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SENECA'S CHARACTERIZATION: THE "AGAMEMNON" AS A CASE STUDY

EIRINI-EVDOKIA NOUSIA

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Contents

List of Abbreviations

Bernabé	A. Bernabé, ed. *Poetarum Epicorum Graecorum. Testimonia et Fragmenta* (Leipzig, 1987). Corrected edn. (Stuttgart, 1996^2)
IEG	M. L. West, ed., *Iambi et elegi Graeci ante Alexandrum cantata* (Oxford, 1971-72)
MW	R. Merkelbach and M. L. West, eds., *Fragmenta Hesiodea* (Oxford, 1967)
PLF	E. Loeb and D. Page, eds., *Poetarum Lesbiorum Fragmenta* (Oxford, 1955). Corrected edn. (Oxford, 1963)
PMGF	M. Davies, ed., *Poetarum Melicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* (Oxford, 1991)
RE	A. Pauly and G. Wissowa, *Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* (Stuttgart and Munich, 1894-)
SH	H. Lloyd-Jones and P. Parsons, eds., *Supplementum Hellenisticum* (Berlin, New York, 1983)
TrGF	B. Snell, R. Kannicht, and S. L. Radt, eds., *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* (Göttingen 1971-2004)
W	M. L. West, ed., *Iambi et Elegi Graeci* (Oxford 1989-92^2)

Journal abbreviations are as in *L'Année Philologique.*

Introduction

Aristotle in his *Poetics*, his chief contribution to the art of literary criticism, seeks to instruct us by formulating theories of dramatic composition. One of the major tenets of his theory is that every tragedy has six basic components upon which its quality depends: the plot, the character, the diction, the thought, the spectacle, and the song.[1] Aristotle, however, did not confine himself to the mere charting of this list; he went on sketching the relationship between two of the most important constituents of tragedy: that of plot and character noting that:

Ἀρχὴ μὲν οὖν καὶ οἷον ψυχὴ ὁ μῦθος τῆς τραγῳδίας, δεύτερον δὲ τὰ ἤθη. παραπλήσιον γάρ ἔστιν καὶ τῆς ἐπιγραφικῆς· εἰ γάρ τις ἐναλείψειε τοῖς καλλίστοις φαρμάκοις χύδην, οὐκ ἂν ὁμοίως εὐφράνειεν καὶ λευκογραφήσας εἰκόνα. ἔστιν τε μίμησις πράξεως καὶ διὰ ταύτην μάλιστα τῶν πραττόντων. (1450^{a}42-1450^{b}4)

"The plot then is the first principle and as it were the soul of tragedy: character comes second. It is much the same also in painting; if a man smeared a canvas with the loveliest colours at random, it would not give as much pleasure as an outline in black and white. And it is mainly because a play is a representation of action that it also for that reason represents people."

Aristotle's insistence on the primacy of plot does not denote that characterization is subordinate or unimportant to tragedy but rather that it is of secondary importance.[2] Yet, his statements were the starting point of the perception of the key role played by characterization in dramatic works.

Characterization in Greek tragedy, however, has always been a vexed issue, and a difficult one to tackle. As Easterling has underlined[3] there is nowadays "a general readiness to recognize that the business of defining character and personality,

[1] Cf. *Poet.* 1450^{a}8-1450^{a}10.
[2] For more information on this subject see Jones 1962, 29-46; Pearson 1968, 76-83; Halliwell 1986, 138-67 and 1987, 139-43; Heath 1987, 115-23; Blundell 1989, 16-25 and Seidensticker 2008, 333-346.
[3] Easterling 1990, 90. See also Frow 1986, 227 who similarly stresses that "the concept of character is perhaps the most problematic and the most undertheorized of the basic categories of narrative theory."

let alone the self, is problematic and that there is no single perspective on tragic action that we can safely take for granted."

Much work on characterization[4] shows precisely that character in tragedy is not constructed around a single idea or quality; that character is steadily affected by action and language to such an extent that has to be seen as a combination of these elements. "'Plays are about people', but people in plays, dramatic persons, are constructs, constructs of language and gesture, of the sounds of the language given them by the playwright and the movements envisaged by the playwright and realised by the actor; and it is through language and gesture that the playwright controls our response, as audience, to the personalities of his stage figures."[5]

A dramatis *persona* is a "dynamic phenomenon"[6] and should not be analyzed or observed in isolation since he is not an independent unit but takes part in a larger whole. As Garton aptly remarks "the figure cannot however be set loose. .. He is to the drama what a front or side elevation is to a building, basically a resultant of its structure." Far from looking for unity of characters and fixed character portraits or engaging themselves in stressing their incongruities, scholars of ancient drama nowadays recognize the "dynamics of action and interaction" in their discussions of the various traits of tragic *personae.*[7] Related to this comes Mossman's consideration that "describing the hero by revealing the nature of his external relations with those who surround him is a method of characterization particularly suited to the dramatic medium."

While literary critics[8] lauded the Greek tragedians' competence with which they lead their audience to develop an impression of their plays' characters, Seneca's

[4] For general discussions of characterization in Greek tragedy see e.g. Katz 1994, 81-103; Goldhill 1990, 100-127; Gellie 1963, 241-55; Gill 1990, 1-31; Halliwell 1990, 32-59; Docherty 1983; Gill 1986, 251-273 and Pelling 1990. Cf. also Allan 2000, 86-117, Mossman 1995, 94-141. The importance that scholars have already from antiquity attached to characterization in dramatic works is manifested in a comment, of the ancient *Life* about Sophocles, who was deemed to be one of the most skilled in character portrayal: οἶδε δὲ καιρὸν συμμετρῆσαι καὶ πράγματα, ὥστ' ἐκ μικροῦ ἡμιστιχίου ἢ λέξεως μιᾶς ὅλον ἠθοποιεῖν πρόσωπον. ἔστι δὲ τοῦτο μέγιστον ἐν τῆι ποιητικῆι, δηλοῦν ἦθος ἢ πάθος ("And he knows how, to compose the action with such a sense of timing that he builds an entire character from a mere half-line or a single expression. This is the most important thing in poetry, to depict character or feelings", *Vita* § 21, p.40 Radt).
[5] See Gould 1978, 43.
[6] Cf. Easterling 1977, 126.
[7] Cf. Easterling 1990, 88 and Docherty 1983, xii-xiv.
[8] See Easterling 1973, 3-19 and 1977, 121-129 and Griffin 1990, 128-149.

techniques of characterization have rather been neglected and under judged.[9] His dramatis *personae* have often been condemned as mere *exempla*, embodiments of Stoic doctrines[10] and have been criticized for being either "stock" figures[11] lacking realism[12] and displaying exaggeration[13] or being excessively rhetorical, influenced by the rhetoric of declamation[14] which is apparent in Seneca's drama as a hangover from the declamatory training that the Latin dramatist had received.[15]

Although the editorial introductions to Seneca's plays often include a section on the characters of the drama in which their various traits are collected into a series of sketches the most collective work that dealt with characterization in Seneca was J.Fitch's doctoral thesis *Character in Senecan Tragedy* dated in 1974. Fitch explains that his aim is "to show that it is possible to take a much more positive view of these characters, firstly if one examines their portrayal with care rather than impatience, and secondly if one judges them by standards which are appropriate to dramatic characters – particularly by seeing them not in isolation, but in relation to the plays in which they appear."[16] Yet Fitch examines the dramatis *personae* only in four tragedies of Seneca, namely *Phaedra*, *Troades*, *Medea*, and *Hecules Furens* leaving out of his discussion *Agamemnon*.

My thesis is a concentrated study on this relatively neglected tragedy of Seneca, despite the revival of interest in Senecan drama. My aim will be to examine the way Seneca presents his characters and let them speak at different levels of language, rhetoric and argumentation according to the new nuances their role has inside the new play. Since discussion of Seneca tends to revolve around certain familiar plays, I shall seek to show that the *Agamemnon* is no less valuable than the most celebrated plays for the exploration of Senecan theatre aspects. The critical literature on *Agamemnon* is frequently negative. It has been criticized for being the weakest and unworthy drama of Seneca. Its structure has been condemned as

[9] Garton 1972, 190 comments that in Seneca's plays we can witness "the paradox of an art of characterization which has somehow contrived both to stimulate and to bore, to matter greatly and not to matter at all."
[10] Cf. Marti 1945, 216-245 and Pratt 1948, 1-11.
[11] See Bonner 1949, 162
[12] See Mendell 1941, 120
[13] See Hadas 1939, 222.
[14] See Canter 1925, 1.
[15] Cf. Fantham 1982, 26 and Coffey and Mayer 1990, 19 who notes that "no Roman of consequence in the early empire could have escaped declamation as an obligatory part of his education."
[16] See Fitch 1974, 1.

disjointed; it has no protagonist, nor a central actor, and its two distinct choruses led many a critic to stress its fragmentation and incoherent nature.

The Latin dramatist does not confound our expectations as readers with knowledge of the Greek prototype since in Seneca too, Agamemnon's story is still unpleasant as he will be killed by his wife. The similar development of the mythic plot naturally invited comparisons with Aeschylus' celebrated *Agamemnon* and modern scholarship has labored on whether we should place Seneca in direct relationship with this particular Attic tragedy. Thus, Tarrant in his commentary[17] sustains that "it seems incredible that the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus could ever have been thought Seneca's source" while in a later article[18] he asserts with a kind of axiomatic certainty that "one might conclude that Seneca had never read Aeschylus." More recently and contrary to Tarrant's claim Lavery by giving an account of correspondences between the two plays is making the point that Seneca wrote his tragedy with the presence of Aeschylus in his poetic background. He maintains that through these correspondences it appears not only that "Seneca was acutely aware of Aeschylus' play" but rather that "Seneca had read Aeschylus' Agamemnon attentively." [19]

My analysis of the Latin tragedy inclines me to embrace Lavery's point of view. For this reason, in my thesis, an analysis of the characters in the ancient Greek text comes first in each chapter, in order to trace how and to which extent and how Seneca utilizes or deviates from the Greek prototype and explain the reason of his stance. This "how" will be the red thread I will try to pursue in my analysis of the Aeschylean prototype and Senecan tragedy; I hope that highlighting the difference between the two plays can turn into a focalization of Seneca's positive choices of poetics. Seneca is not Aeschylean, certainly, but in his being not-aeschylean he often appears to be post-aeschylean. His dialogue with Aeschylus is not a signifiacant dialogue but rather a reactive one. With more or less radical differentiations pursuing different targerts and adopting different forms from Aeschylus, Seneca shapes something new out of inherited material. To follow Lavery's overall implication Seneca by using Aeschylus' scaffolding, he re-arranges or discards most of it.[20]

[17] Cf. Tarrant 1976, 10.
[18] Cf. Tarrant 1978, 215.
[19] Cf. Lavery 2004, 12.
[20] Cf. Lavery 2004, 13.

But apart from the text of the Greek tragedian I also consider the other extant literary sources available to Seneca in conceiving his play and what he has made of them; for example. Hellenistic texts such as Lycophron's *Alexandra* for the presentation of the clairvoyant Cassandra or, since Seneca's tragedies are pieces of Neronian literature, Latin texts such as Ovid's *Heroides* that Seneca employs for the representation of Clytemnestra playing with motifs from other genres in order to produce more complex but still fully tragic characters. My study will also show that social factors of Seneca's era should not be left out of consideration since they have a bearing on Seneca's characterization in the way he actualizes or modernizes his figures.

The first chapter seeks to demonstrate the skill with which Seneca adapts his dramatic method in order to elucidate the title hero of his play. In the Senecan portrayal of Agamemnon the martial prowess, the salient feature that Aeschylus has endowed his hero with, is pared away. Nevertheless, Seneca's dramatic technique clearly bears the imprint of his Greek predecessor. The technique of characterization in absence the dramatist uses in his hero's representation had already been employed in the Aeschylean *Agamemnon*; yet Seneca's handling of this motif shows his innovative approach which is geared to serving his own dramatic purposes. Whereas in Aeschylus the technique of characterization in *absentia* accentuates the great peril and fear connected with the expectation of the absent Agamemnon, in Seneca it accentuates the anguish his audience feel whether Agamemnon's death on s tage would cater their appetite for bloody spectacles.

Chapter two focuses on Clytemnestra's characterization. I have set out to show that Seneca uses the Aeschylean prototype and elaborates on i t: in Aeschylus she behaves as a male because she has the power, in replacement of her husband-king. In Seneca she is a queen who believes to be entitled to have power as a queen, and has a deep awareness of her royal condition. Seneca might have wanted to provide with his presentation of Clytemnestra — and above with his treatment of the balance in her characterization between female gender and royal status — a justification for her actions. Aeschylus' Clytemnestra was considered to be the most transgressive woman in tragedy. Seneca may want to correct the Aeschylean presentation in a way: his own Clytemnestra is not presenting herself as aggressive as the Aeschylus' one, and for her over-female power Seneca appears to look for a specific reason: her awareness of her queenly condition, and her fear to lose it. For the Senecan Clytemnestra her status is

important because it grants her power. So, when she feels that her power is at stake she is presented to act more strongly since she does not want to be deprived of it.

The third chapter concentrates on Clytemnestra's rhetorical skill and how by interlacing rhetoric and deceit in her arguments, she uses and abuses rhetoric to manipulate her environment and to elicit reactions from her interlocutors.

Chapter four considers Seneca's presentation of Cassandra. It is interesting enough that in Aeschylus Cassandra, when Clytemnestra is on stage, she either remains silent or leaves the stage, emphasizing thus, the domination of the latter character. In Seneca, however, she is the character who dominates the stage and has the pivotal role after the arrival of the king onwards till the end of the tragedy. Yet, apart from this fundamental difference a closer examination of Seneca's characterization of Cassandra reveals that the source for a clairvoyant vision of the prophetess must be sought to Cassandra's subsequent history in the Hellenistic era and more specific in Lycophron's *Alexandra.*

The last chapter examines Seneca's use of the choral songs. It is true that the dramatic chorus underwent considerable alterations during the intervening period of half a millennium that separates Seneca from the Athenian tragic poets. It is also true that Seneca's choruses have repeatedly come under strong criticism with scholars complaining that their relationship with the action of the play is loose and detached. Yet in Seneca's *Agamemnon* we can perceive the (unusual for Seneca's technique) strong interaction between the choral odes and the action of the play in such an extent that we can conjecture that the Latin poet models his chorus closely to the prototypal *Agamemnon* by Aeschylus where the choral ode are an integral element in the play.

Agamemnon

Agamemnon in Aeschylus

The character of Agamemnon stands in the center of the entire *Iliad*, since the whole play reposes upon and opens with the abduction of Achilles' war-prize, Briseis, at the order of Agamemnon in Book 1 and the explosion of Achilles' wrath, which, as emphasized from the beginning by the narrator, will be the driving force behind the action of the whole play. Agamemnon, the most important figure after Achilles in the play,[21]typifies, as almost all approaches by classical scholars have stressed,[22] a flawed character: while, on the one hand he is depicted as the representative of supreme power and political authority as the leader of the Greek army at Troy (ἄναξ ἀνδρῶν) his chief concern to assert his position and status within the Achaian hierarchy and over his antagonist Achilles,[23] singles him out as an insecure leader, a figure who "is sometimes cruel and overbearing, sometimes weak and pathetic."[24]

In what follows I will give an account of Agamemnon's characterization in Aeschylus in order to create a background against which to judge the handling of Seneca's Agamemnon and consider how far this hero, filtered through the Latin poet's lens, corresponds with the Aeschylean one.

Agamemnon, in Aeschylus, partakes in the dramatic action for a comparatively short time. Not only do the other characters surpass him in the duration of their presence on stage, and in the number of lines they speak, but he himself, coming on stage at line 810 and uttering only 82 lines, appears for "only one-tenth"[25] of the play. But even before Agamemnon's actual appearance the comments that work between the figures of the play and the chorus and their scattered references to him convey to the audience a sympathetic, if not a honourable, picture of the King. Thus, first the watchman, a loyal servant of Agamemnon speaks warmly and affectionately

[21] Taplin 1990, 78 aptly remarks that Agamemnon drops out of the narrative "once he is no longer the object of Achilles' anger."
[22] Cf. Benardete 1963, 1-16; Donlan, 1971, 109-115; Taplin 1990, 60-82; Rabel 1991, 103-117; Greenberg 1993, 193-205; Zanker 1994, 75ff; Clay 1995, 72-75 and Paul 2006, 1-46.
[23] See *Il.* 9.160-161 καί μοι ὑποστήτω, ὅσσον βασιλεύτερός εἰμι ἠδ' ὅσσον γενεῇ προγενέστερος εὔχομαι εἶναι "and let him submit himself to me, since so much more kingly am I, and claim to be so much his elder."
[24] Cf. Donlan 1971, 115.
[25] Cf. Denniston and Page 1960, xxxiii. See also Crane 1993, 117.

for his master who is about to come home.[26] The chorus of the Argive Elders, though they criticize Agamemnon openly for the sacrifice of Iphigenia[27] (vv. 206-211) they cannot hide their genuine emotions and joy for the their king's triumph at Troy[28] and reveal their loyalty and care for their most kindly guardian (1452 φύλακος εὐμενεστάτου) praying for their own death after Agamemnon has fallen murdered (vv.1448-55).[29] Likewise, the Herald informs us thatἈγαμέμνων ἄναξ is worthy of a glorious welcoming at home as it is appropriate for the conqueror of Troy (vv. 520-533). And although one might be tempted to think that displaying a spirit of devotion is something natural for these minor characters and the Chorus[30] and can be easily explained by the bonds of loyalty and fidelity towards the returning King, we cannot afford to ignore Cassandra's full of praise reference to the destroyer of Ilium and her captor, Agamemnon, as a noble lion (v. 1259 λέοντος εὐγενοῦς).[31]

When Agamemnon appears on s tage in person the play arrives at its crux point.[32] The King enters and his first words, after greeting his country, Argos, express his respectful gratefulness to the gods, with all due respect. Yet, we must register in

[26] See *Ag.* 34-35 γένοιτο δ' οὖν μολόντος εὐφιλῆ χέρα ἄνακτος οἴκων τῇδε βαστάσαι χερί "well, anyway, may it come to pass that the master of the house comes home and that I clasp his well-loved hand in this hand of mine."

[27] The sacrifice of Iphigenia is not mentioned in Homer as the ancient commentator acknowledged. See Sch. Ariston. *Il.* 9.145 ὠκ οἶδε [i. e.Ὅμηρος] τὴν παρὰ τοῖς νεωτέροις σφαγὴν Ἰφιγενείας. In Aeschylus, however, the sacrificial theme pervades the play, as the root of the tragedy of Agamemnon and the problem of his personal role and guilt raised by the Aeschylean passage has been one of the main principal focuses of scholarship on the *Agamemnon* and many different interpretations have been given. Thus, Denniston and Page 1960, xxiv argues that the sacrifice of Iphigenia is necessary since Artemis demanded it while for Llyod-Jones 1962, 199 Agamemnon's guilt is the result of curse inherited by Atreus. Hammond 1965, 42-55, Lesky 1966, 78-85 and Peradotto 1969, 237-263 reject the significance of the inherited guilt and stress the importance of Agamemnon's personal human decision and the responsibility that this incurs. For more details see also Smith 1973, 1-11; Dover 1973, 58-69 and Edwards 1977, 17-19.

[28] See *Ag.* 270 χαρά μ' ὑφέρπει δάκρυον ἐκκαλουμένη "Joy is suffusing me, and calling forth tears."

[29] Cf. Earp 1950, 49. For chorus' delight see also Dawe1963, 47 and Alexanderson 1969, 3.

[30] The optimism and the joy of those characters at the prospect of Agamemnon's return is impaired by the feeling of gloom and despair they exhibit in their words, shifting from hope to dread. For this pattern which arises continually in the play see Schenker 1999, 649ff.

[31] See Doyle 2008, 57-75 who points out that Cassandra plays the role of the "proper" wife and her portayal in the tragedy operates as a "feminine corrective" intervening between Iphigenia, the unwilling sacrificial Bride and Clytemnestra , the murderous Wife.

[32] There has been a heated debate that hinges on Agamemnon's personal qualities. Critics are far from unanimous as far as their judgement on the character of Agamemnon is concerned, adopting distinctive readings of his speech. On the one hand, Fraenkel 1950, 441 whose study and commentary have gained the status of a standard work in the field speaks of "a great gentleman, possessed of moderation and self-control".On the other hand, however, according to the approach of Denniston and Page 1957, 151 Agamemnon is a negative character, picturing him as "arrogant and sacrilegious, an orientalized despot." See also Rosenmeyer 1982, 221 and Podlecki 1986, 87-94 for a negative analysis of Agamemnon. A general study of the approaches for Agamemnon's behaviour is offered by Goldhill 1984, 69-74.

his salutations the dissonance with the Herald's emotionally charged speech[33] and his phrase θεοὺς ἐγχωρίους, τοὺς ἐμοὶ μεταιτίους νόστου δικαίων θ᾽ ὧν ἐπραξάμην πόλιν Πριάμου (vv. 810-812: "the native gods, who are responsible, together with myself, for my return and for the punishment I have exacted from the city of Priam")[34] accentuates his pride in himself and at the same time his too little consideration or lack of piety towards the gods as he calls them his partners.[35]

Agamemnon's pride crucially colours his characterization further as his ensuing words display the King's attitude towards the war and the utter destruction of Troy.[36] It is true that the Herald's speech has already supplied us with all the necessary information of the sack of Troy with a strong hint at the "negative aspects of war, notably the excessiveness of the punishment".[37] Moreover, the earlier comments and warnings of the Chorus that the Gods are always enraged against those who have caused many lives to be lost (vv.461-462 τῶν πολυκτόνων γὰρ οὐκ ἄσκοποι θεοί "for the gods do not fail to take aim against those who have killed many") and their firm refusal to be considered a sacker of cities (v. 472 πτολιπόρθης) guide our response and lead the spectator to develop an impression of uneasiness and fear for the King.

