et nata patri nubit, et nato parens,  
et iuncta crescit vinculo pietas duplo. (165-72)*

If it pleases you to follow the parental lead of nature, she grants to all things not only love and marriage, but wild promiscuity as well to the beasts of the forest, A doe born to a male sire becomes his bride, and a doe submits to he who dropped from her womb. It is also said that there are races where the daughter is married to the father, and the mother to the son, and their mutual loyalty increases with this double bond.

From these lines alone it is abundantly clear that while Pandarus and Phaedra's *nutrix* share a common goal, they could not be any more different as characters. Just as he is in Chaucer and Shakespeare, Pandarus is the personification of insidious advice in the *Panniculus*, and his debased logic (such as his attempt to equate the mating practices of humans and deer) and deceitful scheming show that he is an entirely new type for the *nutrix* role. Whereas Phaedra's *nutrix* advocates the virtue of a chaste marital bed and focuses on the psychological benefits of a loving relationship instead of the physical act of lovemaking, Pandarus bases his argument on the temptations of carnal desire and does not hesitate to propose the incestuous union directly. Pandarus' language, not to mention his suspiciously unsigned love letter (199), seems intentionally misleading and immoral, and Binns is correct in pointing out that Hippolytus' rejection of Pandarus shows the prince's virtue, if only for a short time.

If Pandarus is indeed a unique version of the Attendant character, then Gager must have inserted him into Seneca's text with a specific goal in mind: after all, the *Phaedra* already features a strong *nutrix* character for the queen, and the Nurse does a more than adequate job of displaying Phaedra's psychological distress. Gager's explicit reversal of the typical Attendant characteristics signals his dissatisfaction with Seneca's one-sided presentation of the advisor-master relationship. If the *nutrix* is Phaedra's conscience personified, Pandarus represents the dark side of human consciousness. Both Attendants want the same thing but for very different reasons – the *nutrix* wishes only to save Phaedra's life while Pandarus' motivations are never made clear – and the *nutrix* is characterized as moral and rational while

Pandarus relies on cunning and deceit. Furthermore, Pandarus' true relationship to the queen is left ambiguous and the viewer is left to wonder if he was indeed sent by Phaedra or if he approached Hippolytus as a third party with some ulterior motive. The implication is that while it is important to take advice from trusted sources such as friends or one's own conscience, no method of decision-making can ever be truly infallible and morally-conscious behavior comes only from careful consideration of one's actions and motivations. Gager's insertion of Pandarus challenges the audience's expectations of the Attendant character and invites the viewer to consider an entirely new reading of Seneca's stock role.

### **vii. Conclusion**

While it is difficult to isolate precise moments of commentary on Senecan form in Gager's individual adaptations of Senecan devices, the Attendant is a helpful example because for the most part Gager leaves Seneca's original character alone. In Gager's expanded use of the Attendant role we are able to witness Gager actively developing an element of Senecan drama to a variety of ends. On a dramaturgical level, the abundance of Attendant figures enables the development of multiple primary characters and encourages the audience to broaden its focus away from simply the tragic hero when generating a moral position on the tragedy. Through the new roles Gager strives to more realistically portray human interaction and the innumerable ways in which close personal relationships can lead to destructive passion and utter disaster.

On a deeper level, however, Gager's use of the Attendant points to significant revision of Seneca's moral philosophy. While Gager's Attendants, like Seneca's, are



usually the ambassadors of moral righteousness and moderation, their criteria for assessing and guiding their masters' moral constitution are very different. The advisors of Gager's drama do little to discourage their masters from feeling the effects of passion and emotion, focusing instead on the actions that may put the heroes in real danger. The Attendants accept that their masters will inevitably be afflicted by passion and work actively to prevent them from acting on it, suggesting that the protagonists become guilty through immoral action rather than at the moment of passion's inception. Althaea's *nutrix* gives voice to this concept when she struggles to prevent the queen from burning the brand that will destroy Meleager. The nurse points out the best-case scenario for the crime – that Althaea commits it without anyone's knowledge – and then shows that even in such a scenario the queen is doomed:

*ut lateat omnes, haud lateat animum tuum.  
hoc mille testes pectore, hic paenae est satis.  
ecce aderit omni filii extincti loco  
feralis umbra, cumque nox operit diem,  
armata facibus veniet, et furiis aget.*

Would that [the crime] be hidden from all, it would hardly be hidden from your spirit. Hence a thousand witnesses from your breast, here there is enough punishment. Behold, the fierce shade of your dead son is present everywhere, and when night comes to the day, he will come armed with torches and will pursue you with furies. (1215-1219)

Here the nurse pronounces with certainty that Althaea will be punished the very instant she burns the brand, even if no other person ever learns the truth. In passages such as this one we find evidence of Gager's revision of Seneca's views on moral culpability. Whereas Seneca's characters are inevitably culpable the instant passion grips their minds (as they are tragically unable to control their emotions

through reason), Gager's protagonists are morally salvageable until they actually commit their crimes. The *nutrix* of Seneca's *Hercules Oetaeus* best illustrates the difference between the two authors' opinions on moral agency when she advises Deianira not to consider herself guilty:

*Quid domum impulsam trahis?  
erroris est hic omne quodcumque est nefas.  
haud est nocens quicumque non sponte est nocens.*

Why do you drag down a shaken house?  
Whatever crime is here lies in error.  
He who is not guilty by intent is scarcely guilty. (884-886)

With these three lines the *nutrix* frames the audience's judgment of Deianira: the queen is indeed guilty of mortally wounding Hercules, but her crime was committed in error and as a result of her husband's infidelity. Deianira is thus responsible to a similar degree as Phaedra's *nutrix*: she has no intention of harming Hercules yet causes the eventual disaster through her desire to fix her marriage and her jealousy of Hercules' lovers. Just as in the *Phaedra*, all characters in *Hercules Oetaeus* suffer regardless of their actions, but Seneca again uses the *nutrix* to point out the variability of moral responsibility based on emotion and intent. Contrasting this passage with the words of Althaea's *nutrix* mentioned above, it seems very unlikely that Gager's Attendants would argue for their master's innocence after the fact as the nurses of Phaedra and Deianira do. This distinction indicates Gager's reception of Seneca's belief that the hero is doomed as soon as passion grips the mind. Gager forces his characters to focus on the action of the tragedy in hopes that the audience will understand that the victims *could* have been saved from their fate had they simply refrained from the crime itself, regardless of their immoral and passionate

thoughts. Just as we have seen in his other adaptations of Senecan conventions, Gager uses the Attendant character to bring Seneca's drama forth from the gloomy recesses of the protagonist's mind and into the stark reality of human actions and their consequences.

## Chapter V – Conclusion

In studying the reception of Senecan tragedy through the plays of William Gager, we are at an immediate advantage as a result of Gager's unique place within the theatrical tradition of Elizabethan England. Not only can we easily identify his primary literary influences through the details of his academic life, but the time period at which he was composing drama places him at the dawning of the Renaissance tragic tradition and allows us to read his plays as pure Senecan imitation in ways that we could not if he had written, for example, during the first half of the seventeenth century. Gager began to produce tragedy in a dramaturgical environment that had recently seen the decline of the ecclesiastical drama and was just starting to develop into the literary environment that would eventually produce *Hamlet* and *Tamburlaine*. Like his now-famous contemporaries, Gager turned to classical world in search of a dramatic form that would prove more compelling and evocative than the religious theater of the Middle Ages and early modernity. In the tragedies of Seneca, as we have seen, Gager discovered a genre with enormous potential for examining the moral issues of his day, though not without considerable adaptation.

Over the course of this thesis we have explored many points of variation between the techniques of Gager and Seneca as well as the implications that these differences have for the audience's experience of the tragedies. Though not all of Gager's modifications affect his plays in exactly the same way, his various points of departure from Senecan form speak to the same fundamental revision of the moral philosophy exhibited in Seneca's dramas: whereas Seneca's dramatic approach

emphasizes the psychological sources of tragic events and the inability of moral reason to control the irrational psyche, Gager's tragedies supply the more optimistic sentiment that a person's moral constitution is defined by action rather than thought and that people do in fact have the potential to avoid immoral acts and their consequences. On the most basic level, the two authors are in disagreement over the function of moral agency in the tragic setting. Seneca's primary characters and their supporting casts are irretrievably doomed the instant passionate emotion grips the protagonist's mind. Rationality and moderation can no longer save them as they play out their fated role in the ongoing cycle of tragedy. While Gager's characters are similarly irredeemable, the audience is led to believe that their fates could have been avoided and, most importantly, that the viewer can prevent similar circumstances in real life by learning from the immoral acts and inflexible fates of the characters. Gager's vision of tragedy, perhaps drawing on the Christian notion of personal salvation through contrition and scrupulous morality, paints a considerably more hopeful picture than Seneca does of man's role in creating and regulating tragic events, and as a result Gager's audience members would likely have left the theater with an increased sense of responsibility for their own moral characters.

In the most general sense, the differences between the two authors' views on moral agency are reflected in Gager's reversal of Seneca's declamatory narrative approach. Seneca's lengthy soliloquies and metadramatic devices separate the audience from the onstage events and create a focus on the psychological states of the primary characters. Gager inverts this technique and concentrates instead on

constructing his characters through their actions in each scene and their responses to the behavior of the other players. The contrast between these two dramatic approaches illustrates the fundamental manner in which Gager recasts Seneca's bleak vision of moral reasoning and its function in tragic events.

In *Oedipus* we saw how Seneca's use of multiple internal narrators creates two primary effects for the audience. First, the removal from the stage of the tragedy's most disturbing and emotionally evocative events prevents the viewer from basing moral judgments on an immediate and passionate reaction, thereby fostering rational and composed reflection on the scenes as related through the eyes of the characters. More importantly, however, the variation in narrative perspective complicates the audience's understanding of guilt within the play – Oedipus' in particular – and recasts the familiar tale as an illustration of man's inability to combat through reason the forces that drive the tragic cycle. Like many of the characters, the viewer becomes effectively blind to the most important scenes of the tragedy and therefore cannot form any authoritative and objective judgments, suggesting that the intangible emotions that provoke tragic events cannot be predicted or controlled through *ratio* alone. Similarly the two internal narrators drawn from *Agamemnon* stress the impotence of reason in the world of tragedy, but in a slightly different way than in *Oedipus*. Eurybates' account of the storm at sea connects the play to the cyclical nature of violence and suggests that involvement in immoral acts places men onto a path driven by anger and the desire for revenge. The implication of his otherwise extraneous account is that taking part in tragic circumstances will inevitably engender further strife and eventual destruction for

those associated in any way. The placement of Agamemnon's murder within the prophetic mind of Cassandra makes explicit what is implied in Eurybates' tale. Cassandra, who is endowed with foreknowledge of the play's events yet cannot affect any change, illustrates how tragedy infects the minds of those involved and consigns them to annihilation through the recurrence of the violent cycle. The combined effect of these two narrators is paradoxical: it seems to suggest that an understanding of the self-perpetuating nature of tragedy can help men anticipate and avoid damning complicity, yet Cassandra's fate points to the ultimate powerlessness of reason (even prophetic wisdom) in the tragic realm. Ultimately, Seneca's narrative approach asserts the supremacy of destructive passion over moral reasoning even as his framing techniques encourage calm reflection on the part of the audience.

Whereas Seneca relies heavily on in-text narrative figures to construct his tragedies, Gager eliminates all such devices and chooses instead to stage nearly every relevant scene of his plays. Our examination of the dramatic approach in *Ulysses Redux* shows how Gager's viewer would have had no choice but to evaluate each character based on their moral constitutions as displayed and developed by their behavior throughout the tragedy. Gager's focus on the observed actions of each character, especially Ulysses', allows the *dramatis personae* to evolve independently instead of confining each player to a predetermined characterization. Ulysses illustrates the gradual development of the tragic protagonist in a comprehensive manner, displaying the progression of acts that construct his character and rejecting Seneca's practice of defining his protagonists based on their motivating passions.