A fear that increases rapidly when we hear Agamemnon's self-satisfaction for Troy's annihilation and his description couched in words exhibit his arrogance and "verges on *hybris*."[38] Agamemnon pictures the smoke rising from the fallen city as the fire keeps demolishing it and its wealth (vv. 818-820) and how the Argives as a lion leaped over the walls and licked their fill of royal blood (vv. 825-830). His boastful description of the total destruction of the city in sharp contrast to Clytemnestra's sympathetic words for the conquered demonstrate clearly that the vanquished "to Agamemnon's dull and official mind are not persons but instruments

[33] See Earp 1950, 50 who points out that the Herald's emotional phrases about his dear Argive country comes in sharp contrast with Agamemnon's words since he is "apparently too self-centered to have deep emotions except about things which touch himself and his own dignity."
[34] All the references to the Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* are given according to Denniston and Page edition 1957. Translations are given according to Smyth's translation 1963.
[35] Cf. Denniston and Page 1957, 140; Earp 1950, 50; Higgins 1978, 25. For a different reading see Fraenkel 1950, 371ff.
[36] Zeitlin 1965, 495 observes: "A conquering hero, distended with pride, glutted with spoils of war, he vaunts his performance in the war and gloats over the ruin of Troy without a thought of those men who are now a handful of ashes and the lovely things that were trampled into the dust."
[37] Cf. Jackson and Vermaak 1990, 98.
[38] Cf. Leahy 1974, 71

of the just and necessary punishment of the Trojans for the rape of Helen."[39] In addition his confession that the war was caused on account of a woman (v. 823 γυναικὸς οὕνεκα) has been acknowledged that testifies Aeschylus' intention to present his character in most unfavourable light.[40]

The last section of Agamemnon's first speech (vv. 830-50) is addressed to the Chorus' warning to be cautious and careful with his social intercourse since few men have in their nature to honour a fortunate friend without being jealousy of him. Agamemnon reassures them that he can understand people's hypocrisy and true feelings but he totally fails to apprehend their point as shortly afterwards he will fall victim to his wife's snare.[41]

But the most crucial problem of Agamemnon's character is immediately presented in the next scene during his confrontation with his wife, in the third episode of the play (vv. 914-974). The so-called carpet scene has puzzled the scholars and much acumen has been lavished by many commentators on answering why Agamemnon, while at the beginning he has clearly and explicitly refused Clytemnestra's request to walk on the purple tapestries in an unexpected *volte face* he yields to her demand and tread on the path of the expensive cloth. With the exception of Fraenkel, who states that Agamemnon surrenders because he was exhausted by the warfare and the expedition at Troy,[42] the majority of the Aeschylean scholarship[43] took a dim view of the King's character whose resoluteness is broken (ll. 956-957) and he consents to commit the deed that few lines earlier rejects as an act that befits a barbarian despot (vv. 919-920), a dangerous venture that would make him the object of envy (vv. 921-22) and finally an impious undertaking that is permitted only to the gods (vv. 922-25). Yielding to Clytemnestra's *peitho* Agamemnon, before crossing the tapestries makes two requests to be met; he asks first that his boots be removed, in order not to profane the fabrics and thus, he "demonstrates for all to see that he can recognize *hybris* for what it is and yet possessed by Ate, still choose to commit it."[44]

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[39] Cf. Earp 1950, 51.
[40] Cf. Dawe 1963, 48.
[41] Cf. Easterling 1973, 9. See also Earp 1950, 51 who points out that "the Chorus were trying to warn him against treachery at home, but he takes it as referring to public affairs and, being full of himself, rather condescendingly tells them that he has had experience of such things in the past and intends to take the necessary measures."
[42] Cf. Fraenkel 1950, 442
[43] For a detailed survey of the interpretations that the Aeschylean scholars have offered of Agamemnon's unexpected surrender to Clytemnestra's request see Konishi 1989, 210-22.
[44] Cf. Leahy 1974, 22.

And secondly, by asking Clytemnestra, his legal wife to graciously introduce his concubine into the palace Agamemnon "adds insult to injury."[45] After these the last words Agamemnon walks along the purple path and enters inside the palace not as its master but as a sacrificial victim.[46]

In sum, as Lloyd-Jones puts it very perceptively the Aeschylean Agamemnon is a character of "light and shade"[47] not poles apart from the Homeric Agamemnon. His presumption and arrogance transgresses him from just being a King who wins the admiration and the praise of the ordinary men to a King suffering from *hybris* and indicating consequently that his impending disaster is inevitable.

Agamemnon in Seneca

Seneca's *Agamemnon* treats the same myth as the Aeschylean one; Agamemnon's unfortunate arrival from Troy and swift departure for Hades is the central event of the play to which the returning hero lends his name. Agamemnon is not the protagonist even in the Latin drama; in fact, here, his role is little more than a footnote. He is just a character who speaks only 26 lines, vv. 782-807 (few more lines than Strophius, a minor character that appears towards the end of the tragedy) whereas Seneca has replaced the most powerful with its heavy dramatic significance Aeschylean scene between Agamemnon and Clytemnestra[48] with the brief and rapid ἀντιλαβαί (vv. 791-799) between the returning King and the prophetess Cassandra. What is most important is that these lines are not all of his own, but some of them are shared with Cassandra. And then, they are not randomly distributed, but they are concentrated on what is in effect the only intervention. This is very important, because the position of his intervention makes the pivot of the play and indicates in a certain way the centrality of the character, his role as protagonist.

[45] Cf. McNeil 2005, 3and see also Meridor 1987, 41ff.
[46] It has been argued that Agamemnon's request that his boots be removed demonstrates his vulnerability since nakedness may imply the loss of identity and even death. See Griffith 1988, 552-54
[47] Cf. Llyod-Jones 1962, 195.
[48] Peiper 1937, 271 sustains that a scene between Clytemnestra and Agamemnon did exist in Seneca's play as well before the third stasimon but it must have been lost.

Up to the time of his arrival on the stage the references made to him corroborate the sentiment of the audience that Seneca has not made the son of Atreus into an imposing figure in the public eye, as the Aeschylean one who retains the respect and affection of his subordinates. As an audience, we are asked to reconstruct his person from the remarks of the other characters. Thus the first mention to him comes already in the prologue from the ghost of Thyestes who calls him *rex ille regum, ductor Agamemnon ducum* (vv. 39-42). But this note of honour and respect wanes rapidly and will of course prove to be sarcastic when in the next line Thyestes fixes our perspective on the impending doom of Agamemnon presenting him as a sacrificial animal that *daturus coniugi iugulum suae* (v. 43). In the same way, Eurybates[49] the Herald, though at the beginning he designates him *telluris altum remeat Argolicae decus....victor Agamemnon* (vv. 395-396) and few lines later *incolumis, auctus gloria, laude inclitus* (v. 400) yet he adds that he comes home like one conquered, though a conqueror, and his comments filled with sombre scorn suggest a rather degrading and humiliating return[50]: *remeatque victo similis, exiguas trahens | lacerasque victor classe de tanta rates* (vv. 412-413); though he had mustered so many troops and ships he returns with few shattered vessels, having shamefully lost a great part of his force.

The only character whom we hear to speak in favour of the King is Clytemnestra's Nurse. In order to manage to dissuade her Queen from killing Agamemnon, the Nurse styles him in the most favourable light. She presents him as a competent commander, and a highly accomplished warrior who comes as victor over Asia and avenger of Europe (vv. 204-206: *victor venit | Asia ferocis, ultor Europae; trahit | captiva Pergama et diu victos Phrygas*). He is an invincible hero since he overcame all the attacks launches against him from Achilles, *melior* Ajax, Hector and Paris. While the Nurse's "mythological erudition"[51] as we will see[52] is impaired by the fact that she ends up attributing to Agamemnon feats that as reported by the tradition were Achilles' (namely the defeat of the rivers Memnon, Xanthus, Simois, of Cycnus and of the Amazonian warrior Penthesileia), it is meaningful if we see it with an eye to the Aeschylean tradition about Agamemnon's boastfulness. Keeping in memory the image of the Aeschylean Agamemnon the Nurse saves his Aeschylean

[49] For the narration of Eurybates see Segurado e Campos 1973, 49-70.
[50] Tarrant 1976, 253.
[51] The term is of Martina 1986-87, 117.
[52] For an analytical comment of the Nurse's answer see chapter three and Fantham 1981-82, 122-23.

pride crediting him with all possible exploits. Eulogizing the royal *oikos* is a common pursuit of the *trophoi*, as proudly belonging to it, but here the mythological exaggerations of the Nurse can be explained as a consequential function of her pursuit to magnify Agamemnon's greatness in the context of his Aeschylean characterization. But the Nurse's depiction makes the reader to wince at the irony and the sarcasm of her words and normally fail to convince the Queen.

In addition, Clytemnestra's portrayal of Agamemnon is a scornful one too[53]. The derogatory tone in which Agamemnon is introduced in her lengthy speech (vv.174-191) destabilizes his heroic κλέος and diminishes his heroism presenting his conjugal perfidies during the ten years of the war; she records all the amours of her husband accusing him of choosing the *militia amoris*[54] and nullifies his martial prowess picturing him as being enfeebled with leisure of love replacing one mistress with another (v. 183-84 *veneri vacat* | *reparatque amores*). She speaks about Agamemnon as *captae maritus remeat et Priami gener* (191: "he returns as a captive's husband and Priam's son-in-law!")[55] and her words can easily be considered the exploitation of the motive "victor victus".[56] Clytemnestra's words dictated by her jealousy of a woman that she fears to lose her own husband won by another woman are charged with heavy irony; Agamemnon will be conquered but by another woman rather than his wife. Moreover, this elegiac *querela* is the overarching *topos* in the Latine love poets and a dominant theme of the elegiac Ovidian heroines, especially in the ninth of the *Heroides.* In Deianira's letter to Hercules Deianira berates Hercules for being defeated by a Iole:

Gratulor Oechaliam titulis accedere nostris;
victorem victae succubuisse queror. (1-2)

"I render thanks that Oechalia has been added to the list of our honours;
But that the victor has yielded to the vanquished, I complain"

[53] See for more details on Clytemnestra's depiction as an elegiac figure and her speech see chapter two.
[54] The theme of *militia amoris* although it reached its outmost popularity in Roman elegy, has met with warm reception already in the Greek poetry. See Sapph. fr. 1.28 *PLF*; Thgn. 1286f. and Soph. *Ant.* 781. For the use of this leitmotif in the Latin elegy in general see Murgatroyd 1975, 59-79 and 1981, 589-606; Spies 1930; Thomas 1964, 151-64; Baker 1968, 322-49.
[55] For the present study we have used the text and the translation by Fitch 2004.
[56] The theme "victor victus" is allusive to Prop. 3. 11.16: *vicit victorem candida forma virum* (Penthesilea and Achilles). For more information see Baker 1968, 322-49 and for the use of this leitmotif in elegy in general see Murgatroyd 1975, 59-79; Spies 1930; Thomas 1964, 151-64 and especially Casali 1995, 33f for the oxymoron expression "the vanquisher has been vanquished."

and expresses thus her indignation that a woman has vanquished the unvanquished hero. Likewise, the Senecan Clytemnestra, endowed with an elegiac voice stigmatizes Agamemnon as being subjugated by Cassandra;[57] this resentment, elegiac in format and in amatory context, leads to the radical deconstruction of Agamemnon presenting him stripped from his Homeric profile and virtues; Agamemnon, thus, once again ruthlessly emerges as the most scornful and ridiculous figure of the play.

Agamemnon's arrival on stage is constructed in such a way by Seneca as to reflect the hero's insignificance. His entry is not given due space and attention. "In Seneca, there are no beacon fires, no choral doubt, and the returning of Agamemnon, instead of being surrounded with dramatic anticipation, is simply an accepted fact."[58] His announcement is not a formal one making his reduction in stature all the more remarkable. In addition, it comes after the captive Cassandra's quite impressive entrance not only because it is has been announced by Clytemnestra herself but mainly, because she comes with the escort of the Trojan Women, the secondary Chorus. The King and captor enters after her, without a pomp accompanied only by Clytemnestra and his entrance-announcement by the hostile chorus[59] is quite short:

En deos tandem suos
victrice lauru cinctus Agamemnon adit,
et festa coniunx obvios illi tulit
gressus, reditque iuncta concordi gradu (778-781)

"See, at last Agamemnon comes before his own gods, crowned with the victor's laurel; his wife went out to meet him in festive mood, and returns walking in concord at his side."

This momentarily meeting of Agamemnon with his wife during the course of the drama tends to illuminate and simultaneously to aggravate the powerful irony. Notice

[57] Rosati, 2006, 98 aptly remarks that "nell'assegnare un peso così marcato alla component erotica, Seneca non fa quindi altro che muoversi sulla linea della poesia elegiaca, che aveva elegizzato 'Omero' e il suo sistema di valori."
[58] Cf. Dewey 1968, 226.
[59] See Calder 1976, 32. For a different view see Tarrant 1976, 318 who points out that the words "*relevemus artus* demonstrate concern for Cassandra but *tandem* in the same line suggests a relief at Agamemnon's safe arrival which better suits the Argive group."

the wry *festa coniunx* which conveys the delight of the assassin Clytemnestra and the *concordi gradu* which directs our attention to the illusion that Seneca is going to utilize in the whole episode of Agamemnon's homecoming.

Agamemnon's first lines on entry read:

Tandem revertor sospes ad patrios lares.
o cara salve terra! Tibi tot barbarae
dedere gentes spolia, tibi felix diu
potentis Asia domina summisit manus
Quid ista vates corpus effusa ac tremens
dubia labat cervice? famuli, attollite,
refovete gelido latice. iam recipit diem
marcente visu. Suscita sensus tuos:
optatus ille portus aerumnis adest.
festus dies est.

"At long last I return in safety to my father's housegods. Greetings, my dear land! To you so many barbarian peoples have yielded spoils, to you the long-thriving mistress of powerful Asia has surrendered. Why is the priestess lying there trembling and fainting, her neck drooping? Servants raise her, revive her with cold water. Now she sees the light again, but with dull eyes. Gather your senses: the longed-for haven from sufferings is here at hand. This is a festive day!"

The adverb *tandem*, placed emphatically at the beginning of his speech, taints his proclamation with a strong sense of delight and impatience. However, it is worth noting further that it enables the audience to adopt two distinctive lines of interpretations. *Prima facie*, they hear Agamemnon the King, uttering a heartfelt satisfaction: the king of Argos, the leader of the Greek forces expresses great pleasure in his home-coming after 10 years of labour and privation that awaited him at Troy during its besiege by the Greeks. It is not by chance, in fact, that Agamemnon's first utterance and salute is directed with affection only and exclusively to his land (*cara terra*) and its gods (*revertor ad patrios lares*) conveying, thus, perfectly the essence of his delight in his unhoped-for return and his lack of patience to catch sight of his

land. Without doubt all that is very natural in a man returned home after a campaign of ten years, even for Agamemnon the king.

But besides this significance at surface level, the mood of relief that the adverb *tandem* transmits can be viewed as a broad hint that Agamemnon, the actor of the play this time, gives to the audience. The person, who has the part of Agamemnon in the play having been waited until it was his turn, finally appears before the spectators at line 782. After a lot of delay, for he was unseen for most of the play, the time has come for him to show upon the stage and perform his role. Of course in this case the salutation to the *cara terra* does not refer to Argos, the city of Agamemnon the King. What the actor Agamemnon greets and addresses is the visible sphere of the play, namely the stage which represents for him a "dear land." This suggestion gains some support since it is not something of a surprise to find that Seneca's plays "contain pointers to, and implicit comment on, the nature of drama."[60] It is another brilliant Senecan touch together with the declarations which his powerful characters express in his tragedies, like Medea's yearning: *gravior exurgat dolor; maiora iam me scelera post partus decent* (49-50).

The next triplet of his speech (vv. 783-785) heralds much for Agamemnon himself. Although he comes on stage amid no fanfare nevertheless, he emerges as a boastful and bumptious man. Vaunting for his victory, the language of authority he uses illustrates the pleasure he takes in power. His words *tibi tot barbarae dedere gentes spolia, tibi felix diu potentis Asiae domina summisit manus* demonstrate clearly that he enters the stage triumphantly. He comes as a triumphant victor yet, he converses only with the Chorus of Trojan slave women and other *famuli*, namely with the commoners and low rank characters in such a way that "his talk to minions and prisoners…is pathetic and paltry."[61]

He marches as a celebratory winner into his city yet, at a time when celebrations and festivities have become especially untenable since throughout the city there is a mood of mourning and lamentation for so many young men who were lost when the storm seized the Greek fleet on the way home, a fact that even Clytemnestra herself seems to keep into perspective (*remeasse laetor, vulnus et regni grave | lugere cogor*, 580-81: "I rejoice at his homecoming, and yet I must mourn the deep wound to our kingdom"). In addition, Eurybates' description just before

[60] Cf. Hine 2000, 36 commenting on *Medea*'s tragedy.
[61] Cf. Motto and Clark 1988, 193.

Agamemnon's entry as we have seen (vv. 412-13) can hardly tally with a triumphant winner. "Stripped down in such fashion, and rejoicing alone amidst a hostile throng, Agamemnon manages to be blandly portrayed as no major or impressive figure."[62]

It has been suggested that Agamemnon's function in the dialogue with Cassandra that follows "is to elicit from Cassandra in tight epigrammatic *antilabai* the information that establishes him as the deutero-Priam, the *semper idem* motif that we have already noted in the Tantalus-Thyestes equation of Thyestes."[63] But in reality this brief dialogue has another purpose. Cassandra tries to warn him against the impending danger, but in vain;[64] not only does Agamemnon totally miss her point, but he emerges as the real victim rather than a conqueror. Content in his fool's paradise, he views the present as a happy release from the sufferings (*optatus ille portus aerumnis adest*, 790) and a festive day (*festus dies est*, 791) while we watch him advance towards his horrible fate. He assures Cassandra that a life in security (*secura vive!*, 797) awaits her and from now on she can fear no danger (*nullum est periclum tibimet*, 798) but ironically enough he cannot imagine that as the play progresses he is brought nearer only to his death. Just before the catastrophe ensues, illusions are interposed.

After this short conversation with Cassandra, Agamemnon gives order to the chorus for the treatment of the priestess and moves to enter the palace to pray to Jupiter and Juno (*at te, pater, ...| et te sororem cuncta pollentis viri, | Argolica Iuno, pecore votivo libens | Arabumque donis supplice et fibra colam*, 802-807), but in reality to meet his death.[65]

Thus, whereas the Aeschylean play enhances Agamemnon's martial prowess in its Latin counterpart the epic values are nullified and the powerful conception of the King utterly downplayed, since "the heroic is wretchedly abolished"[66] from Seneca's play. Recently in her article Degiovanni[67] suggested that Seneca depicts Agamemnon speaking with Cassandra and being in anguish about the prophetess' state of health with a view to indicate that he is in love with her and pointing rather to

[62] Cf. Motto and Clark 1985, 140.
[63] See Calder, 1976, 31.
[64] See Giomini 1965, 150; Fitch 1974, 121 and Sapio 1995, 9-10.
[65] Marcucci 1994, 191-203 sustains that Seneca presents the death scene of Agamemnon having in mind the analogous one of Hercules pointing to the similarities between the two scenes.
[66] See Motto and Clark 1983, 86.
[67] Cf. Degiovanni 2004, 391-392.

a deheroization of the hero, he follows a tendency that has started with Euripides since in his *Troades* he depicted Agamemnon being in love with Cassandra.

Although this is an attractive idea as there is no way of avoiding the conclusion that Seneca taints Agamemnon's presentation with a derogatory tone I cannot adopt totally Degiovanni's view. In my opinion Agamemnon is not in love with Cassandra because he speaks with her and certainly his deheroization does not arise from his having or not feelings for her; nor this tendency avowed Seneca's "Euripideanism".

It is true that in Euripides the heroes are less monolithically heroic than they used to be in Homer and the process of deheroization is more generalized since he is fond of unveiling the everyday (or bourgeois) aspects of the life of all short of ex-epic and ex-heroes. But it is also true that between the Latin poets on the one hand and Euripides and his attention for the everyday life (deheroization) of the epic heroes on the other, there is Hellenistic poetry, which magnifies Euripides' trend.