Similarly, the varied portrayals of Ulysses' victims – specifically those of Eurymachus and Antinous – allows the viewer to judge the suitors separately based on their actions and words instead of condemning the entire group as a result of their immoral and greedy desires. The overall effect of Gager's narrative approach to *Ulysses Redux* is that despite the inevitability of the play's outcome, the audience has the opportunity to evaluate the moral constitution of each character by witnessing firsthand their actions firsthand rather than by receiving a portrait of their psychological states through multiple layers of narration. Thus, Gager's reversal of Seneca's dramatic techniques emphasizes the importance of considering actions instead of psychology when forming moral judgments, as the complicated nature of tragedy necessarily precludes a deterministic definition of moral agency.

Moving into the internal mechanisms of the tragedies, we encountered next a figure of central importance in the tragic genre – the citizen chorus. Seneca's choral odes, modeled upon those of his Greek predecessors, are among the most recognizable elements of his plays. The chorus' lengthy discourses on various abstract subjects have drawn both dramaturgical and philosophical interpretations, and as we have seen the particular role of the citizen chorus differs across (and even within) Seneca's tragedies. When we contrast Gager's use of the chorus with Seneca's, the immediately noticeable reduction in choral lines is the first of Gager's two adaptations. Gager also creates the role of the sub-chorus, the discrete choral entity made up of individual characters to which Gager attributes a significant portion of the duties assigned to Seneca's chorus. The result is a transfer of interpretive responsibility from the detached citizen chorus (which can seem at



times to be a tool of authorial intervention) to Gager's audience. Instead of being told how to understand the plays through the prolonged speeches characteristic of the Senecan chorus, Gager's viewer is presented with only a basic theoretical framework and left to draw its own conclusions from the scenes presented onstage.

In our discussion of Seneca's choruses we saw how, despite the prominent and often accurate moral discourses of the odes, his choral groups are ultimately rejected and silenced by the violent passions that drive the characters and the tragedies that they create. Seneca establishes the chorus as the onstage representation of the audience, and its reactions to the tragedy construct a model of response for the concerned yet powerless spectator. Inevitably, however, Seneca's chorus becomes an allegory for the hopeless conflict between *furor* and *ratio* that pervades each of his plays: the chorus cannot always comprehend the true implications of the tragedies, and Seneca's elimination of the chorus in the final act confirms its inability to rationalize the tragedies' horrific conclusions. In the chorus of *Phaedra* we examined Seneca's most straightforward use of this device. The Athenian chorus is ambiguously identified and restricts its discussions to abstract concepts that are generally related to the tragedy but still display a limited grasp of the true issues at hand. The chorus of the *Phaedra* functions primarily to shape the audience's judgment of the primary characters and identify a few of the drama's underlying themes, yet it ultimately underscores impossibility of using reason to make sense of tragic events. The chorus encountered in *Troades*, on the other hand, is not quite as easy to understand. Seneca's specific characterization of this chorus as a group of Trojan women frames its odes and shows how choral identity can

affect the audience's understanding of its discussions. The Trojan women become a theatrical representation of the grieving process, and their recognition of their own hopeless position speaks to the general inescapability of the tragic cycle. Though Seneca's specific uses of the chorus vary with each play, the basic characteristics of the choral role establish the chorus as an onstage depiction of the involved but impotent audience. The ultimate failure of the chorus to make sense of or affect a positive change in the tragedies, coupled with its consistent absence from the final act, contributes to Seneca's focus on uncontrollable passion and its ability to override moral reason.

Our analysis of Gager's choral technique focused on the choruses of two plays, *Meleager* and *Ulysses Redux*. Through the multiple choruses presented in each play we discovered that Gager's minimization of the citizen chorus, coupled with his insertion of various sub-choruses, functions to further emphasize his plays' concern for physical action. In *Meleager* the citizen chorus operates rather like the typical Senecan chorus, but its manner of presenting philosophical concepts reveals the underlying difference. When it treats abstract themes related to the tragedy, the citizen chorus argues that men are indeed able to avoid tragic fates by adhering to reason and morality when deciding how to act. Whereas Seneca's choruses comment on the inevitability of fate within the tragic cycle, the citizen chorus of *Meleager* implies that by learning from the failures of the figures onstage we can protect our own moral constitutions and overcome the forces that drive tragic circumstances.

The discussion of Gager's sub-chorus utilized three primary examples, each of which carries different implications for our understanding of Gager's adaptations: the *Matres Calydonides* of *Meleager* as well as Phemius and the *Carmen* from *Ulysses Redux*. The *Matres Calydonides*, a sub-chorus made up of Calydonian mothers, functions like the chorus of Seneca's *Troades* in that it provides a model of response to the most emotionally trying scene of the tragedy. The critical difference is that the *Matres Calydonides* are a separate entity from the primary citizen chorus, and Gager's delegation of the "surrogate audience" role to an explicitly defined group of citizens contributes to the focus on characters and action over abstract philosophy and psychology. Phemius, the bard of Ulysses' palace, plays an entirely different role in his contributions to *Ulysses Redux*. As a composer and performer Phemius becomes the symbol of poetry and artistic creation within the text, and the content of his odes (as well as his deliverance from the suitors' fate) illustrates the redeeming effect that literature can have on man's moral constitution. Phemius is spared from the climactic slaughter because of his role as the bard, implying that poetry, when used purposefully and responsibly, has the ability to protect a person's moral character against the faults that create tragic events. Phemius' role is a metatheatrical comment on the power of verse, and it reminds the audience that in witnessing a tragedy they have an opportunity to learn from the characters and the consequences that they face, thus protecting themselves from falling into similar circumstances. The *Carmen*, sung by Penelope's attendants and penned by Phemius himself, drives home this point. In the *Carmen* Gager delivers the most crucial moral discourse of the play, and the fact that it comes from individual members of the cast

rather than from the *Chorus Ithacensium* carries significant implications for the viewer. Gager's construction of this ode reminds the audience members that they should judge the characters of the play by their demonstrated ability to measure up to the standards of loyalty and moderation embodied by Penelope and described in the *Carmen*. Outside of the play itself, however, Gager's use of the *Carmen* also encourages the viewer to strive for Penelope's moral example in everyday life, as imitation of her irreproachable character would prevent a person from behaving, and ultimately suffering, like the suitors.

The final device examined in this thesis is the Attendant, a Senecan figure that we found to be expanded rather than fundamentally altered in Gager's plays. Indeed, the character type functions in largely the same way for both authors: the Attendants are paired with the protagonists of each play and embody their moral consciences, though the Attendants are chronically unable to dissuade their masters from following through with their ill-fated plans. From the audience's perspective, the Attendants help to characterize the tragedies' primary figures by drawing out their motivations and illustrating through dialogue their corrupted psychological states. In his imitation of the character type, however, Gager broadens the scope of the role to include more Attendants in each play as well as Attendant figures who behave unlike any found in the Senecan corpus. In Gager's expansion of the Attendant we see that despite his basically faithful reproduction of the character type, Gager departs from Seneca's fundamental views on the sources of moral agency in a tragedy.

As we saw in our analysis of the examples from *Thyestes* and *Phaedra*, Seneca's Attendant figures perform three primary functions in his tragedies. First, they complement the protagonists in order to reveal the passions that drive their depraved actions. Furthermore, the Attendant's role as the physical representation of the master's moral character emphasizes just how powerless the forces of *fas* and *ratio* are in comparison to the main character's hyperbolic *furor*. Finally, the Attendants contribute to Seneca's framing efforts by acting as *spectator* and (sometimes) unwilling accomplice to their masters' unfolding scheme. The *satelles* of *Thyestes* exemplifies this effect: instead of interacting directly with Atreus and assuming the complicity of a horrified yet engrossed witness, the viewer learns of the king's wicked intentions through his dialogue with the *satelles*, who then becomes guilty through association and participation while allowing the audience to evaluate the tragedy from a detached perspective. Indeed, the *satelles* is the most straightforward example of the Senecan Attendant. He appears briefly at the start of the play and draws the audience's attention to Atreus' moral corruption, reminding the viewer that the tragedy has its roots in the king's uncontrollable *furor*. The remarkably swift and inexplicable way in which the *satelles* subsequently abandons his morally conscious position is an extreme demonstration of the lopsided conflict between *ratio* and *furor*, as he not only fails to restrain Atreus' rage but also becomes eagerly and disgracefully complicit with the king's plot. As the *satelles'* complete and effortless defeat illustrates, the mere presence of destructive passion within the mind of a character creates a scenario in which moral reasoning is powerless to prevent a tragic outcome.