Thus, in my view the deheroization of Agamemnon is the result of his presentation by Seneca as a hero on the margins, a debunking hero. Following the deheroizing or de-epicizing conception of Agamemnon's character which was cultivated during the Hellenistic era,[68] the Latin poets of the first century BC are consistent in interpreting the *Iliad* as a blending of enraged outburst of immoderate characters and some love passion. Horace, for example, in his epistle to Lollius Maximus (*Epist.* 1.2.6-20), a young man who is studying rhetoric in Rome seeking to interest him in moral philosophy through Homer, provides us with a picture of *Iliad* and the Trojan War as the folly of princes which incurs terrible sufferings to the people:

fabula, qua Paridis propter narratur amorem
Graecia barbariae lento collisa duello,
stultorum regum et populorum continet aestus.
Antenor censet belli praecidere causam:
quid Paris? ut salvus regnet vivatque beatus
cogi posse negat. Nestor componere litis

[68] Callimachus in his *Hymn to Artemis* clearly signposts the arrogant nature of Agamemnon (*Dia.* 263: οὐδὲ γὰρ Ἀτρεΐδης ὀλίγῳ ἐπὶ κόμπασε μισθῷ "for not even the son of Atreus could vaunt without paying a high price"), while in his *Aetia* (fr. 276 *SH*) Agamemnon appears as a secondary character in a digression of the narrative about Teuthis.

inter Peliden festinat et inter Atriden;
hunc amor, ira quidem communiter urit utrumque.
quidquid delirant reges, plectuntur Achivi.
seditione, dolis, scelere atque libidine et ira
Iliacos intra muros peccatur et extra.

"The story in which it is told how, because of Paris love Greece clashed in tedious war with a foreign land, embraces the passions of foolish kings and people. Antenor moves to cut away the cause of the war. What of Paris? To reign in safety and to live in happiness - nothing, he says, can force him. Nestor is eager to settle the strife between the sons of Peleus and of Atreus. Love fires one, but anger both in common. Whatever folly the king commit, the Achaeans pay the penalty. With faction, craft, crime, lust and wrath, within and without the walls of Troy all goes wrong."

Horace's interpretation sounds radically alternative presenting Achilles as a hero of love[69] but Agamemnon as a furious king affected by individual craziness, *ira.*

But it is not Horace, a single author or his work that "destabilized" Agamemnon. Also Ovid "activating" love in the life of the Iliad heroes starts a process of familiarization that automatically leads to vilification in the case of Agamemnon. The Iliad Agamemnon was a king with many shadows; but a post-erotic Agamemnon could not be any longer a decent king. Thus, at *Rem*. 777-84 Ovid offers an erotic perspective on the Iliadic actions, mainly on the rivalry of Achilles and Agamemnon delineating it as an erotic one:

Hoc et in abducta Briseide flebat Achilles,
Illam Plisthenio gaudia ferre viro;
Nec frustra flebat, mihi credite: fecit Atrides,
Quod si non faceret, turpiter esset iners.
Certe ego fecissem, nec sum sapientior illo:
Invidiae fructus maximus ille fuit.
Nam sibi quod numquam tactam Briseida iurat
Per sceptrum, sceptrum non putat esse deos

[69] For the construction of Achilles as a "hero-of-War-and-Love" in Latin poetry see Fantuzzi, forthcoming.

"This too did Achilles bewail in the loss of Briseis, that she should give joy to the Plisthenian hero; nor bewailed he without cause, believe me: Atrides did what he had been a shameful sluggard not to do. Certainly I would have done it, nor am I wiser than he: that was the choicest fruit of their quarrel. For that he swears by his scepter that Briseis ne'er was touched, he deems not his sceptre to be heaven."

But the most characteristic example of the rejection of the Iliadic Agamemnon and his deheroization or better vilification is recorded in the *Ilias Latina.* It is a short latin exameter version - translation of the Greek epic poem, attributed to Publius Baebius Italicus that gained popularity in Antiquity. The focus of the poem is differentiated from anything that might be considered epic or heroic since now the driving force behind the action of the whole play is the *infesta pestis* of love, the negative love passion in the heart of Agamemnon: *Ille Pelasgum* | *infestam regi pestem in praecordia misit* | *implicuitque gravi Danaorum corpora morbo* (vv. 10-12: "For he (Apollo) it was who sent a fell disease into the breast of the Pelasgians' king, infected too the bodies of the Danaans with an illness grave").[70] Agamemnon is depicted as a furious and jealous king, a radically negative figure: *ferus ossibus imis* | *haeret amor spernitque preces damnosa libido* (v. 25-26: "wild love burns deeply in the royal bonesand hurtful lust spurns Chryses' prayers"). He will be convinced to restore Chryseis to her father but in order to extinguish his lust with another woman, he will abduct Achilles' Briseis: *non tamen Atridae Chryseidis excidit ardor:* | *maeret et amissos deceptus luget amores.* | *Mox rapta magnum Briseide privat Achillem* | *solaturque suos alienis ignibus ignes* (vv. 70-73: "But yet Atreides' passion for Chryseis has not ceased; he grieves and in delusion mourns for his lost love. Soon he deprives the great Achilles of Briseis, and solaces love's flames with the beloved of another"). Thus, the translator of the "Iliad" builds a new, radically post-Iliadic opposition between Achilles, the poor sincere lover who is oppressed by the *hybris* of Agamemnon, and Agamemnon the crazy hubristic and irresponsible monarch.[71]

It easy to record the transition from heroic poetry, the essential part of which were the epic and the tragedy, to a poetry which highlights the loss of heroic integrity

[70] For the present study we have used the text and the translation by Kennedy 1998
[71] Cf. Scaffai 1982, 64 who points out that "i personaggi omerici diventano εἰκόνες παθῶν: Paride è il paradigma dell'uomo pavido e sensuale, Agamennone del tiranno ebbro di potere e di lussuria."

and exhibits shadow, inert protagonists whose behaviour is entirely unbecoming to the Homeric hero. The only thing that associates Horace and Iliad Latina with Seneca is that the pursuit of τιμή, which is the quintessential motivation in Homer, becomes completely irrelevant for all the Latin authors. The more or less hubristic pursuit of τιμή of Homer becomes unjustifiable craziness or negative love for passion.

Title matters

We have seen how Aeschylus and Seneca, following parallel plotlines since they both handle the same mythical material present to the audience the returning King Agamemnon.

In Aeschylus the King is an imposing figure, who is depicted as a great and courageous warrior but his behaviour, nonetheless, demonstrates his proud Homeric roots. He is at the peak of power but distorted by his arrogance he will defy his principles and will pay by dying himself.

On the contrary, in Seneca not only is the element of Agamemnon's martial prowess watered down but mostly he is not the leading male figure. One of the most fundamental dramatic principles holds that a leading person would not have such a small role nor would die midway through the play. As a rule the protagonist should be a voluble character who would carry on to the end and would hold the audience's attention throughout the drama. In fact *Agamemnon* is unusual among Seneca's plays for the play's title does not denote its most dominant character.

It has been suggested that there are two kinds of title used by the ancient tragic poets: there are those which are named after the chorus of the play, but the most typical kind is "that which consists merely of the name of the chief personage."[72] The titles of the play were a label that was designed by the dramatists in order to achieve three purposes: mainly they were used to orientate the audience towards a general picture about the plot of the play; sometimes they were used to provide information about its atmosphere and the mythological apparatus. But there is a third category of titles that "the dramatists started using them to mystify, tantalize and sometimes

[72] See Haigh 1896, 396.

mislead their audience as to what their play is going to be about."[73] Without doubt, it is in this third category that Seneca's *Agamemnon* falls into. For no potential spectator would be likely to expect or at least to imagine that in a play called *Agamemnon* the title character's role would be little more than a footnote and that he himself would die in the middle of the play.

To our knowledge, after Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and up to the 1st cent. AD and Seneca's one, the earlier Roman tragic poets Accius and Livius Andronicus[74] handle the story of Agamemnon in their dramas. Although the fragmentary state of their corpus makes it difficult to establish details, a consideration of the titles they employ for their plays may prove instructive. Accius titled his tragedy *Clytemnestra* whereas Livius Andronicus named his *Aegisthus*. Both Republican dramatists departed from what was commonly accepted norm as far as the title of a play is concerned, choosing the most negative figures as their title character, an unusual option which is never known to have existed.

Seneca has not followed suit. On the contrary, he prefers to follow the predominant practice and being influenced by the most standard titling pattern, he names his play after a positive character. Although his *Agamemnon* has been designed to conform to the traditional rules that applied to the dramatic titles nevertheless, it is not short of poetic innovative approach as far as his skilful fabrication of the character of Agamemnon is concerned.

An interesting feature of Agamemnon's characterization in the play is the technique of characterization in absence. Since Agamemnon is on stage for a comparatively short time a good deal of what we learn about him emerges from the remarks of the other characters, whose opinion of him differs widely. Agamemnon can be seen from a variety of angles and therefore Seneca leaves him deliberately vague. As spectators we are not permitted an insight into character's deliberation; rather we must depend to a large degree on passing remarks, hints and judgments which are prejudiced on the part of those who speak of him. Clytemnestra, Aegisthus, the Chorus and the Nurse speaking about Agamemnon both reveal and hush, omit and ignore just as it suits them providing a variety of perspectives which Seneca pieces together so that his reader may form an impression of his hero.

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[73] See Sommestein 2002, 1. The topic of the titles of Greek tragedies is also treated by Taplin 1975, 184-186 and by Pearson 1917, I xviiiff.

[74] For Accius' *Clytemnestra* and Livius Andronicus' *Accius* see Erasmo 2004, 86ff and 11ff respectively.

Agamemnon is alone among Seneca's plays in exhibiting this technique of characterization "in absence" and in order to perceive its importance and uniqueness we are bound to start from a comparison of this tragedy with the rest of the Senecan *corpus*, mainly with those tragedies which have as their title the name of a leading person.[75] Thus, in *Medea*, the princess from Colchis surpasses the other characters in duration of her presence on stage, but also in the number of lines she speaks; appearing on stage in every scene she dominates the play not only on the level of action but also on that of language "speaking more than half the lines of the play"[76] (the tragedy is 1027 verses long and the number of lines that belong to Medea are 540). In *Phaedra*, the stepmother of Hippolytus partakes in and is responsible for the dramatic action of the play. Although the opening speech is not delivered by Phaedra, since she makes her entrance in the second act[77] (85-273) nevertheless the focus of the play rests with her and she is on stage for most of the drama. Of the five acts of the tragedy she does not take part only in two (apart from the prelude that is delivered by Hippolytus (1-84) Phaedra does not participate in Act five (989-1122) where the messenger recounts Hippolytus' death). The next tragedy, *Oedipus*, is no exception. Likewise Oedipus is a primary figure in the play, to whom is refused the choice of exit. Having the largest role and supplying the overriding interest for the audience Seneca has him remaining on stage and appearing in all the acts of the play from the beginning to the end. He is the figure who directs most of the traffic in the tragedy, a far cry from Agamemnon, who is constantly awaited and is absent from the stage too long a time for a hero in a tragedy.

However, if there is an exception to this remark it is the character in *Thyestes* and *Hercules Furens* respectively. In *Thyestes* the title character appears upon the scene at line 404 and although "he is for the most part an unknowing and unwilling victim"[78] he is on stage in only two scenes (Act III 404-545 and the last one, Act V 885-1112); nonetheless he speaks 244 lines (almost one fourth since the play is 1112 lines long) and is linked with the other character of the play, his brother Atreus, throughout the play "in the Messenger's narrative (682-788), the Fury's

[75] We leave out of our study the tragedies of *Troades*, which is the only play named after its chorus-members and *Phoenissae* with its problematic title since as Frank 1995, 1 notes "Seneca tentatively entitled the play *Phoenissae* after Euripides play before he had given consideration to the problem of the chorus."
[76] Cf. Hine 2000, 18.
[77] Cf. Boyle 1987, 140 who underlines that it is a common Senecan practice that the second act begins "with a speech by a protagonist revealing his/her emotional state."
[78] Cf. Davis 2003, 43.

foreshadowing (54-62) and above all in each other's thoughts (176-335, 412-16, 473-86, 491-507, 885-919)."[79] In *Hercules Furens* the fact that the hero's entrance is delayed until halfway through the play has gained considerable critical recognition.[80] But despite the fact that Hercules comes into view in the third Act of the play (592-829) with a short scene where he speaks only 39 lines he is not demoted to a secondary focus; Shelton remarks that in this play the supporting characters are used by the dramatist in order "to present dramatically the conflict in Hercules' mind. These characters do n ot change, but they are agents in the development of Hercules."[81] The hero's prominence can also be demonstrated by the fact that he will remain on stage until the end of the play (the tragedy is 1344 lines long and Hercules speaks approximately one third, namely 312 lines). Consequently even though it is true that the arrival of the two protagonists of Thyestes and Hercules is postponed to a certain extent and their entry is held up until almost halfway through the play yet this delay does not lessen their prominence as key figures. They are focal characters and the audience keep them in the forefront of their minds.

Yet Seneca is not our earliest literary evidence of employing this technique of characterization in absence. For a clearer picture we need to shift our perspective farther back in time- back to the era of Homer, since the pioneer of this technique is the Homeric epos; Homer, especially in the *Odyssey* employs the technique of "absent presence" and through him this motif found its way into the genre of tragedy. Differently from the *epos* however, in tragedy the absence of a character is conspicuous for the audience during the performance of the play, whereas during the narration of the *epos* the audience has always in front of them the epic singer. Furthermore the technique of "absent presence" was advantageous to the ancient theatre since it accommodated one of its conventions according to which on the scene cannot appear more than three characters. In theatre the motif of "absent presence" can refer generally to a hero who is absent from the scene for a long time in the dramatic action or to a hero who is constantly mentioned through the words of the other characters in such a degree and with such intensity that he embodies the basic core of the dramatic action.[82]

[79] Cf. Tarrant 1985, 43.
[80] See Fitch's commentary 1987, 21.
[81] Cf. Shelton 1978, 39.
[82] Cf. Stanchi 2007, 15.

The mark of this technique can be found in eight tragedies: the *Persians*, the *Agamemnon*,[83] the *Trachiniae*, the *Supplices* (of Aeschylus), the *Heraclidae* (of Euripides), the *Andromache* and *Electra* (both of Euripides and Sophocles). The motif can be pinpointed lexically by paying attention at words – keys such as verbs that denote movement (ἄπειμι, οἴχομαι) [84] but emphasis should be given mainly to the dramatic value of the hero's absence for the play, the arrangement of the dramatic space and the solutions that each writer espouses using this technique which is characterized by a diversity of forms[85] in the construction of the drama and in the dramatic action.

The most distinctive feature of these eight Greek tragic plays is the description of a grave peril closely connected with the expectation of the absent character which creates an atmosphere of a great fear and growing unease that cloud the whole play. The same atmosphere of dread and deep anxiety we witness in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, since the dramatist prepares the appearance of his hero through a series of information concerning the situation that predominates at Argos, the fate of his brother Menelaus and the investigation conducted by the chorus about Agamemnon's responsibilities for Iphigenia's death and his conduct during the war which incurred Artemis' wrath. As Stanchi aptly remarks "il testo dell'*Agamennone* è … punteggiato da una serie di riferimenti oscuri e di enigmatiche allusioni a un male celato nel cuore stesso della reggia, che gradualmente addensano un'ombra minacciosa sull'auspicato tirorno del re."[86]

Thus, Aeschylus outlines the situation that awaits Agamemnon at his palace and at Argos: on the one hand there is the shameful behavior of Clytemnestra about which the watch and the Chorus can make but veiled comments and references and on the other the reports of widespread discontent and resentfulness in the city about the deaths caused by the war. This information, diffused in the text, serves to caution the audience against the climate of anguish and alarm for the returning king. But the whole air of fear was accentuated by two other factors. Agamemnon returns home alone, without Menelaus whose death not only does it overshadow the joy and the relief for the reappearance of the king but cues to the audience that his return will

[83] The *Agamemnon*, the *Persians*, and the *Trachiniae* belong to the same category of waiting of the appearance of a related person who is at the war or at a heroic assignment.
[84] Cf. Stanchi 2007, 17.
[85] According to Stanchi 2007, 16 there are three variations of this technique: the waiting of a character who returns having survived from a war, the waiting of a persecutor, and the waiting of a savior.
[86] Cf. Stanchi 2007, 53.

have fatal consequences for himself. And what is more through the Chorus' comments about the king's actions in the warfare the dramatist conveys all the more clear that the destruction of his hero will come as a consequence for his violating of the ethic and religious commonly accepted norm. Therefore Aeschylus uses the technique of the absent presence so that whatever happens after the arrival of Agamemnon would obtain a meaning in connection to what has been ascertained during the absent presence of him.[87]

Five hundred years later when Seneca wrote his play, Agamemnon's murder was a given with which he had to deal. His title hero too "does not get many words in edgeways in this drama on C lytemnestra"[88] and Seneca in order to highlight Agamemnon's absence employs the technique of "absent presence". Yet, although lexically he shows his conformation to this technique using words –keys that denote movement (v. 43: *adest*, v. 191: *remeat*, v. 204: *venit*, v. 401: *impressit reducem pedem*, v. 779: *adit*) his usage of it is quite different of Aeschylus. All the atmosphere of dread and the sense of anguish conveyed by the characters' every utterance in Aeschylus' play have been pared away. Seneca's audience/readers do not have to decipher the message hidden behind the words of the Queen, the Nurse or Aegisthus. From the very beginning of the play they are informed of the fatal fate that awaits the returning king. Thyestes' words *daturus coniugi iugulum suae* (v. 43) and *ictu bipennis regium video caput* (v. 46) encourage us to realize that Clytemnestra is going to kill Agamemnon. In fact throughout the play and until the arrival of Agamemnon there are unmistakable reference points (vv. 218-19, 235-36, 308-309) that can only bolster our perception of Agamemnon's slaying by his wife. Therefore the only keen sense of anguish that the Senecan audience feel is whether Agamemnon's theatricalised death would meet their expectations. It has been suggested that "in the imperial Rome of Seneca's day, crowds seemed unable to register grisly spectacles, and flocked to the arena in droves to witness all varieties of gladiatorial violence, torture and death."[89] Seneca's tragedies are geared to cater this appetite for violence

[87] Cf. Stanchi 2007, 91.
[88] Cf. Sørensen 1984, 251.
[89] Cf. Mowbray 2012, 393. An evidence for onstage bloodshed in the Roman theatre during the first century A.D. can be found in Suetonius'*Caligula*: *Sacrificans respersus est phoenicopteri sanguine. et pantomimus Mnester tragoediam saltavit, quam olim Neoptolemus tragoedius ludis, quibus rex Macedonum Philippus occisus est, egerat; et cum in Laureolo mimo, in quo actor proripiens se ruina sanguinem vomit, plures secundarum certatim experimentum artis darent, cruore scaena abundavit* (57). See also Hopkins 1985, 1-30 who sustains that brutality was built into Rome's culture and that Romans popularize fights to death and public slaughters due to their commitment to cruelty.

and bloody deaths since repeatedly they feature onstage bloodshed.[90] Although Agamemnon's death does not occur in the sight of the audience as Phaedra and Iocasta's deaths or the killing of Medea and Hercules Furens' sons,[91] nevertheless it is conveyed to the audience aurally by clairvoyant Cassandra. Cassandra's narration, 35 lines long (vv. 875-909) describes Agamemnon slaying as if it was taken part right in front of the audience's eyes since "there is a focus on body, its inner and outer parts, their penetration and dismemberment."[92] By letting Cassandra vividly tell the story as a remote third person event Seneca makes Agamemnon appear as helpless and isolated victim in the same way that his use of the "absent presence" technique isolates his hero from the drama where his death, the crux of the play, is presented in adherence to the demands and expectations of the spectators.

Thus, this technique of characterization in absence we witness in the *Agamemnon* is a medium of Seneca's dramaturgy and a significant feature of the texture of literary personality. To my knowledge no scholar so far has discussed this technique in Seneca's *Agamemnon*. Most editors and critics concentrated their strictures on the flawed and poorly constructed nature of the tragedy giving prime attention to the strikingly brief appearance of title character upon the stage which has induced many a critic[93] to conclude that Agamemnon is not the protagonist of the drama. But what is most important is that this technique employed by Seneca to the furtherance of his own agenda points to a tendency that through him penetrated first the Elizabethan stage creating the necessary bridges from Seneca's *Agamemnon* and through Shakespeare's works across to the twentieth-century theatre.

Literary critics[94] lauded Seneca as a model for style and tragic action on the Elizabethan drama, examining especially Seneca's influence on Shakespeare. Apart from verbal echoes, stylistic and thematic elements that Seneca bequeathed to Shakespeare the previous statement can easily be substantiated if we compare

[90] Cf. Sutton 1986, 63.
[91] Roisman 2005, 85 aptly remarks that "historically, this onstage violence reflects the abandonment in Roman times of the Greek dramatic convention which prohibited such displays."
[92] Cf. Boyle 1997, 134.
[93] There can be no unequivocal answer to the question which character in the play is the leading protagonist. For Giomini 1956, 7 and Croisille 1964, 464-72 Clytemnestra is the principal personage in the play whereas Giancotti 1953, 115 and Lefèvre 1972, 461and 1973, 89 stress the importance of Cassandra. Also for Corsaro 1978-79, 322 Cassandra is the real protagonist of the play since for the philosopher Seneca philosophizing means learn to die. Tarrant 1976, 4 sees Agamemnon's presence as a pivot around which all action turns. For more details see Motto and Clark 1985, 136-44.
[94] Eliot 1951, 65 aptly remarks that "no author exercised a wider or deeper influence upon the Elizabethan mind or upon the Elizabethan form of tragedy than did Seneca." For more details see also Arkins 1995, 1-8.