The other Senecan Attendant examined in Chapter IV was Phaedra's *nutrix*, who presents a far more complicated use of the character type relative to the *satelles*. While she participates in and encourages her master's immoral plans just like the *satelles*, the *nutrix* is given the opportunity to explain her motivations and thus earns some sympathy from the audience despite her undeniable transgressions. Though the *nutrix* abandons her moral convictions and actively creates the circumstances for the deaths of Phaedra and Hippolytus, her characterization shows that her complicity is provoked by her devotion to Phaedra and is thus more understandable from the audience's perspective than the *satelles'* involvement in Atreus' scheme. Instead of seeming corrupt and weak like the *satelles*, the *nutrix* becomes an ethical martyr of sorts when her love for Phaedra overrides her own moral conscience. Seneca's subtle use of this Attendant suggests that immoral actions do not necessarily constitute irredeemable guilt in a tragedy, as a considerable degree of responsibility ultimately falls on the shoulders of the characters who are gripped by passionate and irrational emotion.

In our analysis of Gager's Attendants we saw how Gager's expansion of the stock role results in several significant changes to the Attendant's effects on his tragedies relative to Seneca's. Gager's application of the Attendant to multiple characters within the same play broadens the audience's focus and allows it to evaluate the moral constitution of each important character instead of concentrating solely on the psychology of the protagonist. Furthermore, Gager's more unusual Attendant figures reveal the limitations of Seneca's one-sided approach to the advisor role, implying that external counsel is not always well intentioned and that

its sources should always be carefully evaluated. Finally, the manner in which Gager's Attendants attempt to restrain their masters' immoral impulses differs substantially from Seneca's approach and suggests that characters take on responsibility for a tragedy when they act on their sinful desires but are not guilty simply as a result of having such thoughts.

The multiplicity of Attendants in *Meleager* best exhibits how a deeper understanding of several different characters changes the audience's appreciation of moral responsibility within the tragedy. In Philemon's interactions with Meleager we see how this minor Attendant emphasizes the importance of refraining from reprehensible and irredeemable behavior instead of arguing on the level of moral philosophy. Philemon's handling of his master is indicative of the way that Gager's Attendants focus on responsible action over psychological purity, thereby recommending to the audience that the characters should be judged based on the inherent morality of their actions and not on the intangible emotions that motivate immoral behavior. Achates, during his brief appearance alongside Aeneas in *Dido*, similarly underscores the primacy human agency in tragedy but in a rather different way. Gager's decision to have Achates plan the Trojan's cowardly flight from Carthage instead of Aeneas (as he does in Vergil) establishes a contrast between the supernatural advice of Mercury in the preceding scene and the human counsel of Achates. Aeneas acts directly on the inexplicably harsh advice of Achates rather than on Mercury's heavenly edict (which makes no mention of abandoning Dido in such a sudden and heartless way), and by following Achates' plan Aeneas inadvertently creates the setting for Dido's tragic suicide. The contrast between these two sources

of advice implies that tragic circumstances are invariably the result of human decisions and cannot be attributed to indefinable and uncontrollable forces such as fate or supernatural intervention.

Finally we looked to Pandarus from Gager's second added scene in the *Panniculus* as the extreme example of Gager's expanded use of the Attendant. Though Pandarus' well-known characterization in the Homeric and modern traditions likely provides the basis for Gager's portrayal, the fact that Gager places him into an entirely new mythological context (i.e. the Phaedra myth, in which he does not ordinarily appear) allows us to examine him as one of Gager's Attendants. By reading Pandarus as more than simply a textual connection to the Pandarus characters in Chaucer and Homer, we were able to see more easily how Gager's Pandarus sets up his contrast with Seneca's *nutrix* and provides the audience with a new perspective on the Attendant and its role in tragedy. Whereas Phaedra's *nutrix* embodies the queen's righteous yet overmatched moral conscience, Pandarus represents the darker side of Phaedra's consciousness. Pandarus' language and actions show him to be the antithesis of the *nutrix*: he utilizes corrupted logic and appeals to base, immoral desire in an attempt to deceive Hippolytus into accepting Phaedra's advances, whereas the *nutrix* simply advocates the joys of a chaste marital bed and conclusively refutes Hippolytus' stubborn rejection of natural love. Furthermore, Pandarus' actual affiliation with Phaedra is left ambiguous, giving the audience grounds to wonder whether his efforts are motivated by factors less understandable than the Nurse's demonstrated devotion to her queen. Gager's insertion of Pandarus into his production of the *Phaedra* provides contrast with the



*nutrix* that expands the viewer's understanding of the Attendant figure and suggests that counsel from outside sources can easily have nefarious motivations. Ultimately, the juxtaposition of Pandarus' deceitful nature with the Nurse's sympathetic characterization reminds the audience that advice from others, no matter how convincing or well intentioned, should always be evaluated based on the actions and demonstrated character of its agent.

As this brief overview of the preceding chapters indicates, Gager's adaptations of Senecan form do not always alter Seneca's practices to the same degree. What all of Gager's changes have in common, however, is their contribution to his fundamental revision of Seneca's views on moral agency and its role in the construction of tragedy. By reading Gager through Seneca we can see that the religious and intellectual context of Renaissance England occasions a more hopeful view of man's ability to control tragic passion through moral reasoning than is found in Seneca's drama. Conversely, the authors' contrasting views on personal morality help to further illustrate the moral cynicism that characterizes Roman Imperial literature. In a general sense, then, the study of Gager's plays provides valuable insight into the subject of Senecan reception as well as the development of the tragic genre from the classical world through the modern era. My analysis of Gager's imitation is just one example of how two vastly different cultural landscapes can use the same literary vehicle to deliver fundamentally distinct moral philosophies.

## Works Cited

- Armstrong, Rebecca. *Cretan Women: Pasiphae, Ariadne, and Phaedra in Latin Poetry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Black, J.B. *The Reign of Elizabeth: 1558-1603*. 2nd ed. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1959.
- Belsey, Catherine. "Senecan Vacillation and Elizabethan Deliberation: Influence or Confluence?" *Renaissance Drama*. 6. (1973): 65-88.
- Binns, J.W.
- "William Gager's Additions to Seneca's *Hippolytus*." *Studies in the Renaissance*. 17. (1970): 153-191.
  - "Introduction." *Th' Overthrow of Stage-Players*. John Rainolds. New York: 1972.
  - *Intellectual Culture in Elizabethan and Jacobean England: The Latin Writings of the Age*. Leeds: Francis Cairns Publications Ltd, 1990.
- Boas, Frederick S. *University Drama in the Tudor Age*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1914.
- Boyle, A.J.
- *Seneca's Phaedra: Introduction, Text, Translation, and Notes*. Liverpool: Francis Cairns Publications Ltd, 1987.
  - *Tragic Seneca: An essay in the theatrical tradition*. London: Routledge, 1997.
  - *Seneca's Oedipus: Edited with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 2011.
- Braden, Gordon. *Renaissance Tragedy and the Senecan Tradition: Anger's Privilege*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985.
- Brooke, C.F. Tucker
- *The Tudor Drama: A History of English National Drama to the Retirement of Shakespeare*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911.
  - "Latin Drama in Renaissance England." *English Literary History*. 13.4 (1946): 233-240.

-- "The Life and Times of William Gager (1555-1622)." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*. 95.4 (1951): 401-431.

Calder III, William M. "Seneca: Tragedian of Imperial Rome." *Classical Journal*. 72.1 (1976): 1-11.

Coffey, Michael, and Roland Mayer. *Seneca: Phaedra*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Eliot, T.S.

-- "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca." *The Shakespeare Association*. Folcroft, PA: Folcroft Library Editions, 1927.

-- *Elizabethan Essays*. London: Faber & Faber Ltd, 1934.

Fantham, Elaine. *Seneca's Troades: A Literary Introduction with Text, Translation, and Commentary*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982.

Fitch, John G.

-- "Playing Seneca?" *Seneca in Performance*. Ed. George W.M. Harrison. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd, 2000. 1-13.