Seneca's *Agamemnon* with the Shakespearean *Julius Caesar.* The Elizabethan author in his *Julius Caesar* follows the Senecan *Agamemnon*'s "pattern". Julius Caesar is a great general, as Agamemnon. Both characters come on stage to be killed by the person we would expect to be loyal to them (Caesar will be killed by Brutus a person we would expect to be devoted to him in the same way we expect Clytemnestra to be a faithful wife to Agamemnon). And most important both characters although they are the title characters have a small role and die midway through the plays. In fact, *Julius Caesar* has been under the puzzling discussion of who the hero of the play is, a question that has also baffled the commentators of the *Agamemnon*, and critics have a variety of voices in this debate.[95] Still, more surprisingly, since Julius Caesar is not conceded but a scant space in the play and as in the same way with Agamemnon, he does not reveal himself utterly through his speeches and deeds we cannot but agree with Palmers's observation: "Caesar's greatness is assumed throughout the play. It fills the mind of the dramatist and is communicated to the audience in phrases that fall from his pen whenever Caesar is mentioned, even by his enemies."[96] Thus, Shakespeare weaves Seneca's technique of characterization in absence into his play and employs it as an approach to his character's portrayal.[97]

The idea of Shakespeare's indebtedness to Seneca has enjoyed a wide currency; yet, what is more interesting is how Seneca's technique brings the classical world into proximity with the twentieth- century theatre revealing thus Seneca's modernity that has influenced the theatrical culture of European authors. Modern writers such as Pirandello and Beckett view this technique as a part of author's design and have woven it into their work in the furtherance of their own literary agenda, signaling thus their repudiation of the traditional practice as far as structuring principles are concerned.[98]

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[95] Raffel 2006, xix-xx remarks that Caesar "Not dramatically the dominant character in the play, he remains the linchpin around which the narrative turns." And McMurtry 1998, 38 comments: "To many readers and audiences, past and present, Brutus is the prime candidate for the play's central character. It is possible to see him as a tragic hero, possessed of a fatal flaw in the shape of excessive idealism. Brutus is onstage for much of the action, and he does not disappear from the audience's awareness even when he is off. He dies at the correct time for a hero—just at the end. Other characters constantly express their admiration of him. Moreover, Brutus has an interior life. We are admitted into his mind, presumably into his truest conscious thoughts, as he speaks to himself or to his friends and followers." Likewise Spevack 2004, 27ff.

[96] Palmer 1961, 35.

[97] For a detailed analysis of the analogies between Seneca's *Agamemnon* and *Julius Caesar* see the Appendix at the end of the chapter.

[98] Cf. Cousineau 1990, 53-55 comments about Beckett's work.

Pirandello's play *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921) "deals with the basic relationship in theatrical procedure: that between the actor and the spectator."[99] The members of an acting company are about to rehearse the play *The Rules of the Game* by Luigi Pirandello. But their rehearsal is interrupted by the appearance of six people: they consist of a middle-aged Father, a Mother, a Son of twenty-two, a Stepdaughter of eighteen, a Boy of fourteen, and a Little Girl of four. The group announces themselves as characters and demand that their family's drama must be put on stage asking the Director to be their author and they his new production.

The technique of characterization Pirandello employs reminds us of the Senecan one, since as Bassanese observes[100] "As characters, the Six personify different stages of the creative process by demonstrating different degrees of characterization, in keeping with the author's original conceptualization. In his self-analytical introduction Pirandello states that the Father and Stepdaughter are fully realized as Mind or Spirit, the Mother less so as Nature, whereas the Boy and Child are merely underrealized presence. The Son remains peripheral, refusing to participate in the dramatic action in any way. "They had to appear at the exact stage of development each had reached in the author's imagination at the moment when he decided to be rid of them" (xvi-xvii). Inert and silent, the Boy and Child are ambiguous beings, caught between dissolution and form. Having supposedly died in the inner story, they nevertheless play out their small but pivotal roles, wordlessly reliving their own deaths onstage: appearing only to disappear. The Mother, as Nature, does not comprehend her reality as a character, but she experiences it as emotion, an anguish that never ceases. "I am living my agony constantly, every moment," she declares to the assembled company, "I'm alive and it's alive and it keeps coming back again and again, as fresh as the first time" (52). Fixed forever in timelessness, the artistic creation repeats its life. In every reading of a book, in every performance of a play, the action and characters are once again present, unaltered by time or repetition. Thus the Characters are indissolubly tied to the reality of their imagined lives, no matter how desperate they are to change the plot and alter their roles."

But, a better proof of the freshness of Seneca's approach to the characterization of his Agamemnon is to be sought in Becketts's play *Waiting for*

[99] Bermel 1973, 141.
[100] Cf. Bassanese 1997, 104.

Godot (1949). The play is about two friends, Vladimir and Estragone, who wait uncertainly and endlessly for the arrival of Godot, a person whom they admit they would not recognize since they hardly know him. While they are waiting they are visited by a master and his slave and a boy; the latter comes with a message from Godot that he will not come that evening but for sure the next night. The two friends decide to depart but they have no energy to move. It has been suggested that "none of the four major characters of *Waiting for Godot* possesses the usual defining characteristics of stage characters."[101] Yet what has tantalized the spectators over the years is Godot's identity and the critics "characterize Godot's nonarrival as an effect of Beckett's authorial power rather than of the impotence and ignorance he himself insists."[102]

If Godot's absence and ever-expected appearance is set beside the Senecan Agamemnon's ever-anticipated arrival on stage striking similarities become apparent. Hutchings offers us a most revealing remark when he observes that: "The only certainty about Godot is the fact of his apparent absence—but no one can be sure even about the *kind* of absence that it is. This, indeed, is the central problem of the play, for absences can be of two very distinct varieties: the absence of the existent and the absence of the nonexistent. … The central, forever unsolvable mystery of *Waiting for Godot*—preceding even any consideration of who Godot is or what Godot represents—is precisely this: the nature of his absence. Is there in fact a Godot who does somewhere exist, who does send the boy as his messenger, and whose unexplainedly deferred coming might actually occur in the always-promised tomorrow? Or is Godot a figment of the imagination, a fantasy projected out of the needs and yearnings of those who want earnestly to believe in his existence, who define their lives by his expectations, and who find their purpose and meaning in waiting to obey his command? The play provides—but also undermines—substantial evidence to support each of these possibilities. Ultimately, however, it validates neither, leaving the question as irresolvable for the audience in the theater as it is for the characters on the stage. Yet the question *must* be addressed, for the nature of Godot's absence defines the nature of the universe in which the characters live and, indeed, defines the characters themselves. If there is an actual Godot who might

[101] Cf. Bradby 2001, 29.
[102] Schlueter and Brater 1991, 135. Esslin 1965, 55 informs us that when Beckett himself was asked about his hero's identity he cleverly replied "If I knew I would have said so in the play."

eventually arrive, whether he ever does so or not, the hope and persistence of Vladimir and Estragon in continuing to wait may not be forever in vain. If, on the other hand, there is no Godot, they are self-deluding vagabonds who fail to confront the reality of their futile situation, hoping and waiting pointlessly in an existential void, seeking an affirmation and a personal validation that can and will by definition certainly never come. Each reader's reaction to this central but irresolvable issue—and each theatergoer's response to it in viewing a production—determines the very nature of the play that she or he reads or sees as well as any interpretation that is subsequently made. Nevertheless, the play is fundamentally *not* about Godot, the "absent presence" (or, as some would prefer, the "present absence") of whatever kind. Instead, as the title ever-so-plainly indicates, it is about the act of waiting itself."[103]

This same "absent presence" or "present absence" of Agamemnon has tended to puzzle the scholars and tantalize the spectators of the Senecan play. Nevertheless, as I hope to have shown, this dramatic technique of Seneca, apart from being an innovatory dramatic concept has grown out of his drama of the past and has influenced the twentieth-century European culture. Seneca's presentation of a traditional character may be the "preface" to the modern idea of the fragile inconsistency and lack of identity of characters as exemplified in Beckett and Pirandello's plays.

However, the author of the drama accomplishes an indirect characterization not so much through the character of Agamemnon itself (namely through the words that Seneca puts in the mouth of his hero) but through what the other characters report about him on stage. It is evident that such an indirect characterization reveals something important about the way Seneca intends to construct his character. Agamemnon is not a character in itself, objective, supplied with features and qualities that the author attributes to him and the reader-spectator perceives as qualifications of the character's *ethos.* Agamemnon is rather the "character of someone" and is defined by the way in which the other characters of the play from time to time perceive him subjectively: thus, exists an Agamemnon of Clytemnestra, an Agamemnon of Cassandra, an Agamemnon of the chorus and so forth. Agamemnon therefore is the meeting point where the different points of view of the characters intersect: each one of them has its own reasons, its own justifications.

[103] Hutchings 2005, 24-25.

Each one of these different Agamemnons is therefore real in its own way, even if it is only partial. In this virtual evanescence of the real character, we almost have the impression that his identity is substantially irrelevant, and that his drama springs out from the conflict which the various images of Agamemnon trigger. But far from producing a debilitation, a reduction of the stature of the character, this multiple identity, which characterizes him, and places him at the centre of the discourse of the other characters who circle around him, is an extraordinary and efficacious way to strengthen the protagonist's heroic dignity and exalt his grandeur.

APPENDIX

Seneca's *Agamemnon* and Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*

That the works of Seneca were important to the Elizabethan playwrights is a principle long accepted. The Senecan contribution has not gone unnoticed. More than a century ago Cunliffe's book traced Seneca's influence on Renaissance drama providing a list of parallel passages; his example has followed many critics[104] who tried to illuminate Seneca's impact through numerous verbal echoes piling up lists of corresponding extracts. As Arkins aptly remarks "For the dramatists of the Renaissance in France, in Italy, and in England, Classical tragedy means the ten Latin plays of Seneca, not Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides."[105]

Yet Seneca's presence is seen especially and most obviously in Shakespeare's drama.[106] It has been suggested that throughout Shakespeare's career "Seneca provides an important paradigm of tragic style, character, and action" and his influence exceeds the limitations of genre since it could be easily investigated in tragedy and in comedy as well.[107] In fact the idea that Seneca's tragedies *Phaedra, The Trojan Women, Thyestes, Agamemnon* and *Hercules Furens* have provided Shakespeare with a subsidiary model in the structure and have contributed to the atmosphere of his *Titus Andronicus, Hamlet, Richard III* and *Macbeth* has enjoyed a wide currency among the critics.[108] Thus, Seneca looms very large in the pages of

[104] See Engel 1903, 60-81 and Lucas 1922.
[105] Cf. Arkins 1995, 2-3.
[106] See Martindale 1990, 44 who comment that "Seneca was the closest Shakespeare ever got to Greek tragedy" and Meres 1904, vol.2, 317-18 who underlining the eminence of Shakespeare as a writer of both tragedy and comedy observes: "As Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for Comedy and Tragedy among the Latines: so Shakespeare among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage."
[107] Cf. Miola 1992, 10.
[108] Cf. Arkins 1995, 4. For the connection of *Titus Andronicus* with Seneca see Martindale 1992, 47 who comments: "Titus used confidently to be described as a Senecan play…the description of uncontrolled emotion leading to catastrophic consequences is central to Seneca's interests and understanding of psychopathology"; for *Hamlet* Miola 1992, 52 remarks: "The ghosts of Senecan drama – Atreus, Hercules, Pyrrhus, Clytemnestra, Aegisthus, Orestes, Electra – and of neo-Senecan drama – Hieronimo, Titus, Lucianus – hover in the background of Hamlet, providing perspective on character and action"; for *Richard III* Muir 1977, 37 notes: "Whether Shakespeare was directly influenced by *Hercules Furens*...or whether the influence was indirect, there can be little doubt that *Richard III* is the most Senecan of Shakespeare's plays"; for *Macbeth* see Thomson 1966, 119-24 and Bullough 1957-75, vii. 451-5.

Shakespeare's plays since the latter seems to have the Latin dramatist in his memory as he writes.

What I would like to propose here is that there is another Shakespearean tragedy, the *Julius Caesar*, where we can recognize the presence of a specific Senecan drama even though it is a less conspicuous source. An attempt has been made to connect this Shakespearean play with Seneca's *Hercules Oetaeus* indicating that both present the conception of a stoic hero: "Hercules and Brutus are men in whom stoical strength of purpose leads to a death over which they triumph by perfection of fortitude."[109] But in my view Shakespeare modeled his *Julius Caesar* more closely on the Senecan *Agamemnon.*

Recent classical scholarship, however, tends to link Seneca's *Agamemnon* with rather *Macbeth*, since as Miola suggests "both *Agamemnon* and *Macbeth* feature a pair of lovers who slay an unsuspecting king, and a woman – artful, powerful, and wicked – who dominates the initial action. Agamemnon's triumphant return home and the false welcome of Clytemnestra generally resemble Duncan's triumphant entry at Inverness, complete with the fulsome greeting of Lady Macbeth. The joyful chorus which celebrates Agamemnon's return heightens the dramatic irony as does Duncan's happy anticipation. In both plays the threat of retribution hangs heavily in the air: two sons, Orestes and Fleance, escape and live on to haunt the evildoers. Audible in both plays is a music of regret, the sad contemplation of the past and of good things no longer possessed or attainable (*Ag.* 110ff; 590ff; *Mac.*III. ii. 19ff; v. iii. 22ff)."[110]

Nevertheless, as we have already noted, *Julius Caesar* follows the pattern of Seneca's *Agamemnon.*[111] Both heroes' presences are felt from first to last through other characters' comments and statements, but they are not seen until some lines from the end and therefore other characters emerge as the best and most likely candidates for the main protagonist of the tragedies. Since they are not dramatically

[109] Cf. Jespen 1953, 103.
[110] Miola 1992, 97 n. 46. See also Muir 1977, 213-14.
[111] It is well known among the critics that Shakespeare's direct source for the plot of *Julius Caesar* was North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives.* Dorsch 1965, xiii-xiv for the treatment of the source comments that "Shakespeare took his material from three of Plutarch's *Lives,* those of Marcus Brutus, Julius Caesar, and Marcus Antonius. From three separate accounts of the events leading to and resulting from the assassination of Caesar, presented with different emphasis and some differences in detail, he put together a plot which is supremely well proportioned in its distribution of interest and wholly consistent in its development of character, and which seems inevitable in its chain of cause and effect. From these *Lives* he took, too, many details of the appearance and personality of his characters, adding, however, much of his own, and developing in his own way the relationship between them, as will be apparent to anyone who reads more widely in the *Lives* than the extracts in the Appendix."

the main characters of the two plays, it has been suggested that the tragedies could hardly have been named after a hero whose role is limited in this way. Both tragedies relate a political crime and murder and in both plays the titular hero finds death at the hands of his conspirators. Agamemnon appears in line 782 only to disappear twenty-five lines later; Julius Caesar enters the stage during the Act 1 to be stabbed to death in Act 3.

But besides the parallel structural design we can detect other close affinities that the two plays share. The way Cassius plays upon Brutus with the aim of bringing him into the plot against Caesar bears the imprint of Senecan Aegisthus. Cassius' strategy which "rests on the premise that Caesar is a tyrant"[112]:

"Why man, he doth bestride the narrow world
Like a colossus, and we petty men
Walk under his huge legs and peep about
To find ourselves dishonorable graves" (I.ii. 135-138)[113]

reminds us of the skilful trick that Aegisthus also employs towards Clytemnestra playing with the idea of Agamemnon as a prospective tyrant:

gravis ille sociis stante adhuc Troia fuit:
quid rere ad animum suapte natura trucem
Troiam addidisse? rex Mycenarum fuit,
veniet tyrannus; (*Ag.* 249-252)

"He was overbearing to associates while Troy still stood: what do you think Troy's fall has added to a spirit that is naturally harsh? He was king of Mycenae, he will return as tyrant;"

What is more, as Aegisthus presses all the right buttons appealing to Clytemnestra's jealousy for Cassandra, her sexual rival in order to lure her into the conspiracy plan, in the same way Cassius' plan based upon Brutus' love for his country and sense of honour was the key to success:

[112] Cf. Houppert 1974, 4.
[113] All citations are from Raffel 2006.

"I know that virtue to be in you, Brutus,
As well as I do know your outward favor.
Well, honor is the subject of my story." (I.ii. 90-93)

and again:

"Well Brutus, thou art noble. Yet I see
Thy honorable mettle may be wrought
From that it is disposed." (I.ii. 305-307)

As Stapfer underlines "if he appeals to any lower motives Brutus would turn a deaf ear, but by speaking to his conscience, Cassius at any rate ensured a hearing."[114]

Moreover, in another debt to Seneca Shakespeare makes Julius Caesar find a paradigm for a degradation process in the character of Agamemnon. It is possible that Caesar may be designed to recall the main aspect of Seneca's Agamemnon who is been ridiculed and whose heroic behavior is been negated by the Latin dramatist. Thus, Caesar, although returning from a victorious campaign enters the stage without the impressive splendor we would expect. He is depicted as superstitious, as a "conqueror dwindled into a ruler who accepts flattery."[115] But Shakespeare's belittlement of Caesar reaches its peak moment when we are invited to see him through the prejudiced glance of Cassius[116] which calls our attention to his general's cowardice and fearfulness:

"He had a fever when he was in Spain.
And when the fit was on him I did mark
How he did shake. 'Tis true, this god did shake,
His coward lips did from their color fly,
And that same eye whose bend doth awe the world

[114] Cf. Stapfer 1880, 344
[115] Cf. Raffel 2006, 145-46.
[116] Bonjour 1958, 6 aptly remarks that "That Caesar had a fever when he was in Spain is a matter of fact. But when Cassius implies that Caesar was a coward because he really did see him tremble "when the fit was on him," it gives us a mighty measure of Cassius's blind and malignant spite—not of Caesar's cowardice!"

Did lose his luster. I did hear him groan.
Ay, and that tongue of his that bade the Romans
Mark him, and write his speeches in their books.
Alas, it cried, "Give me some drink, Titanius,"
As a sick girl. Ye gods, it doth amaze me
A man of such a feeble temper should
So get the start of the majestic world
And bear the palm alone." (I.ii. 119-131)

The same accusations are leveled against Agamemnon in Clytemnestra's biased version of his unheroic conduct during the Trojan War for whom she comments that enfeebled instead of the warfare he opted for leisure for love, replacing one mistress with another (183-4, *marcet ac veneri vacat* | *reparatque amores*).

One last affinity we can identify between the two plays is the Soothsayer (I.ii. 18-24) and Calpurnia's real and genuine premonition (II.ii 1-107) that Caesar should not to go to the Senate which invite us to recall Cassandra's warning to Agamemnon that his life is still in danger (vv. 791-800 and especially vv. 798 -99 *Nullum est periclum tibimet. At magnum tibi* | *Victor timere quid potest? Quod non timet*). Although at the beginning Caesar seems to yield at his wife's foreboding accepting that her dream bore ill for him yet he changes his mind and as Agamemnon decides to pay no heed to Calpurnia's intuitive fear and comes to the Senate to find his death.

Thus, in view of what has been said above it is evident that what Seneca's *Agamemnon* offers to the Shakespearean *Julius Caesar* is not only the pattern in order to present Julius Caesar at his last moments but the general theme of political murder of a great general at the hands of the conspirators and its tremendous consequences for the state since as Dean comments "the essential tragic action starts just after his death."[117]

[117] Cf. Dean 1968, 102

Clytemnestra

Clytemnestra in Aeschylus

In dramatic plays problems could be arisen in the cases where the complexity of a tragic figure is securely established, namely, in the cases where the boundaries between male and female of a play character are blurred and the distinctions are not clearly cut, but the tragic poet presents characters with mixed characteristics. Aeschylus' Clytemnestra is a clear case in point.

Clytemnestra is a well-known figure in the mythical complex surrounding the Trojan War. She appears in the *Odyssey*, but without a central role, and she is occasionally mentioned in the *Iliad.* Homer presents her as the noblest of women (διᾶ Κλυταιμνήστρη)[118] and places responsibility for the whole crime on the crafty-minded (δολόμητιν)[119] Aegisthus, who talked Clytemnestra into helping him with the deed. Actually the only cruelty that Homer ascribes to her is the killing of Cassandra.[120]

Aeschylus extends the portrayal of Clytemnestra much beyond Homer's, choosing thus to give her a more active role than Homer; and he employs every mechanism in order to make his protagonist's overpowering presence evident. Her key role not only in the *Agamemnon* but also in the other tragedies of the *Oresteia* makes her the central character in the whole trilogy.[121]

In *Agamemnon*, in particular, the 340 lines she speaks show her preponderance over Cassandra and the king, who utter only 176 and 82 lines respectively. The latter, noticeably enough, appears when "the play is half finished … and he is present for

[118] *Od.* 3.266.
[119] *Od.* 3.308.
[120] *Od.* 11.421-22 οἰκτροτάτην δ' ἤκουσα ὅπα Πριάμοιο θυγατρός, | Κασσάνδρης, τὴν κτεῖνε Κλυταιμνήστρη δολόμητις. In Odyssey Clytemenstra seduced by Aegisthus (Od. 3.263-75) seems to have played no direct role in Agamemnon's murder (Od. 1.35-43, 3.193-8). However it is true that Agamemnon's shade in the underworld declares that Clytemnestra not only helped Aegisthus murder him, but that she also killed the prophetess Cassandra and in this way "defiled" herself and all the women. But of course Agamemnon tells his side of the story.
[121] Pool 1983, 106 notes that "in the trilogy as a whole Clytemnestra appears nine times, while in *Ag*. she has no less than six entrances, more than any other character in surviving tragedy."

only one-tenth of its course."[122] But apart from that, another element that proves the importance Aeschylus attaches to Clytemnestra is the fact that she is present in every episode, and has conversations with all the other characters in the drama, who are all males: the male chorus of the twelve Argive elders, the herald, Agamemnon[123]. Whenever she is not on stage, the other characters make references to her.

It is mainly to these references that we have to pay due attention, since through the commenting voice of these other characters, Aeschylus not only emphasizes the significance of his heroine, but also guides his audience to appreciate better the abnormal nature of the queen, the titanic figure who violates acceptable female norms[124] inasmuch as to be considered "the most transgressive woman in extant tragedy."[125]

When the play opens the first person to appear is the watchman; his speech, delivered in the pre-dawn darkness from the roof of Agamemnon's palace, embodies many themes that are to be developed from one end of the trilogy to the other.[126] The watchman states that for a whole year he has been staying vigilant waiting for the fire signal to flash, as a sign that Troy has fallen and that his royal master Agamemnon[127] is returning home. He goes on explaining the person who is to be held responsible for his weary and tedious situation and his words, although at the beginning they do not refer to Clytemnestra directly, "immediately call our attention to her ambiguous status":[128] ὧδε γὰρ κρατεῖ | γυναικὸς ἀνδρόβουλον ἐλπίζον κέαρ (vv. 10-11: "for so commands a woman's man – counselling, hopeful heart"). In his phrase the word κρατεῖ, which denotes domestic or political authority,[129] is placed emphatically

[122] Cf. Denniston and Page 1957, xxxiii.
[123] The only female character to whom Clytemnestra speaks is Cassandra, but the latter does not answer back to her, and paying no heed to the words of the queen makes Clytemnestra to leave the stage saying: "I will not bear the same of uttering more." For more information about Cassandra's silence towards Clytemnestra see Taplin 1972, 57-97 where he discusses the Aeschylean silences among the lost (*Mytmidones*) and the surviving plays too (*Eumenides*, *Prometheus*, *Choephori*). Taplin sees Cassandra's silence in *Agam.* as a way to show her indipendence and draws our attention to its chief point, to its breaking, namely the onset of her vision, as a scene which will take us from mystification to insight.
[124] For general information on women and their role in Greek tragedy see Foley 1981,127-168; Shaw 1975, 255-266; Zeitlin 1996, 341-74, and also Easterling 1987, 15-26.
[125] Cf. Hall 1997, 107.
[126] Cf. Herington 1986, 117.
[127] Compare the Watchman's warmth that the lines γένοιτο δ' οὖν μολόντος εὐφιλῆ χέρα ἄνακτος οἴκων τῇδε βαστάσαι χερί (vv. 34-35) convey towards his royal master, with the fear towards the queen that the words φόβος γὰρ ἀνθ' ὕπνου παραστατεῖ (line 14) reveal.
[128] Cf. McClure 1997 116ff. And see also Fraenkel 1950, 10 who commenting on the forceful in sound and sense oxymoron γυναικὸς ἀνδρόβουλον κέαρ notes that it impresses the hearer's mind from the outset with one of the principal features of Clytemnestra's character.
[129] Cf. Winnington – Ingram 1948, 131.

at the end of the line. This odd combination of male and female levels of behaviour, as underlined in the watchman's speech, is mainly focused through the polarity male-female (κρατεῖ / ἀνδρόβουλον – where also the second half of the rare compound ἀνδρόβουλος is based upon the verb βουλεύομαι and denotes the logical process of decision that is characteristic of a man – and γυναικὸς / ἐλπίζον κέαρ) and indeed hints at an upsetting of the balance of the gender roles and at emphasizing the paradoxicality of Clytemnestra's androgynous nature: while the watchman's speech is fraught with intimations of Clytemnestra's distorted sexuality nevertheless he ends up his speech referring to her as Agamemnon's wife and expects her to play the stereotypical role in which women in tragedy are cast and is associated with lamentation (*ololygmos*).[130] As the beginning (hence possibly programmatic) position of these remarks might easily lead to expect, this distortion is the keystone of the tragedy.

The chorus of the twelve Argive elders enter the stage after the watchman in order to obtain information from the queen about the sacrifices that take place throughout the town. Their choral song[131] dwells upon the Trojan War, describing the portent which was sent to the Atridae at Aulis and with which the Greeks started their undertaking, its interpretation by Calchas and Agamemnon's decision to sacrifice Iphigenia.[132] In their long speech (40-257, the longest choral song in Attic tragedy) they address Clytemnestra twice; and while the first address σὺ δέ, Τυνδάρεω| θύγατερ, βασίλεια Κλυταιμήστρα (84) [133] is the most suitable and proper way of addressing a queen, we have to wonder how to interpret their words a few lines later: ἥκω σεβίζων σόν, Κλυταιμήστρα, κράτος· | δίκη γάρ ἐστι φωτὸς ἀρχηγοῦ τίειν | γυναῖκ', ἐρημωθέντος ἄρσενος θρόνου (vv. 258-260: "I come to show my respect for your sovereignty; for it is meet to do homage to the consort of a sovereign when her lord's throne is tenantless"). It has been argued that the chorus act "as a internal, male audience which evaluates and attempts to circumscribe Clytemnestra's

[130] As Stanford 1937, 92f. has rightly pointed out. Cf. also Katz 1994, 89f.
[131] For the usefulness of the chorus in Aeschylus' tragedies see Rosenmeyer 1982, 145-187.
[132] Much acumen has been lavished by many commentators on answering the puzzling question whether Agamemnon was free to choose between sacrificing his daughter or not. For more information on this matter see Denniston and Page 1957, xxiii; Fraenkel 1950, 113f; Dover 1973, 58-69; Lesky 1966, 78-85 and also Lloyd-Jones 1962, 187-199.
[133] Clytemnestra's presence during lines 83-103 has always been a vexed issue that has divided the scholars. For an analytical approach see Taplin 1972, 89-94; Taplin 1977, 285ff; Fraenkel 1950, 51ff, and also Denniston and Page 1957, 75ff.

speech and reveal her deviation from speech norms."[134] The chorus' choice of words offers us another insight into the queen's inversion of gender roles. For the chorus recognize that Clytemnestra has κράτος[135] – the word interestingly enough rests, as in the watchman's speech, at the end of the line in order to be given special stress – and see her now as a ruler who replaces an ἄρσην. Although they have come to show their respect to the queen – they use the verb σεβίζω, which they will use once more but when their king arrives in front of them[136] – their comments are not at all tactful and "in saying that they pay homage to her not for her own sake but because she is the substitute for her absent husband, they betray something of their hostility and contempt towards the woman in power."[137]

Actually the chorus' speech offers a rich vein to exploit, since the same pattern of combinations that reveals Clytemnestra's masculine role can readily be found in another instance of their speech. At line 351 they comment γύναι, κατ' ἄνδρα σώφρον' εὐφρόνως λέγεις ("woman, like a wise man you speak sensibly"), when Clytemnestra expresses the hope that the victors will do nothing in their joy to offend the gods and place obstacles in their way back. And thus, "once again the chorus valorize Clytemnestra's appropriation of the male sphere."[138]

Nonetheless –not very differently from the watchman of the beginning– the chorus insist on seeing her as a "should be" typical and stereotypical female figure, showing critical attitude towards everything she says. They refuse to believe straightaway her assertion that Troy has been captured, lest she might have believed in dreams[139] (274: ὀνείρων φάσματα) or in rumours (276: ἄπτερος φάτις) and ask for proofs. "The function of proofs by mere vision is what the chorus impute to Clytemnestra, as a female, and what she rejects by her repetition of φρενός/φρένας, the male principle of proof."[140] Moreover, after she had committed the crime against Agamemnon the dismayed chorus refuse to accept it and try to justify her deed and her boldness as acts that emanate from madness, which has been caused by poison

[134] Cf. McClure 1997, 115.
[135] Cf. Katz 1994, 89, who underlines that the chorus "undercut the anomaly of the woman in full public view, justifying it as exceptional and temporary."
[136] *Ag.* 785.
[137] Cf. Denniston and Page 1957, 93.
[138] Cf. Katz 1994, 89. Compare the contempt the chorus' address to Aegishtus reveals as they call him γύναι in l.1625 when he appears on stage claiming that he had taken part to the execution of the deed.
[139] For a psycho-analytical approach to the dreams and their role in the Greek tragedy, cf. Devereux, 1976.
[140] Cf. Goldhill 1984, 37.

(vv. 1407-08: τί κακόν, ὦ γύναι, | χθονοτρεφὲς ἐδανὸν ἢ ποτὸν, "woman, what poisonous herb nourished by the earth have you tested, what potion") that rendered her insane. Because her deed and her demeanour after it are so extraordinary[141] for a typical member of the female race. Similarly, when Cassandra describes the murder and explicitly speaks about a woman (1231: θῆλυς ἄρσενος φονεύς) who is about to slay her husband, they pay no attention to her words and their question a few lines later (1251: τίνος πρὸς ἀνδρὸς τοῦτ' ἄχος πορσύνεται; "what is the man that he contrived this wickedness") conveys the impression that they are not thinking – and almost cannot think – of a woman.

But surprisingly enough and in sharp contrast to what the others say about her subversion of the normative social categories, Clytemnestra tends to present herself as a typical woman[142] and balances the emphasis the others place on her masculine behaviour, most probably in order to re-establish her gender coherence. Even if she does not resort to pathetic expressions or expressions associated with lamentation,[143] and other similar linguistic features that are considered more consistent with female characterization, nevertheless whenever she speaks of herself she always uses the word γυνη.

Thus, for example, after the beacon speech she finishes her words towards the chorus with the statement τοιαῦτά τοι γυναικὸς ἐξ ἐμοῦ κλύεις (348: "you hear this story from me, a woman"). What is most interesting in her speech are the themes and patterns upon which it dwells. McClure maintains that the emphasis Clytemnestra places upon victory and defeat (as the use of the words νικώμενος in line 291 and νικᾷ in line 314 manifests) gloating over the sufferings of the defeated and implying that the conquerors are still in great peril, her vivid description of Troy (324, 340, 342), and her insistence on proofs (τέκμαρ ...σύμβολόν in l. 315), although they are inappropriate motifs for a woman's speech, still succeed in rendering "her self-controlled, masculine speech credible"[144] by the chorus.[145] Her aforementioned

[141] Cf. Denniston and Page 1957, 199-200.
[142] Cf. Easterling 1973, 3, who underscores that Aeschylus' portrayal of his human characters is unique and "every detail of language adds subtle touches to an elaborate and consistently drawn personality, which is assumed to be a major focus of the dramatist's interest."
[143] Indeed Aeschylus chooses to present Cassandra inseparable from the stereotypical role of the women in tragedy, namely the lamentation and the silence. Thus, the language assigned to her, which is mainly composed of lyrical verses, teems with several interjections (1072, 1076, 1080, 1085, 1100, 1107, 1114), and pathetic expressions (1107, 1136, 1138).
[144] Cf. McClure 1999, 73-80 at 74.

statement about her female gender that galvanizes the attention of the audience challenges and matches her great skill in the "masculine speech" and once more restores the balance of the gender roles.[146]

But if this first speech presents her crossing the male – female boundaries, the next one, in the herald scene (587-614), projects her as a typical Greek wife: Clytemnestra chooses to begin with the verb ἀνωλόλυξα (587: "I have raised a shout of triumph") placed in an emphatic position. She continues by describing herself as the wife of a soldier who has been waiting for her husband to come back from the war, and rejoices over his return with the words τί γὰρ | γυναικὶ τούτου φέγγος ἥδιον δρακεῖν, | ἀπὸ στρατείας ἄνδρα σώσαντος θεοῦ | πύλας ἀνοῖξαι; (601-604: "what day is sweeter for a woman to behold than this – to open the gates when a god has saved her husband from the campaign?"). The last part of her speech, when she orders the herald to report to Agamemnon, ends with Clytemnestra persisting on her devotion and sexual faithfulness to her husband as any conventional wife would do: γυναῖκα πιστὴν |...δωμάτων κύνα | ἐσθλὴν ἐκείνῳ...| οὐδὲν διαφθείρασαν...| οὐδ' οἶδα τέρψιν ...|...ἄλλου πρὸς ἀνδρὸς (vv. 606-612: "his wife faithful… a watch-dog of his house, loyal to him…unchanged in every part… of pleasure from other man I know no more").

However, a few lines later in the third episode she will throw off this mask of the typical wife, when the king comes to the stage and their confrontation takes place (810-947). As McClure points out Clytemnestra's speech is "dense in metaphor and innuendo" and is similarly constructed: "simultaneously disguising and exposing herself, she continually ruptures her feminine persona by adopting masculine language."[147]This masculine language is evident enough from the form of her address to the chorus ἄνδρες πολῖται (855) which denotes the beginning of her public speech, while we would expect her to address her first words to her husband, whom she has not seen for ten years. And once again she will disguise her real character behind a long enumeration of her sufferings and the anguish she had to cope with during his long absence, sitting at home severed from her husband, and forlorn for him, prey to every kind of rumours and gossip.

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[145] Cf. the chorus comment at line 351-53: γύναι, κατ' ἄνδρα σώφρον' εὐφρόνως λέγεις· ἐγὼ δ' ἀκούσας πιστά σου τεκμήρια θεοὺς προσειπεῖν εὖ παρασκευάζομαι (woman, like a wise man you speak sensibly; now that I have heard your plausible proofs, I am ready to address the gods).
[146] Cf. also Fraenkel 1950, 178.
[147] Cf. McClure 1997, 119.

The last two scenes that call for our attention are the "carpet scene" (958-974) and Clytemnestra's last confrontation with the chorus while the king and Cassandra lie dead (1372-1576).

The "carpet-scene" is the central point, where the whole play culminates; Agamemnon, having yielded to his wife's will, treads the path of the purple vestments. This scene has been regarded as the triumph of Clytemnestra's rhetoric over Agamemnon.[148] "The carpet scene takes the form of an *agon*, a contest of *peitho* which effects a dramatic overturn, in which a woman conquers the conqueror of Troy."[149] Clytemnestra's very best efforts to disperse Agamemnon's doubts and the force of her *peitho* in her binding song, her use of metaphors and the polysemy they create "have prompted many scholars to conclude that Clytemnestra assumes an almost supernatural power or even work a form of magic fascination."[150]

In the last scene, Clytemnestra discloses to the chorus her terrible deed. At this moment the protagonist presents herself clearly as a male character. She appears on stage with her cloths bloodstained, and her description of the murder to the elders and her language is "ranging in its coarse vividness to the very extreme of Aeschylean diction."[151] Not only does she not show any remorse for her crime, but she gloatingly admits it twice (1380 and 1405) in front of the baffled chorus and rebuffs them for having thought of her as ἀφράσμονος γυναικὸς (1401: "witless woman"). Her heroic-like words οὗτός ἐστιν Ἀγαμέμνων, ἐμὸς | πόσις, νεκρὸς δέ, τῆσδε δεξιᾶς χερὸς | ἔργον (vv. 1404-6: "here is Agamemnon, my husband, done to death, the work of this right hand") polarize again the male-female boundaries of the drama.

In conclusion, the prototype of the tragic Clytemnestra, namely the Aeschylean one, bequeaths to the tragic theatre the idea of a character that has deeply problematized and blurred the boundaries of the traditional distinctions of gender roles. Many other Clytemnestrae were staged in Greek tragedy,[152] where this aspect of

[148] For Agamemnon's personality and *ethos* in conjunction with this scene see Lanahan 1974, 25; Fraenkel 1950, 441f., Goheen 1955, 126, Lebeck 1971, 74-79.
[149] Cf. McClure 1996, 129.
[150] Cf. McClure 1996, 130, who connects the use of persuasion and cloth with magical practice.
[151] Cf. O'Daly 1985, 15.
[152] Cf. Sophocles and Euripides who in their *Electras* make Clytemnestra the most prominent figure, but they tend to increase the relative importance of Aegisthus. In fact, Euripides treats her more sympathetically, making her sorry somewhat for all that has happened (*El.* 1105-6). And also the other previous versions of the story, presented Clytemnestra as simply helping her lover to kill her husband: namely the Epic cycle, Hesiod (23 (a) MW 11. 13-30), and Stesichorus fr.223 Davies PMGF. Only in Aeschylus she becomes the centre of attention almost to the exclusion of Aegisthus.

Clytemnestra's character may have not been featuring, but the glamour of the prototype had possibly a concrete relevance also for Seneca, as I will try to show, and influenced the characterization of his own Clytemnestra.

Clytemnestra in Seneca

The aim of this chapter will be to explore what Seneca tries and to what extent he succeeds in presenting Clytemnestra as a character moving back and forth between her female nature and the more powerful role she plays as a queen. Starting from the importance given to Clytemnestra's status, I shall examine how the powerful side of the queen emerges in every scene in which Clytemnestra's power is challenged as in the scene with Electra or when the legitimacy of her position –the main constituent of her prestige and status – is placed in danger as in the dialogue scenes with her Nurse and Aegisthus, where Cassandra's imminent substitution of Clytemnestra are at the very core of each of these scenes. In addition, my discussion will aim to show that *Agamemnon*, as every artistic creation, is bound up with the artist's concrete spatiotemporal environment, and thus Seneca portrays his Clytemnestra's character in the light of his contemporaries female powerful figures.

To begin with, Clytemnestra makes her initial appearance in the first episode and dominates the stage until the arrival of the captive Trojan women headed by Cassandra, in line 588. What is interesting enough is that both in the first (108-309) and the second episode (392-588) she is the person who utters the first and the last word. In the whole play she speaks six times as many lines as Agamemnon, the title character, who has been confined to a brief scene, 26 lines long, which takes place at the end of the third episode (782-807).[153] But from the moment that the Senecan king enters the stage a shift of focus, conspicuous enough for a perceptive audience, takes place, since Seneca's interest lies elsewhere; namely on Cassandra. Not only does

[153] Cf. Tarrant 1976, 3 who, commenting on the insignificance of Agamemnon, points out that the tragedy lacks a dominant central figure and thus its unity. See also Croisille 1946 who maintains that Clytemnestra is the most plausible candidate for the role of the dominant character of the tragedy, and Giomini 1956, 7, who argues that this is Clytemnestra's tragedy. On the contrary, Calder III 1976, 32 accepts Cassandra's role as the main focus of interest in the play, considering the fact that Seneca has expanded considerably her role as compared to Aeschylus' play.

Seneca replace the Aeschylean Clytemnestra – Agamemnon scene[154] with that of Cassandra and Agamemnon, but from the third episode onwards till the end of the tragedy,[155] he has also given Cassandra the pivotal role (she speaks almost equal number of lines with Clytemnestra), when Clytemnestra has just a limited number of lines (only 22 verses) available.[156]

Moreover, Seneca departs from the androgynous picture of Aeschylus' Clytemnestra by attaching paramount significance to her royal status and galvanizing the attention of the audience to it; a real shift takes place between Aeschylus' emphasis on her "abnormal" masculinity and Seneca's emphasis on a behaviourally parallel but more socially "normal" concern for her royal birth and role. While in Aeschylus the chorus' references to Clytemnestra's *κράτος*, which is due to the fact that she is the legitimate substitute for the absent King, convey the impression that the twelve Argive elders feel nothing but contempt for her, in Seneca she is, beyond dispute, the queen to whom all refer, emphasizing her distinguished lineage and her lofty *genus*. Thus, the Nurse[157] addresses her as:

Regina Danaum et inclitum Ledae genus (125: "Queen of the Danaans, glorious child of Leda").

This kind of periphrastic patronymics, as Dickey maintains, "normally identif[ies] the addressee as the offspring of a specific individual and praise[s] him or her by asserting the connection to that person".[158] Also, Clytemnestra employs for her self-definition a high poetic language to affirm her distinctive descent:

...*Tyndaris, caeli genus* (162: "I, a Tyndarid, child of heaven")[159]

[154] Cf. the different theory see Peiper 1937, 21 who believes that a scene like that did existed in the Latin tragedy before the third stasimon, but it must have been lost.
[155] For the favourite technique of Seneca to reach the climax of his plays in the fourth act see Calder III 1976, 32.
[156] The importance of Cassandra and Seneca's interest in her will be discussed further in chapter four.
[157] In Greek literature from Homer to Euripides, the Nurse is a central figure of authority. In Seneca the Nurse-scenes are considered a stock scene and are much used in his tragedies in order to allow the passion-character to express his or her thoughts. Cf. Tarrant 1976, 192, who sees these scenes as an indirect inheritance from Euripides.
[158] Cf. Dickey 2002, 114. For analogues addresses that occur also in the Greek tragedy see Aesch. *Ag.* 914, *Sept.* 39; Soph. *O.T.* 85; and Eur. *Tro.* 709, *Med.* 49, 53.
[159] Cf. also Eur. *El.* 480, 989.

and her nobility *generosa* (291: "high-born woman"), scoffing at Aegisthus' disgrace and contempt that as an *exul* he suffers.[160] What is most notable is the fact that Aegisthus, in spite of his low register of language, speaks highly of the queen and his exhortation to her as *Leda sata* (234: "seed of Leda") is in fact the only moment of high level in his talk. Tarrant notes that this type of elevated form of address is often used in high poetry by Virgil (*Aen.* 4.198, 5.244, 7.331) and Ovid (*Met.* 1.82, 6.157, 7.322, 8.363) and is typical of Republican drama.[161]

The play opens in an atmosphere of fear which the long monologue (1-56)[162] illustrates most clearly. Thyestes provides all the necessary information about the past history of the house of Tantalus, namely Tantalus' feast and his own Thyestean feast. Our apprehension is aroused. And the end of his speech whets it further, since he warns us about the dim prophecy that is about to be fulfilled: the approaching feast of Agamemnon's blood with these words*:*

rex ille regum, ductor Agamemnon ducum, | *cuius secutae mille vexillum rates* | *Iliaca velis maria texerunt suis,* | *post decima Phoebi lustra devicto Ilio* | *adest – daturus coniugi iugulum suae* (39-43: "That famous king of kings, leader of leaders, Agamemnon, behind whose banner a thousand ships hid the seas of Ilium with their sails, has conquered Ilium after ten cycles of Phoebus, and is here – doomed to offer his throat to his own wife'").