-- *Seneca: Hercules, Trojan Women, Phoenician Women, Medea, Phaedra*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002.

-- *Seneca: Oedipus, Agamemnon, Thyestes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004.

Fitch, John G., and Siobhan McElduff. "Construction of the Self in Senecan Drama." *Seneca: Oxford Readings in Classical Studies*. Ed. John G. Fitch. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. 157-181.

Hadas, Moses. *Seneca's Oedipus*. New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1956.

Harbage, Alfred. *Annals of English Drama 975-1700: An Analytical Record of All Plays, Extant or Lost, Chronologically Arranged and Indexed by Authors, Titles, Dramatic Companies, Etc.*. 1st ed. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1940.

Herington, C.J. "Senecan Tragedy." *Arion*. 5.4 (1966): 422-471.

Hill, D.E. "Seneca's Choruses." *Mnemosyne*. 53.5 (2000): 561-587.

- Johnston, Alexandra F.. "Tudor Drama, Theatre and Society." *A Companion to Tudor Britain*. Ed. Robert Tittler and Ed. Norman Jones. London: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2009. 430-448.
- Kohn, Thomas D. "Who Wrote Seneca's Plays?" *Classical World*. 96.3 (2003): 271-280.
- Littlewood, C.A.J. *Self-Representation and Illusion in Senecan Tragedy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Logan, Terence P., and Denzell S. Smith. *The Predecessors of Shakespeare: A Survey and Bibliography of Recent Studies in English Renaissance Drama*. 1st ed. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1973.
- Marshall, C.W.. "Location! Location! Location! Choral Absence and Theatrical Space in the *Troades*." *Seneca in Performance*. Ed. George W.M. Harrison. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd, 2000. 27-53.
- Marti, Berthe. "Seneca's Tragedies: A New Interpretation." *Proceedings of the American Philological Association*. 76. (1945): 216-245.
- Miola, Robert S. *Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy: The Influence of Seneca*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Motto, Anna Lydia, and John R. Clark. *Senecan Tragedy*. Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1988.
- Nussbaum, Martha C. *The Therapy of Desire*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994.
- Pratt, Norman T. *Seneca's Drama*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983.
- Ribner, Irving, and Clifford Charles Huffman. *Tudor and Stuart Drama*. 2nd ed. Arlington Heights, IL: AHM Publishing Corporation, 1978.
- Schiesaro, Alessandro. *The Passions in Play: Thyestes and the Dynamics of Senecan Drama*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Segal, Charles.
- *Language and Desire in Seneca's Phaedra*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986.
- "Boundary Violation and the Landscape of the Self in Senecan Tragedy." *Seneca: Oxford Readings in Classical Studies*. Ed. John G. Fitch. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Smith, Bruce R.

-- "Toward the Rediscovery of Tragedy: Productions of Seneca's Plays on the English Renaissance Stage." *Renaissance Drama*. 9. (1978): 3-37.

-- *Ancient Scripts & Modern Experience on the English Stage: 1500-1700*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988.

Staley, Gregory A. *Seneca and the Idea of Tragedy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Star, Christopher. "Commanding *Constantia* in Senecan Tragedy." *Transactions of the American Philological Association*. 136.1 (2006): 207-244.

Stevens, David. *English Renaissance Theatre History: A Reference Guide*. 1st ed. Boston: G.K. Hall & Co, 1982.

Sutton, Dana F.

-- *Seneca on the Stage*. Leiden: Brill, 1986.

-- *William Gager: The Complete Works*. New York: Garland Publishing Inc, 1994.

Tarrant, R.J.

-- *Seneca: Agamemnon -- Edited with a Commentary*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.

-- *Seneca's Thyestes: Edited with Introduction and Commentary*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985.

Volk, Katharina, and Gareth D. Williams, ed. *Seeing Seneca Whole: Perspectives on Philosophy, Poetry and Politics*. Boston: Brill, 2006.

White, D. Jerry. *Early English Drama, Everyman to 1580*. 1st ed. Boston: G.K. Hall & Co, 1986.

Winston, Jessica. "Seneca in Early Elizabethan England." *Renaissance Quarterly*. 59.1 (2006): 29-58.