What follows is the chorus of the Argive women[163] that makes its entrance on the stage. Their notions of fortune's wheel and its vicissitudes, of power and prosperity being the main causes of wrongdoings, and of the dangers of high position, introduce us to a web of interlocking ideas which runs throughout the play.[164]

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[160] Another example of the emphasis of Clytemnestra on her status could be found at the synecdoche of line 111 *casta regna*.

[161] Cf. Tarrant 1976, 216ff.

[162] Seneca's use of this stylistic device, namely the expository monologue here as well as in three other plays, in *HF*, *Tro.*, and *Med.* has been argued that reveals Euripidean influence. On Senecan prologues cf. Anliker 1960, 11-48; Runchina 1960, 19-70; and Pratt 1939. For more information on the monologue of *Ag.* see Tarrant 1976, 157ff.

[163] The chorus in the *Agamemnon* will be discussed in chapter five. For general information on the chorus and the way Seneca utilizes it see Tarrant 1978, 221-228, who maintains that Seneca's use of the chorus shows a deviation from the fifth-century technique, which should be seen as a postclassical Greek tragedy development. In particular for the first choral song in Seneca's *Ag.* and its role see the analytical approach of Tarrant 1976, 180-184.

[164] Cf. Boyle 1997, 85ff. who speaks of an intertextual relationship between Seneca's *Thy.* and *Ag.* stressing the net of the common motifs and ideas in these two tragedies.

Moreover, their rhetorical questions *quas non arces scelus alternum | dedit in praeceps? | impia quas non arma fatigant?* (77-79: "what citadels have answering crimes not plunged in ruin, or kindred wars not weakened?") herald much for Agamemnon's dreadful outcome.

In this atmosphere of fear that is heightened either explicitly by Thyestes' words or implicitly by the chorus' ideas Clytemnestra makes her appearance (v. 108). However, the information we are primed with before her arrival on the stage, through the actorial characterization,[165] can hardly prepare us for the Clytemnestra we are to see. For her first words,

quid, segnis anime, tuta consilia expetis (108: "oh sluggish spirit! Why look for safe strategies?")

with which she begins her self-description, [166] demonstrate at once a perplexed personality. Apostrophe to one's soul is an old device to express personal crisis and the need for determination.[167] Those kinds of addresses to one's heart, abundant enough in Seneca's tragedies,[168] are, according to Tarrant, "exhortation to action or protest against inaction".[169] Tarrant also notes that dissatisfaction with self that is betrayed by her question *quid fluctuaris?* (109: "why vacillate?")[170] is a mark of a disordered and confused character, a character who is short of self-control. [171]

It is true that this lack of self-control is manifested clearly throughout the metaphors Clytemnestra herself employs. The metaphors are not mere

[165] The term belongs to de Jong 2001, xii.
[166] This kind of self-presentational asides, which Seneca employs in order to draw our attention to his heroes' mind and its way of function have been considered as his characteristic recurrent in many tragedies e.g. *HF* 332ff., *Tro.* 1ff., 861ff., *Med.* 1ff., 179ff., 431ff., *Pha.* 835ff., *Oed.* 1ff., *Ag.* 226ff., *Thy.* 404ff., 491ff., 885ff. For an analytical survey of these entrance soliloquies see Tarrant 1978, 231 who considers them as well as the asides as Senecan conventions for a suspension of dramatic time.
[167] Addresses and apostrophes to one's heart is a poetic tradition well testified in Greek literature; see Hom. *Od.* 20.18 τέτλαθι δή, κραδίη, Archil. 128W θυμέ θύμ', ἀμηχάνοισιν, Eur. *Med.* 1056 μὴ δῆτα, θυμέ, μὴ σύ γ' ἐργάσῃ. However as Russo, Galiano and Heubeck 1992, 109, vol. III, comment "direct address to one's heart or spirit will become a familiar device in lyric and dramatic poetry, but it is rare in epic genre which is more concerned with action than reflection."
[168] The addresses to the soul are a recurrent feature of many Senecan heroes' soliloquies. Cf. *Thy.* 192, 324, *Tro.* 613, 662, *Med.* 40, 895, 937, 976, *Pha.* 592ff., 719, *Oed.* 933, 952, 1024.
[169] Cf. Tarrant 1976, 195.
[170] Cf. Fantham 1975, 8ff. suggests that Seneca has borrowed this image from Virgil's *Aeneid* iv and his passionate Dido (531-2, 563-4) but he employs it for the "embodied anger and revenge of Medea and Clytemnestra".
[171] Cf. Tarrant 1976, 194. For similar examples in Seneca's *corpus* see *Thy*. 283-84, 324; *Med.* 440-44; *Pha.* 592; *Tro*. 657.

embellishments. Rather, the imagery is another weapon in Seneca's armour, a major poetic device to which we should pay due attention in order to understand the implications it carries in connection with the psychological and ethical presentation[172] of his character. Seneca draws on the natural world for his imagery, and his similes involve the forces or phenomena of nature, especially its destructive forces, fire and water.

The natural world and the weather conditions supplied by far the greatest source of the Homeric similes both in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.[173] Yet, as Sturt[174] has noted similes taken from natural phenomena are sparingly used to depict emotions before the Silver epicists "who exploit the equation to the full". Thus, the small number of this kind of similes shows Homer's indifference to their correspondence with the emotions of his heroes.[175]Likewise in Greek tragedy, the descriptions of the emotions which are assigned mainly to the messenger's speech, are always simple and used when stage problems arise.[176]

Similes of violent nature or of hostile elements in nature are on Seneca's repertoire and his fondness of them is clearly evident from the fact that he uses them also in his prose works.[177] Seneca, however, chooses a different line of approach towards this kind of similes since he modifies them in order to represent the mental and psychological state of his heroes, and mainly of his female heroines. In fact the only example of male hero in Seneca's plays to use seafaring images and similes drawn on the violent eruption of nature for the expression of his feelings is Thyestes in the title-role (vv. 438-39). Yet Thyestes is the only play that lacks female characters. Seneca employs this kind of similes in a context which illustrates emotions and most often psychological disturbance. In *Medea*, for instance, the undecided tide (*anceps aestus*, 939) and the violent winds that drive the sea water in two directions

[172] For Clytemnestra's ethically coloured speech, as a feature to the completion of her rhetorical mask and subsequently to spark an emotional response, see chapter three.
[173] See Redfield 1978, 188-89, who grouping into categories the similes in *Iliad* remarks that nature and natural phenomena form one of them among the human activities, the hunting and herding and the wild animals. For general information on Homer's similes see Scott 1974, 107-13 and Coffey 1957, 113-32.
[174] See Sturt 1977, 355.
[175] Sturt 1977, 35- 69 sustained that in Homer similes from sea and seafaring are employed either within a maritime background (cf. *Il.* 16.765-9 on conflicting winds) or as an illustration of the power of the warriors as they enter the battlefield with their arms (cf. *Il.* 4.422-6 on the violent sea). For the small number of natural phenomena similes connoting state of mind cf. *Il.* 9.4-8; 10.5-10; 14.16-22; 16.297-302.
[176] See Tietze 1988, 23-25. For more information cf. Shisler 1945, 377-97.
[177] Cf. *Tranq.* 2.1: *sicut est quidam tremor etiam tranquill maris, utique cum ex tempestate requievit* and *Brev. Vit.* 2.3: *si quando aliqua fortuitio quies contigit, velut profundum mare, in quo post ventum quoque volutatio est, fluctuantur nec umquam illis a cupiditatibus suis otium stat.*

(*rapidi ... venti ... utrimque ... maria discordes agunt*, 940) picture the agonies and unstable emotions of the heroine; in *Phaedra*, the efforts of a skilful helmsman to drive his vessel against the current in a turbulent sea without success, (*gravatam navita adversa ratem propellit unda*, 181) represent the heroine's own mental turbulence created by her un-subdued passion.[178]

Commentators have shown that there is a further intriguing implication for our interpretation of Seneca's similes if we approach them from a philosophical point of view. Thus, Pratt has enriched our understanding of Seneca's imagery by proposing that it reveals the poet's own philosophical fondness for Stoicism. Admittedly Seneca uses extensively images that involve water and fire. Stoic thinking entails the idea that these two elements play a central role in the universe since, as Seneca cites in his work *Questiones Naturales* (3.28.7), "water and fire dominate earthly things. From them is the origin, from them the death"[179] Moreover, Tietze maintains that Seneca by depicting the lack of firmness of his heroes, with images of a ship tossing in a turbulent sea and by lending them a Stoic vocabulary he presents them as examples of *inconstantia* and consequently he "transform[s] the tragic characters into surrogate authorial narrators of the action, each speaking the language of Seneca the philosopher".[180]

A philosophical orientation can also be adopted in *Agamemnon*. Seneca likens Clytemnestra's psychological state with the violent eruption of nature, the sea-storm: *fluctibus variis agor,* | *ut, cum hinc profundum ventus, hinc aestus rapit,* | *incerta dubitat unda cui cedat malo....* | *fluctibus dedimus ratem* (138-143: "I am driven by conflicting waves, as when wind and tide pull the sea each way, and the waters hesitate, uncertain which scourge to yield to. ... I have given up the boat to the waves"). The same figurative language of seafaring is also employed in close relationship with the concept of Fortune throughout the play. Fortune whirls the fate of kings (... *praecipites regum casus* | *Fortuna rotat*, 71-2) in a way that not even the sea in the Libyan Sytres roll in rage wave upon wave (*furit alternos vovlere fluctus*, 65). Again, the good fortune is a burden that crushes itself (*cedit oneri fortuna suo*, 89) since whatever Fortune raises on high she will cast it down (*quidquid in altum Fortuna tulit,* | *ruitura levat*, 101-2). And later on the chorus of the captive Trojan

[178] Cf. in addition *HO* 729-35.
[179] Cf. Pratt 1983, 33.
[180] See Tietze 1988, 23-49.

women will compare death with a tranquil harbour – a common tenet of Stoic thought – of eternal calm, untouched by any storm of raging Fortune (*nullus hunc terror nec impotentis | procella Fortunae movet*, 593-94). Thus, the sea-storm imagery equates Clytemnestra with Fortune since both symbolize overturning forces that are about to change dramatically the circumstances in the play.[181]

Stoic account, consequently and illustration of the mental and emotional state, provide the kind of interpretative framework that enables us to formulate a fine-grained reading of the imagery and similes in *Agamemnon*. Although the similarities of the similes in *Agamemnon* and in the Senecan plays discussed above are interesting, it is rather the marked differences (which have scarcely been noted) that are highly illuminating. Thus, if we look closely to the language the similes are propounded by, we sense a difference in the character of Clytemnestra that emerges from her figurative words. Because Clytemnestra utilizes images derived from the stock-in trade of the Senecan range of imagery available for the female characters, but in such a way that Seneca's simile "supports and communicates the themes of the drama".[182] Clytemnestra's first metaphor, *da frena* (114: "loosen the reins",) is taken from horse racing, and through it the queen presents herself as being in charge of the chariot that she can no longer drive. In lines 138-143, where the most prominent simile appears, Clytemnestra likens her helplessness and her despair to a boat that is being carried hither and thither by the tide and the wind: having dropped the rudder from her hands, she has yielded to being driven by the waves in the storm:

... fluctibus variis agor | .... i ncerta dubitat unda c ui cedat malo | poinde omisi regimen e manibus meis | ... fluctibus dedimus ratem.

It has been argued that the word *regimen* ("rudder") stands for "reason"[183] that if Clytemnestra possessed it, it would restraint her and control her soul and emotions.[184] In my view, the force of the similes here does not lie so much in the image *per se*, but in the language. None of the other indecisive female Senecan characters, namely Medea or Phaedra, use such words in their speech, as Clytemnestra does. Still, what is worthy of note is not only that Clytemnestra evokes a

[181] Cf. Pratt 1963, 224-227.
[182] Cf. Pratt 1983, 32.
[183] Cf. Boyle 1983, 164.
[184] Cf. Mader 1988, 57 and Shelton 1983, 164.

range of similes and metaphors, which concern the ability to control means of transport, but mainly the use of the vocabulary of power, by which Clytemnestra advertises the nature of power she exercises. By presenting herself as the charioteer who has lost control of the chariot, or the captain or pilot who was in charge but has temporarily lost the command of the ship, she brings into precise focus her emphasis on her status, since she uses in her similes the figurative political language of the democratic and anti-democratic ideology of power.

Correlation between political power and imagery has been a stock element in poetry since the seventh-century lyric poet Alcaeus (Alc. fr. 6), in whose poetry we find the root of the "true matrix for the ship as symbol of the city-state".[185] Apart from that, more favourably images represent the politician as a helmsman of the ship of state who should steer it according to the course.[186] Together with the maritime political imagery in full swing from Solon's time onwards, the chariot-race metaphor is employed in poetry to indicate the capability of the ruler (or an absolute ruler/tyrant) to govern the mass with the use of the κέντρον,[187] or of the ἡνία.[188]

Indeed, the use of the political language in Clytemnestra's words is neither accidental nor purposeless. It serves as a hint to the reader to take the meaning of her words beyond their face value and to underline that this additional meaning is on a political level. Thus the political imagery negates the imagery of her psychological state of confusion and emphasizes Clytemnestra's queenly status.

This interpretation is also confirmed by what we have already heard her saying. The mythological *exempla* (117-121) she had used earlier in order to urge herself to action are suggestive for the situation at hand. The stories of Stheneboea[189] (*coniunx perfida*, 117), of Phaedra (*novercales manus*, 118) and of Medea (*impia virgo*, 119) are all cases of females whose passions and impulses are so extreme that they lead them to commit atrocious and violent crimes. The accumulation of these cited examples increases further the dramatic tension since it in spires fear to the

[185] Gentili 1988, 215. For the ship as a figure of state cf. Archil. fr. 105W.; Thgn. 671f.; Hdt. 6.109.5; Aesch. *Sept.* 795ff, *Suppl.* 764, *Eum.* 553; Eur. *Rhes.* 323ff., Verg. *A.*.7.594; Hor. *Carm.* 1.14. This imagery is also used in oratory, cf. Dem. *De Cor.* 194; Cic. *Fam*. 1.9, *Sest.* 126-7

[186] Cf. Thgn. 675, 855-6; Sol. fr. 15W; Pind. *Pyth.* 1.86, 10.72; Aesch. *Pers.* 656, *Th.* 2-3, 62-4; Soph. *O. T.* 922-3, *Ant.* 994; Eur. *Supp.* 473-4, 879-80.

[187] Cf. Thgn. *IEG* 847; Soph. *TrGF* 683; Sol. fr. 36W κέντρον δ' ἄλλος ὡς ἐγὼ λαβών Eur. *TrGF* 604 and Plut. *Praec. Ger.reip.* 802d4. For an analytical survey of the tyrant's instruments in order to guide the mass of people in the sense he wanted and their metaphorical use cf. Catenacci 1991, 85-95.

[188] Cf. Ar. *Ecc.* 466, *Knights* 1109; Pl. *Plt.* 266e7-11, *Rep.* 566d2

[189] For the correspondence of Stheneboea's story to Clytemnestra's generic allusion in lines 117-118 see Tarrant 1976, 196.

audience, on account of the model of behaviour and action these paradigms illustrate. This fear will prove to be well grounded if we take into consideration two more warning factors. The first one lies in the "secondary or key function"[190] of the paradigms, namely in our perception of their difference and contrast with the outcome of Clytemnestra's story, which must not be overlooked. These past crimes are described as a model for the present. Yet from these three heroines, guilty and capable of great wickedness, Clytemnestra will end up being the greatest, since not only will she arm herself and kill the offender but, what is more, she will take over his power and throne. The second factor that whets further the audience's alarming expectation can be traced in the wish with which Clytemnestra, just before the entrance of her Nurse, will end her speech:

te decet maius nefas (124: "you are suited to some greater outrage").[191]

These words, which do not correspond with the reference to Clytemnestra's emotional condition which was previously made by her, dispel from the audience's mind the notion of a mentally unstable female character.[192]

Clytemnestra's wish shows a remarkable similarity to the yearning of another powerful character of the Senecan tragedy, that of Medea's (Sen. *Med.* 49-50: *gravior exurgat dolor;* | *maiora iam me scelera post partus decent* "let my grief rise to more deadly strength; greater crimes become me, now that I am a mother").[193] It has been suggested that such of declarations serve as metadramatic signals since behind the hero's ambition to surpass his or her fellow-character lies hidden the ambition of the tragedian himself to surpass his predecessors in poetry. "The character who controls the dynamics of the actions on the stage with a degree of knowledge and power superior to his or her fellow-characters can be regarded as an embodiment of the

[190] I adopt this term from Andersen 1987, 6.
[191] According to Rodon 1981, 51 utterances like these voice the genuine yearning of all the Senecan heroes to find the most effective and terrible way to take revenge.
[192] See Henry and Walker 1963, 4 who characterize Clytemnestra's indecision and moral collapse as "curiously anonymous and remote", in other words they do not reflect her real self but are only said just to be said.
[193] See also Thyestes' words ... *aliquod audendum est nefas* | *atrox, cruentum, tale quod frater meus* | *suum esse mallet* (193-95: "I must dare some crime, atrocious, bloody, such as my brother would more wish were his") phrase an analogous wish.

playwright in the play and can thus offer precious, if implicit insights on its poetics."[194]

What follows is the dialogue between Clytemnestra and her Nurse, at the beginning of act two (125-225). After a long stichomythia,[195] abundant in *gnomae* we are presented with the indignant Clytemnestra who speaks to her Nurse as if she were explaining to her (and therefore to the audience) the reason why she had made up her mind so firmly to add crime to crime and murder Agamemnon. In this scene Seneca has lend to Clytemnestra's speech an elegiac tint and depicts her as an elegiac character. Her words in this part of the play clearly invite us to locate points of correspondence between herself and the elegiac heroines, since the tragedian's choice of elegiac diction evokes the image of a woman abandoned by her lover. Of course Clytemnestra's behaviour can be characterized as anything but the lament of an abandoned woman (such as, for example, Ariadne, the elegiac figure *par excellence* in Catullus 64). However, it is clear in her speech we find typical elegiac words[196] that could establish an obvious link with the *sermo amatorius* of Ovid's *Heroides*, who in their fictional letters to the men they loved, quite often complain to their beloved about their false fidelity.[197]

Thus, Clytemnestra begins her speech. By shifting our focus from Agamemnon's sacrifice of Iphigenia, which occupies the first part (only eleven lines, 162-173) of her forty-one lines in length speech, Clytemnestra, for the next eighteen lines (174-191), fixes our perspective upon the marital perfidies of her husband. As a fact, from the ten years of the war, she chooses to isolate out these facets of the story, Agamemnon's infatuations, and concentrates her venom on his un-heroic conduct, accusing him of unseemly behaviour. In her angry denunciation of her husband's actions nowhere can she even bring herself to pronounce Agamemnon's name. And when she does not refer to him with scornful periphrases *amore captae captus* (175), *en Paridis hostem!* (188) and *captae maritus ... Priami gener* (191), she call him just

[194] Schiesaro 1997, 89-111, 91ff. For Seneca's drama seen as metadrama see also Schiesaro 1994, 169-210, Segal 1986, 215-20, and Boyle 1988, 94-7.
[195] This rapid dialogue is a regular ingredient of Seneca's Nurse-scene found also in *Med.* 155-76, *Pha.* 240-45, *HO* 436-452, *Oct.* 174-89.
[196] See for example the words *mora* (v.131) and the references to herself as *misera* (l.198) and *vidua* in l.156. For the use of word *miser* in the Roman elegists in describing the poet as the victim of an unhappy love see Prop. I,1 and Cat. 79, 19.
[197] For the fictional epistles from the Ovidian abandoned heroines of the Greek and Roman mythology see Knox 1995, Jacobson 1974 and Verducci 1983.

vir.[198] The hero who was the mainstay of the Achean army has become an anonymous *vir.* The term *vir* in elegy ranges in meaning; while, on the one hand is used to refer to a husband, on the other has a richer connotation, since many of the abandoned heroines often use this same word to refer to their distant lovers.[199] What is more, in line 178 Agamemnon is even reduced to a nameless pronoun *illum.* This scornful narrative of hero's past and exploits, seen not through the eyes of an objective commentator, concurs with the general tactic followed by many elegiac women who present their lovers' actions from their own point of view, lending an ironic and cynical colour to their description. In *Her*. 6.10-14, for example, Hypsipyle sarcastically rejects Jason's role as a mere decorative one, crediting Medea and her magical powers with the accomplishment of his trials, imposed in Colchis by king Aeetes.[200]

With the same sarcastic tone are also invested Clytemnestra's words, when she chastises Agamemnon that during the siege of Troy instead of the warfare, he preferred to have leisure for love *veneri vacat* (183) and to seek new loves *reparatque amores* (184). In line 188, with the abrupt *nunc* marking a transition to a new train of thought, she turns to Agamemnon's new *amatrix*, Cassandra, proceeding with even insulting reproofs aiming at shaming Agamemnon. The *vulnera amoris* (188), this metaphor of the "wounds of love" is as old as love[201], and Clytemnestra uses this poetic cliché ironically to stress that these were the only wounds Agamemnon

[198] Cf. *Ag.*156: *decem per annos vidua respiciam virum?* ("single for ten years, shall I give thought to my husband?"), 201: *misce cruorem, perde pereundo virum* ("mingle your blood, destroy your man by self-destruction"), 265: *quid, quod severas ferre me leges viro* ("to judge my husband severely"), 301: ... *haec vacat regi ac viro* ("it is open without hindrance to my king and husband").

[199] For the word *vir* and its meanings in the context of the lovers' vocabulary see Pichon 1966, 296-97. For the common use of *vir* related to a husband see Cat. LXI, 98, 150, 165, 176, 179; LXVI,20, 29; LXXXIII,1; Prop. II,6, 24; II,24 ,46; III,13, 22; III,14, 24; IV,3, 72; IV,11, 68; For *vir* as an amorous title connoting a lover cf. Tib. I,8, 40; I,9, 60; Prop. I,6, 10; I,6, 8; II,9, 48, II,23, 20; II,33, 34; III,3, 20; IV,5, 29; IV,5, 40; IV,5, 45; Ovid, *Am.* I,5, 12; I,8, 40; I,8, 97; II,4, 24; II,17, 16; *A.A.* 1, 328; III,88, 229, 278, 300, 380, 456, *Her.* IV,35; VI,22; VIII,27; IX,33, 36; XIII,2, 16, 90; XIV,12.

[200] Cf. *Her.* 6.10-14 and more explicit Hypsipyle's words *scilicet ut tauros, ita te iuga ferre coegit | quaque feros anguis, te quoque mulcet ope* ("Surely, she must have forced you to bear the yoke, just as she forced the bulls, and has you subdued by the same means she uses with fierce dragons", 97-98). See also how the emphasis the elegiac heroine Penelope (*Her.* 1.39-44) places upon the role of her husband, Ulysses, in the expedition with Diomedes to the camp of Rhesus, makes a pure mockery of his heroic deeds, accusing him of cowardice behaviour since as we know from *Iliad* (10.483-9) it was Diomedes who took all the risk and did the killing.

[201] For the cliché *vulnera amoris* cf. Lucr. 1,34; Verg. *Aen.* 4.2; Archil. fr. 193West; Pindar fr. 223. For the use of this morif in Latin see the references provided by Tarrant, 1976, 209.

suffered in the war. These accusations of Clytemnestra are closely allied with those inhabiting in the passage from the epistle of the elegiac Briseis (*Her*. 3.113-122):[202]

at Danai maerere putant – tibi plectra moventur,
te tenet in tepido mollis amica sinu!
et quisquam quaerit, quare pugnare recuses?
pugna nocet, citharae voxque Venusque iuvant.
tutius est iacuisse toro, tenuisse puellam,
Threiciam digitis increpuisse lyram,
quam manibus clipeos et acutae cuspidis hastam,
et galeam pressa sustinuisse coma.
Sed tibi pro tutis insignia facta placebant,
partaque bellando gloria dulcis erat.

Briseis, here, in a distortion of the elegiac roles, is refuting the elegiac quintessence of "the lethargy and *otium*",[203] and differently from the true elegiac figures, who normally reject the war and the rigours of the military life in general in favour of love,[204] she condemns Achilles' *inertia* and disinclination of going off to war and fight. In the same manner Clytemnestra rebukes Agamemnon for choosing the idleness of a lover's life and the *militia amoris* instead of the real *militia* and the *negotium* of the war.

Furthermore, we may also sense the same feeling of contempt in the way that Clytemnestra speaks of Agamemnon's amours. By describing herself in grandiose terms and by placing great emphasis on her *genus* and social status

…Tyndaris, caeli genus, | lustrale ... peperi caput! (162-63: "… I, a Tyndarid, child of heaven, bore a lustral sacrifice"),

[202] I have used the translation by Showerman: "Yes the Danai think you are, mourning for me – but you are wielding the plectrum, and the tender mistress holds you in her warm embrace! And does anyone ask wherefore do you refuse to fight? Because the fight brings danger; while the zither, and song, and Venus, bring delight. Safer is it to lie on the couch, to clasp a sweetheart in your arms, to tinkle with your fingers the Thracia lyre, than to take in hand the shield, and the spear with sharpened point, and to sustain upon your locks the helmet's weight."
[203] Bolton 1997, 227.
[204] For this motif in elegy see Murgatroyd 1980, 54, 90; Booth 1991, 53-54, 139-146 and Barchiesi 1987, 76-77.

she assumes the standard elegiac role of the *domina*, who draws a clear-cut distinction between her own noteworthy blood-line and her rival's low-class.[205] See for example how Helen becomes the object of ridicule and scorn as a *turpis amica* (*Her.* 5.70) in the letter written by Oenone whereas she refers to herself as *de mango flumine nympha* (*Her.* 5.10), or Hypsipyle's overt notes of reproach towards Medea: *barbara narratur venisse venefica tecum* (*Her.* 6.19) and her words *nocuit mihi barbara paelex* (*Her.* 6.81), heavy with scorn, or again Iole's contempt accusation by Deianira, as *advena paelex* (*Her.* 9.121), who will be basely joined in shameful bonds of Hymen with Hercules (*turpia…corpora iunget Hymene*, 133).

Likewise, Clytemnestra is in tune with the most common behaviour of the abandoned heroines, who quite often stress the fact that the women for whom they have been deserted by their lovers are much worse and much more coarse, when she proceeds to list Agamemnon's mistresses (174-191), appending as a final entry Cassandra. Speaking pointedly of them, Clytemnestra refers to them with vile and pejorative comments, *amore captae captus* ("captured by love for a captive", 175) and *paelice ... barbara* ("barbarian mistress", 185) as well as contemptuous periphrasis *Sminthea ... spolia* (176). As for Cassandra, her opponent and last competitor, she scorns to call her by her name and denigrates her as a slave *capta* (191) and *furens noverca*[206] ("mad stepmother", 199). Yet entwined with Clytemnestra's disdain for the newest addition to the number of Agamemnon's lovers, is the offence caused by her husband's love for a social inferior, a war captive.[207] Not only does she have to compromise with Agamemnon's infidelities, but this time she has to cope with the

[205] See Jacobson, 1974, 400 who emphasises that the comparison between the writers of the elegiac epistles and their rivals, real or imaginary, is always unfair and always to the detriment of the latter. For this recurrent elegiac motif cf. also Prop. 2,16,27.

[206] Stepmothers were proverbially cruel and their wickedness was axiomatic; cf. Hor. *Od.* 3.24.17f; Tac. *Ann.* 1.33; Sen. *Contr.* 4.6; Aesch. *Pr.* 727. They are also a recurrent figure in Seneca's *Med.* 848; *Pha.* 358, 558, 638, 684, 697, 1192, 1200; *H.O.* 10, 31, 98, 270, 313, 440, 560, 852, 1134, 1277, 1317, 1540. In Latin the term *noverca* is accompanied by epithets, the commonest being *saeva*, since the tradition of the lethal stepmother was well-establishe by the early Empire. Cf. for example Virg. *Georg.* 2.128, Ov. *Her.* 6.126, Quint. 2.10.4-5; Stat. *S.* 2.1.49 or *mala* Virg. *Georg.* 3.282. For good stepmothers see Sen. *Helv.* 2.4 and for historical cases of the type of *noverca* see Tac. *Ann.* 1.10; Dio Cass. 55.32.2 for Livia as a stepmother and Tac. *Ann.* 1.33 for Agrippina the elder. See also Courtney 1980, 345; Gray-Fow 1988, 741-757; Vidén 1993, 18-22 and Watson 1995.

[207] For the love of an inferior, a typical elegiac motif, and the role the relationship between another hero of the Trojan War and a slave, namely Achilles and Briseis, played in most Roman writers see Hor. *C.* 2.4.2-4, where he urges his friend Xanthias to feel embarrassed at bring in love with his servant since *prius insolentem | serva Briseis niveo colore | movet Achillem.* Cf. also Prop. 2.8.29-36 and Ov. *Am.* 2.8.11.

fact that her husband has disgraced her bed and himself by taking a foreign and enemy as mistress, who is beneath the civilized contempt of Clytemnestra.[208]

Moreover this kind of verbal abuse by Clytemnestra towards both Agamemnon and Cassandra, apart from including her into the realm of the elegiac betrayed mistresses, gives us a clear picture of her perspective of the Trojan war, which is from the beginning drawn in terms of personal abuse to her by Agamemnon. Indeed, she interprets both the beginning and the end of it as acts showing that Agamemnon has betrayed his duties not only as a father, by deceiving her and sacrificing their daughter (158-159), but also as a husband, since she considers the winner-prisoner relationship of Agamemnon and Cassandra as a lover-beloved one. Interestingly enough, the only instances where Clytemnestra considers and refers to Agamemnon as *maritus* are not in connection with herself but with Cassandra: *captae maritus* (191) and *captiva coniunx, regii paelex tori* (1002): as if Cassandra and Agamemnon were legitimate, on equal terms, as if, instead of winning the war and conquering Troy, Agamemnon had surrendered himself to the enemy by becoming a member of the Trojan royal house: *captae maritus remeat et Priami gener* (191: "he returns as a captive's husband and Priam's son-in-law", 191).[209]

Actually, with the reference to Agamemnon's last infatuation, Cassandra, Clytemnestra, in the last portion of her speech (192-202), takes her departure from the elegiac figures, for she has replaced their resentful despair with her resentful hatred that will motivate and promote the action within the tragedy. The powerful queen makes again her appearance.

Because, differently from the Ovidian heroines who are driven to inactivity and self-despair,[210] Clytemnestra knows she must act before Cassandra is introduced

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[208] Rosati, 1992, 83 notes that it was a common practice for an elegiac heroine to present her rival as improper and indecent and her own self as a "donna di costumi probi e fedeltà incrollabile", underlying for example the words Dido uses to describe her passing the time of the day in Hercules' absence: *domo vidua votis operata pudicis* (9, 35). Although the word *vidua* occurs also in Clytemnestra's speech in reference to the past war (156), it is said sarcastically and has here a very dark proleptic overtone.

[209] For a parallel to this strange statement of Clytemnestra see Agath. Schol. AP. 5.302.15-6: εἰ δὲ μιγῇς ἰδίῃ θεραπαινίδι, τλῆθι καὶ αὐτὸς˙ δοῦλος ἐναλλάγδην δμωΐδι γινόμενος ("As-tu des relations avec ta propre domestique? Accepte, toi aussi, de devenir à ton tour l'esclave d'une servante"). For the paradox *victumque victricemque* cf. Anliker 1960, 98-103 and Lohikoski 1966, 63-70. See also Pratt 1983, 113 and Mader 1982, 71-83, 76-80.

[210] Never does an elegiac figure propose a solution to her lover. Elegiac women describe the helpless situation they are in, their despair and fear, but leave the decision and the action to him, and all they do is to wait and hope for his return. They make up in supplication and despair what they lack in courage and power. A better proof of their despair is evident in the way many of them end their letter, providing us their own epitaph. For this elegiac motif, see Barchiesi 1992, 180-182.

into the domestic space of the legitimate wife. In fact she envisages her coming as a *furens noverca* (199: "a mad stepmother")[211] and she is not willing to wait until *Pelopia Phrygiae sceptra dum teneant nurus* (194: "one when young Phrygian wives hold the sceptre of Pelops?"). So, she is determined to wage her own war:

accingere, anime: bella non levia apparas (192: "Arm yourself, my spirit: this is no light war you are planning").

The passive imperative *accingere* with a reflexive sense, is a metaphor of the typical 'dressing' scene of the warrior, who gets ready for the war in the epic[212]: this is fully in accordance with Clytemnestra's interpretation of her revenge as a war, and most probably alludes in a deliberate way to Euripides *Medea* l.1242: ὅπλίσου, καρδία.[213] Whereas she had considered the war of Troy in a sarcastic perspective, which had transformed it into a series of futile love affairs of Agamemnon, she accomplishes the opposite transformation of her sentimental revenge on a love-rival in a concrete war- a more suitable concern for a real queen. It is the introduction of Cassandra into her palace that appears to upset her most: as a consequence, she is mainly moved to action by Agamemnon's lack of concern for his royal status, and the fear about the loss of her status. Agamemnon had already polluted his kingship and Clytemnestra does not want to see the importance she cherished as a queen being diminished or superseded by the new 'polluting' presence of Cassandra.

In addition, many of the elegiac heroines, by displaying a self- destructive desperation, express their wish to terminate their own lives, and close their epistles by describing their contemplation of suicide either by piercing their heart with the sword or by plunging the steel in their body.[214] Nowhere can we find a reference revealing that any of the heroines was meditating of killing her lover- quite the contrary. In Dido's letter to Aeneas the heroine writes *vive, precor! Sic te melius quam funere*

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[211] Stepmothers were proverbially cruel and their wickedness was axiomatic; cf. Hor. *Od.* 3.24.17f; Tac. *Ann.* 1.33; Sen. *Contr.* 4.6; Aesch. *Pr.* 727. In Latin the term *noverca* is accompanied by epithets, the commonest being *saeva* Virg. *Georg.* 2.128, Ov. *Her.* 6.126, Quint. 2.10.5; Stat. *S.* 2.1.49 or *mala* Virg. *Georg.* 3.282. For good stepmothers see Sen. *Ad Helv.* 2.4 and for historical cases of the type of *noverca* see Tac. *Ann.*1.10; Dio Cass. 55.32.2 for Livia as a stepmother and Tac. *Ann.* 1.33 for Agrippina the elder. See also Courtney 1980, 345.

[212] For more information on the arming motifs in epos cf. Armstrong 1958, 337-354.

[213] Cf. Tarrant 1976, 210 and Sen. *Med*. 51.

[214] Cf. Ov. *Her.* 2,133-42; *Her.* 3,145-47; *Her.* 7,184-87; *Her.* 9,19-20, 96-97; *Her.* 10,81-82; *Her.*11,3, 19-20, 97-98, 119-120.

perdam. | *tu potius leti causa ferere mei.*(63: "O live; I pray it! Thus shall I see you worse undone than by death"). Thus, Ovid represents Dido with the desire that Aeneas' punishment should not be death but the pangs that come from remorse and evil reputation of being the cause of her death. On the other hand, Hypermnestra in her letter (*Her.*XIV 45-50) writes that *timor* and *pietas* kept her from daring the cruel stroke against Lynceus. Instead, Clytemnestra, after saying already from the first scene that *periere mores ius decus pietas fides* (112), now not only does she speak about her own death but she goes further and finishes her speech mentioning explicitly Agamemnon's murder:

misce cruorem, perde pereundo virum: (201: "mingle your blood, destroy your man by self-destruction").[215]

This Nurse-scene in *Agamemnon* has attracted the attention of commentators, who note its departure from the normal pattern in comparison with the other similar scenes in Seneca's tragedy. In particular, R.J. Tarrant[216] has listed the major differences: the stichomythia between Clytemnestra and her Nurse that precedes the protagonist's main speech, the fact that the scene ends with the conflicting ideas unresolved and the lack of relation between its opening speeches. But if we look closer to the Nurse's speech we could register another deviation from the Senecan pattern, as far as the Nurse's address to Clytemnestra is concerned. In the other tragedies the Nurses address their mistresses as *alumna* or *era*, typical apostrophes that reveal their motherly influence and their affectionate tone towards them.[217] Instead, significantly enough, Clytemnestra's Nurse avoids calling her "my child" or even "Agamemnon's wife" (a type of address that Phaedra's and Deianira's Nurses use)[218] and always addresses her as *regina* (vv. 125 and 203) employing thus, a more formal and sophisticated tone pertinent to her awareness of Clytemnestra's queenly status and powerful position. This recognition also contributes to Clytemnestra's change of attitude and heart in the next scene with Aegisthus.

[215] Cf. Tarrant 1976, 211. For the thought of solace that someone feels when he knows that other people are going to die at the same time with him see *Thy.* 190-1 and *Med.* 426-8. Clytemnestra expresses the same idea *mors misera non est commori cum quo velis* (202). See also Rodon 1981, 51ff. who comments the longing of Senecan heroines like Clytemnestra, Deianira or Medea for the most effective and terrible way to take revenge.
[216] Tarrant 1976, 192-194.
[217] Cf. Sen. *Med.* 158, 380, 426; *HO* 276,445, 539; *Pha.* 255, 267, 588; *Oct.* 254, 691.
[218] *Pha.* 129; *HO* 277.

After the Nurse-scene, Aegisthus appears on stage (vv. 226-309). Thyestes' ghost has already alerted us to his nature and confirmed that we are to expect a coward Aegisthus much earlier than his appearance on stage. Shelton[219] aptly remarks that Thyestes is dramatically used by Seneca as a representation of the psychological force that will propel the action in the play. His language lays specifically stress on Aegisthus' indecisiveness and cowardice and his words

... quid pudor vultus gravat? | quid dextra dubio trepida consilio labat | quid ipse temet consulis torques rogas, | an deceat hoc te? respice ad matrem: decet (49-52: "Why is your face heavy with shame? Why does your hand tremble and falter, unsure of its purpose? Why do you consult yourself, torment yourself, ask yourself whether this befits you? Look to your mother: it befits you")

strongly emphasize how much Aegisthus trembles at the thought of performancing his fated part.[220] Aegisthus' entrance (226) makes the description concrete. His first speech begins with a self-description and his monologue well captures his un-heroic character. The awareness of the enormity of the deed that awaits him plagues him with fear

quod tempus animo semper ac mente horrui | adest profecto (226-27: "the time I have always feared in mind and spirit is plainly upon me") and waverings *quid terga vertis, anime? quid primo impetu | deponis arma?* (228-29: "Why turn aside, my spirit? Why lay down arms at the first onslaught?").

However, while Aegisthus' pusillanimity is gradually fleshed out, what is hard to justify in this scene (225-309), is Clytemnestra's sudden and remarkable change of heart.

Critics being baffled by this behavioural alteration of Clytemnestra offered many suggestive accounts of her transformation and unexpected conversion. Thus, Croisille,[221] pointing out Aegisthus' first appearance on stage as lacking in courage, sustains that Clytemnestra manipulates Aegisthus and that she is the one who pushes

[219] Cf. Shelton, 1977, 36-37.
[220] Motto and Clark, 1985, 137-38 detect behind this unfavourable depiction of Aegisthus, through the words of Thyestes, Seneca's wish to present his heroes diminished and set in an unheroic context.
[221] Cf. Croisille 1964, 467-71.

him to corruption pretending to be resolved to draw back. On the other hand, Tarrant's explanation[222] runs counter to Croisille's view. For him Clytemnestra's lack of resolution "furthers dramatic tension: in showing the conspiracy of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra so close to dissolution [Seneca] plays against the audience's foreknowledge of its ultimate success". And he goes on mentioning that these sudden changes of mind is nothing unusual in Senecan tragedy.[223]

Still, Clytemnestra's sudden change of mind is remarkable. Having seen her as a woman of action, stating her plans for vengeance, we find it hard to believe she is the same person that Aegisthus now tries to persuade into acting against Agamemnon. Clytemnestra appears to hesitate (*amor iugalis vincit ac flectit retro*, 239), to have second thoughts (*quem paenitet peccasse paene est innocens*, 243) and her *trementes pallor genas* (237), that Aegisthus witnesses, are pertinent to her resolve to withdraw from their plan of murdering Agamemnon.

As a typical female character she is ready to show forbearance towards her husband's affair. The way she qualifies Agamemnon's other amours and her *laisser-faire* attitude towards his infatuations is quite unexpected and presents itself with immediate attractiveness. Aegisthus will try to persuade her into acting against Agamemnon as planned. From a coward stance (226-233) he has to transform himself into a motive power to provoke Clytemnestra into action. Thus, he starts by stressing out that Agamemnon was not true to his marriage vows (245) and by mentioning Cassandra's coming (*sola sed turba eminet | tenetque regem famula veridici dei*, 254-255: "but one stands out from the crowd and clasps the king – the handmaid of the prophetic god"), his aim is to emphasize the displeasure felt by every wife, and by extension by Clytemnestra herself, who feels herself displaced by the entry of a concubine: *ultimum est nuptae malum | palam maritam possidens paelex domum* (257-58: "the worst disaster for a wife is to have a mistress openly in control of the marital household"). But Clytemnestra is fighting to defend her husband and presenting his infidelities as a natural and trivial slip: as a triumphant leader, she sustains, he is allowed to have some liberty with slaves (262-64). While a few lines above Agamemnon had received disrespectful and scornful appellations now she makes a complete volte-face calling him *victor* (262). Similarly, she uses for Cassandra the words *captam* (262) and *dominam* (263) to reply to Aegisthus' *paelex*

[222] Cf. Tarrant 1976, 230.
[223] Cf. *HF* 1301; *Med.* 294; *Pha.* 250ff.; *Thy.* 542.

(258) and more significantly, whilst earlier she had reviled her fear that she will wield the sceptre, now she replaces it with the neuter – in terms of power- *privato toro* (264).

But as soon as Aegisthus starts to believe that she is willing to forgive Agamemnon, he employs his second argument. "Trying to associate her with himself among the oppressed victims of power"[224] (270: *nobis maligni iudices*, "they are biased judges to us"), and depicting Agamemnon as a harsh king[225] who looks for grounds for accusation (277: *iam crimen ille quaerit*, "this one is already searching for an accusation") he emphasizes that Clytemnestra will be unable to hide her guilt and her adultery, and therefore, Clytemnestra, will be herself a *spreta* (281), a *profuga* (282) and an exile *repudia regum* (283);[226]: but what he mainly means, in other words, is that she will lose her royal rights.

This second argument, and the envisaging of the image that Aegisthus describes, make the powerful queen emerge again and stir her scornful reply. Stressing, once more, her high rank and noble birth (291: *generosa*), Clytemnestra reproaches Aegisthus, and "describes him as deceitful, unscrupulous and treacherous, and she chides him for being an outcast of shameful birth, unworthy of enjoying the affections of a high-born lady"[227]: *scilicet nubam tibi,* | *regum relicto rege, generosa exuli?* (290-91: "I suppose I am to be married to you, a noblewoman to an exile, in place of the king of kings?").[228] Thus, trumpeting her seigneurial status and being sarcastic about Aegisthus' origin, she bids him to disappear and leave her alone:

facesse propere ac dedecus nostrae domus | *asporta ab oculis*; (300-1: "Begone at once, remove from my sight this disgrace to our house;").

[224] Cf. Tarrant 1976, 222,
[225] While Aegisthus accuses Agamemnon of being a partial ruler, he himself will resort ironically to the same arbitrary techniques in order to deal with Electra (988ff.). For Seneca's distinction between the king and the tyrant see Favez 1960, 346-349.
[226] For more information on exile, the several types of banishment and its consequences to the status of the person see Braginton 1943, 391-407. For Seneca's own exile see Kamp 1934, 101-108 and for Aegisthus' see Escher *RE* I, 972ff.
[227] Cf. Shelton 1983, 166.
[228] See Schenkeveld 1976, 401ff, who points out that Seneca has given to Aegisthus' incestuous birth more prominence than his adultery by having Clytemnestra along with five different characters, namely Thyestes' ghost, Electra, Cassandra and Aegisthus himself, lay great emphasis on that as a way to explain his behaviour as determined by his unnatural origin.

When Aegisthus hears Clytemnestra's order, he changes his tactics; "in place of his hectoring superiority comes almost abject recognition of his partner's position".[229] We can sense this change emerging from his speech: he now calls Clytemnestra *regina* (303), instead of the less formal address *pericli socia* he uses when he first appeared on stage (234) and his speech is couched in terms which reveal his obedience to queen's orders: *si tu imperas… iussu tuo* (303-4). Only this submission of Aegisthus and threat to commit suicide[230] make Clytemnestra decide to proceed to the deed in collaboration with him, whom she bids to depart with her in order to plan their future action, against Agamemnon.[231]

After the murder of the Achean King and its description by Cassandra (vv. 866-909), Clytemnestra reappears on stage in the last act. For the last hundred lines Electra, will dominate and confront the powerful queen. This last scene of the play raises a lot of interest not only because of the entrance of three new characters[232], something that is not to be found elsewhere in Seneca, but also because of the dramatic intention of its play writer which, according to Tarrant, is twofold: to cast a moral assessment on Agamemnon's slayers and to describe how Orestes did not suffer a similar fate to his father.[233] But apart from that, one might suggest further that this scene can also be construed as revealing Clytemnestra's true emotions for her children, which jar with the display of her feelings the audience has witnessed in her entrance speech. Thus, the reader is being now conditioned to take the queen's former remarks and fear about the safety of her children

en adest natis tuis | furens noverca!, (198-9: "See, a mad stepmother is at hand for your children!")

not at their face-value, but as evidence of hypocrisy and of Clytemnestra's lack of voicing genuine emotions.[234] Mother and daughter will now become embroiled in the

[229] Cf. Tarrant 1976, 229.
[230] Cf. Shelton 1983, 167, who maintains that this kind of threats is used by other Senecan heroes, namely Phaedra, and Amphitryon in *HF* as a way to manipulate an uncompliant person.
[231] For the departure of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus and the problems this scene pose see Tarrant 1976, 230ff.
[232] Strophius, and the κωφὰ πρόσωπα Orestes and Pylades.
[233] Cf. Tarrant, 1976, 335.
[234] In the Aeschylean *Agamemnon* there is no scene with Electra and Orestes. For from the beginning of the tragedy he resides in Strophius, for there revenge for the murder of Iphigenia is Clytemnestra's best argument and thus she could not be depicted acting against and putting in danger her other children.

dispute that leaves no room for tender feelings and will emphasize the different qualities of their behaviour. The vituperative stichomythic exchange between Electra and Clytemnestra breaks down into a series of insults, threats and defiant ripostes, which illuminate the contrasting character of each woman.

Electra appears on s tage (910) and although she is going to adopt an uncompromising stance towards her mother and Aegisthus[235], she is however depicted by Seneca as a character *feminini generis.* Her primary concern is Orestes and his salvation as the repetition of the imperative *fuge* in the first two lines of her speech illustrates (910-11). She sees Orestes now as *paternae mortis auxilium unicum* (910: "the only hope of redress for our father's death"), a reference which might point to her yearning for vengeance. But by and large, by protecting her brother she evinces maternal feelings, since she takes the role of a mother or a nurse in order to provide nurture to young Orestes. Orestes is the last scion of the royal house and by saving him Electra safeguards and in the long run, preserves the continuity of her own family. She adopts the motherly, protective and affectionate role Clytemnestra has lost. Her devotion to her brother's rescue, a duty that her feminine instincts and priorities dictate, corresponds perfectly to the womanly pattern of female figures.

Strophius' sudden entrance (918) propels the plot since he comes to Orestes' rescue. His arrival at the beginning arouses Electra's suspicion *quis iste celeres concitus currus agit?* (913: "who is this, driving a chariot here in such haste?") and her immediate reaction is one of fear for her brother's life:

germane, vultus veste furabor tuos (914: "brother, I shall conceal your face behind my cloak").

Strophius comes with his son, on their way home after their victory at the Olympic contests, in order to congratulate Agamemnon of whose victory at Troy he speaks in praise and admiration: *cuius impulsum manu | cecidit decenni marte concussum Ilium* (920-21: "whose hand has toppled Ilium after ten years of warfare had shaken her"). Electra can thus see in Strophius a friend and a protector *amici fida praesidia* (917) because he can fulfil to her the function of father-substitute. He could act *in loco parentis* provided he could convince him. Thus, having in mind that upon hi m

[235] For Tarrant, 1976, 351 she is an innocent heroine who will confront with courage and cleverness the adulteress murder of her father.

depends Orestes' nurture and that he could be the purveyor of her brother, Electra resorts to the most traditional feminine means of persuasion, that of supplication, completing unmistakably a woman's traditional portrait. In climactic order, she implores him – using the verb *obtestor* which is found nowhere else in Seneca's *corpus* – by the memory of her father, his royal power and by the gods to accept Orestes into his custody[236] and hide him in his place. Strophius sets himself to the task of protecting Orestes and his exhortation to Orestes to accept the branch of victory both as concealment and as a good omen (939) might symbolize for the audience Orestes' final victory over his father's murderers, a preceded allusion before the clear reference of Cassandra's final words to Orestes' vengeance: *veniet et vobis furor* (1012).

As Strophius drives his chariot away and Orestes' salvation is being secured Electra is prepared to confront Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, her *hostes* (946) but much to our surprise, not in demand for vengeance. Although the Senecan Electra by showing this maternal aspect of her obligation does not fall short of the Euripidean or the Sophoclean one, nevertheless she comes in sharp contrast with them. The Euripidean or the Sophoclean Electra decides to relinquish passivity and assumes the heroic role of avenger replacing thus the supposed dead male head of their family. Their words ἀποκτενῶ σ' ἐγὼ καὶ παῖς 'Ορέστης πατρὶ τιμωρούμενοι (Eur. *El.* 1094-95) and ἀλλ' αὐτόχειρί μοι μόνῃ τε δραστέον τοὔργον τόδ' (Sop. *El.* 1019-20)[237] depict them responding as a surrogate male. Instead, our Electra will not overcome or try to throw off the feeling of *inertia*; she displays no sign of rebelliousness apart from a few moments of verbal defiance towards the two murderers. The Senecan one wants to join Cassandra in the altar so that as a suppliant under the aegis of Apollo to be protected (951-52) and utters that for her even death is preferable (*ultro vulneri opponam caput*, 946). By this voluntary self-sacrifice Electra

[236] Sending a beloved child into custody with a trusted friend was a pattern already known to the post-Homeric writers. Statius, for example, in his *Achilleis*, presents Thetis to send Achilles off to hide into the court of King Lycomedes palace in Skyros in order to avoid the prophecy decreed that he would die in Troy. For analogous example in Greek tragedy see Eur. *Hec.*, where Hecuba sends her youngest son Polydorus for safety reasons to the Thracian King Polymestror, after the fall of Troy. See also Plutarch (*Vit.* 24, 311d) where he mentions the story of Aristides' *Italian History* 3, where it is related that Lucius Tiberis had sent his son with a sum of money to his son-in-law, during Campania's destruction by Hannibal. His son-in-law murdered the child and the father in revenge blinded and crucified him.

[237] Cf. Juffras 1991, 108 who notes that "as Electra takes on Orestes' role, she imagines not only the public favour due any heroic act, but an honour that an Athenian audience might recognize as that bestowed on its tyrannicides."

reaffirms her nobility and accepts the fate reserved in tragedy for women and especially for female virgins.[238]

Thus, although Electra does not seem to tamper with the given state of being a female, interestingly enough, it is through the words of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus that we are confronted with ambivalence towards her own sex and suggestions of transgressing conventions. When Clytemnestra appears on stage (953) she exhibits no human feelings for her daughter and defines her as *hostis parentis* (953). Poignantly Seneca has her using in her apostrophe towards Electra the word *caput* (ll. 953). This term, that is most often used in intimate addresses to introduce a note of maternal affection,[239] is now combined with the negative adjectives *impius* and *audax* to express condemnation and disapproval:

impium atque audax caput (953: "unnatural, brazen creature").

She berates her daughter for seeking public gatherings that do not befit a virgin[240] (954) and exacts from Electra to be more respectful towards her (*modestius cum matre*, 957) since she is her mother. Furthermore, Clytemnestra resorts to name-calling and verbal abuse. Yet her words *animos viriles corde tumefacto geris; | sed agere domita feminam disces malo* (958-59: "you carry a man's spirit in you puffed-up heart, but when tamed by suffering you will learn to play the woman")[241] mark Electra out as an unconventional female. It is the first instance where the female and male moulds have been distorted and Electra is gendered in ambiguous terms. The scene brings into relief the powerful side of Clytemnestra's character. What she could not achieve as a mother, she now tries to achieve by referring to her status: *indomita posthac virginis verba impiae | regina frangam;* (964-65: "these unbridled words from an undutiful virgin – I shall break them later as queen").

But Electra is steadfast in her decision not to reveal to the queen where Orestes is and her determination remains unflinching in the face of punishment. Not only did she not recognize her mother's power and refuse to submit herself to her authority,

[238] The sacrifice of virgins, with or without their assent, is a frequently recurrent theme in the ancient Greek tragedy. See for example Aech. *Ag.* 199-247, and Eur. *IA* and *IT* 1-41, where is described Ipigeneia's sacrifice and Soph. *Ant.* and Eur. *Hec*.
[239] Cf. Tarrant, 1976, 351.
[240] It was conventionally accepted in tragedy that public converses should be avoided both by unmarried girls, e.g. Eur. *Or.* 108; *Phoen.*89-95, 1275-6; *Hcld.*43-4, 474-5, and by married women, e.g. Eur. *Tro.*648-9; *IA*735, 1029-32. For more information see Dover, 1974, 98 and Walcot, 1976, 90-1.
[241] For similar accusations cf. Soph. *Ant.*61-64 and *El.* 997-98.

but she goes further, referring to Clytemnestra's status as *nova regna* (969) a word that is often used to indicate tyranny and dictatorial use of power.[242] Not even Clytemnestra's last words *morieris hodie* (971) and the threat of death could extract from Electra any piece of information on Orestes' hiding place. Thus Clytemnestra gives way and turns to Aegisthus, whom now she addresses as *consors pericli pariter ac regni mei* (978: "you who share my danger as well as my throne") in order that he now confronts Electra.

It has been suggested that this role of Aegisthus as well as his threats against Electra that will follow provide evidence of Seneca's intention to present Aegisthus as possessing leadership qualities and effectiveness.[243] But it seems more likely that the opposite holds true: both Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, "scoffed by a serf and a child" give us the impression of "ludicrous killers ... who will never command an iota of respect".[244] Thus, it is not surprising that not even Aegisthus' insulting words *furibunda virgo* (981: "demented girl") and his warnings to Electra to stop acting disrespectfully towards her mother are to no avail and they meet with no response. On the contrary, Electra, instead of remaining silent, rebukes him of adultery and alluding to Aegisthus' incestuous birth, she sustains that he *idem sororis natus et patris nepos* (985: "both son of his sister and grandchild of his father") is the last person to give reprimands.

Electra's imperviousness to persuasion drives Aegisthus to come up with the most dire way of punishing her; he will not grant her death. The best will be to immure her alive and imprison her in a rocky dungeon.[245] There, under torture, helpless, starving hated by all she will in the long run yield (*succumbet*) and reveal where Orestes is being hidden (988-93). He then orders the slaves to carry Electra away, far from Mycenae and drive her to her unlit cave-prison that will tame the *inquietam virginem* (1000). Apart from the heavy hymeneal allusions that the verb *domet* connotes,[246] its combination with the word *monstrum* that Aegisthus uses to refer to Electra in v. 997, reminds us of Semonides' fr. 7 West.[247] There the female is compared to a wild creature not only eluding the female stereotyping but being in

[242] Cf. Tarrant, 1976, 353-54.
[243] Cf. Tarrant, 1976, 358.
[244] Cf. Motto and Clark, 1988, 192.
[245] Cf. Loraux, 1985.
[246] See Seaford, 1990, 80. For a more detailed survey of the imprisonment of women, a favoured theme by Greek tragedy, and its symbolic meaning see Seaford, 1990, 76-90.
[247] Sem. West 1974, 32, frg. 7.

general outside human civilization. In effect, in Aegisthus' speech we encounter the second references to Electra's nature, with which Aegisthus, as Clytemnestra earlier, suggests its departure from feminine standards. For, when he describes her he uses the word *virgo* but always with negative adjectives; see for example in v. 981 his address to Electra as *furibunda virgo* or his words in v. 1000 *inquietam ...virginem* where Aegisthus, through his abusive characterizations points to her transgression of normative gender role and her being not adherent to the feminine status quo. Also by the same token, Aegisthus' stress on Electra's future fate as *vidua ante thalamos* (992: "bereft before being married") points to her failure to conform to the accepted social construct for her gender in the society. She will die unmarried, without children, and thus unfulfilled,[248] since marriage was always the traditional vocation for women.

It is tempting to think that Electra's unconventional behaviour derives from that of Clytemnestra's as a characteristic trait that has passed down from the mother to her daughter. In support of this idea is the fact that in this scene we find reference to her in association only with her mother: *hostis parentis*, 953; *nata genetricem…lacessit*, 979-80; *aure verba indigna materna*, 982: all these references emphasise the biological link between these two women and underline the precise nature of Clytemnestra's legacy to Electra. The latter's outspokenness and defiant character are inherited qualities which will become a force responsible to create disruptions in the relationship structure. Yet, despite these negative sides of her heritage and the negative masculine qualities of the words *audax*,[249] *monstrum*, *animos viriles*, *indomita* applied to her through Clytemnestra and Aegisthus' words, Electra has been characterized in scholarly discussions as a courageous and "blameless heroine".[250] This characterization implies an approval of her masculine attitude and it is correct because this male attitude is balanced by the feminine qualities of chastity and devotion to the family that Electra exhibits. However, this justification could not apply to Clytemnestra's male behaviour because of her lack of the aforementioned virtues and her intrusion into the male domain of politics for her own good.[251] Therefore Clytemnestra's masculinity has to be regarded as abhorrent and malicious and here lies the fundamental difference between mother and daughter which this last scene of the play is aimed at highlighting.

[248] Cf. Soph. *Elect* and *Ant.* 810-816,876-882, 916-920
[249] Cf. Kaplan 1979, 411.
[250] Tarrant 1976, 351.
[251] See Hemelrijk 1999, 89-92 who characterizes these women as a "male mind in a female body."

Conclusion

Our enquiry has sought to display how Seneca presents his heroine, Clytemnestra, choosing to distinguish better male and female characters and refraining from the radical, total "male" characterization featuring in Aeschylus' Clytemnestra. Indeed Aeschylus had emphasized the anomalous male characterization of his Clytemnestra, and this emphasis must have captured the attention of every ancient reader – Seneca included, who possibly was provoked by it to follow a more uniform approach to the distinction of male and female roles for his heroine.

Thus, by looking closely at the play's structure we have found that in Seneca Clytemnestra is a character within whom there is a constant struggle/balance between the female side and the powerful queen. At the beginning of the play she is depicted as wavering and vacillating, with no self-control but at the same time the imagery she uses demonstrates that she still considers herself a ruler, with simply a temporary problem in controlling the situation. None of the other indecisive female Senecan characters, namely Phaedra or Medea, make mention in their speech of *frena* or *regimen* as she does. In the scene with her Nurse, her jealousy of Agamemnon's infidelities supports the connection between herself and the Ovidian elegiac heroines; but only till the utterance of Cassandra's name; now her power is in danger with Agamemnon's returning home and with Cassandra's coming into her house as his companion. She appears to be mainly afraid that she will be superseded and loose her power as a queen and is ready to start a war against the *paelex* who comes to take the *sceptra* of her palace. But apart from Cassandra there are two other persons who try to change her status or better they did not recognize it and thus deprive her of her power: Aegisthus and Electra. Her status is so important to her because it grants her a power. And when she feels that her power is at stake, she is presented to act more strongly than we are used to. So what she does, she does it because she does not want to lose her power.

I have set out to show that Seneca uses the Aeschylean prototype and elaborates on it: in Aeschylus she behaves as a male because she has a power, in replacement of her husband-king. In Seneca she is a queen who believes to be entitled to have power as a queen, and has a deep awareness of her royal condition. Seneca might have wanted to provide with his presentation of Clytemnestra — and above

with his treatment of the balance in her characterization between female gender and royal status — a justification for her actions. Aeschylus' Clytemnestra was considered to be the most transgressive woman in tragedy. Seneca may want to correct the Aeschylean presentation in a way: his own Clytemnestra is not presenting herself as aggressive as the Aeschylus' one, and for her over-female power Seneca appears to look for a specific reason: her awareness of her queenly condition, and her fear to lose her status and the power that emanates from it.

This struggle for power and political supremacy could relate our aforementioned findings to broader issues of the period in which Seneca lived. It is true that it is impossible to draw safe conclusions on t he basis of references to contemporary events as far as the date of Senecan plays' composition is concerned. Nevertheless, Fitch's significant study has shown that the first group of Seneca's tragedies, namely *Agamemnon*, *Phaedra* and *Oedipus* "must belong before the reign of Nero".[252] I am also inclined to believe that *Agamemnon* is not a Neronian but rather a Claudian production, since in his treatment of Clytemnestra it is fairly possible to detect some resonance to and a glimpse of Seneca's world during the reign of Claudius. These allusions are suggestive but not certain. As Croisille has aptly pointed out "…une Messaline, une Agrippine étaient…de modèles tout trouvés pour donner à une Clytemnestre un aspect très 'actuel'".[253] We cannot but consent with her comment, since Seneca's Clytemnestra is not poles apart from the dominant female figures of his era, the women of the imperial family such as Fulvia,[254] Messalina or Agrippina Minor, and mainly the latter one as I will argue.[255]

Agrippina the Younger was a politically outstanding figure, who exhibited an abhorred masculinity, and did not care anymore for the female virtues of modesty and chastity. Although she was a woman, nevertheless she was far from the domestic domain and self-effacing manners, in fact far from invisible, a common denominator between herself and the Senecan Clytemnestra. Agrippina's yearning for usurpation

[252] Fitch 1981, 307 . Many commentators have tried to tackle the dating problem of Seneca's tragedies as early as Hermann 1924, 78-9, but still research has so far proved inconclusive. See Fantham 1982, 9-14 and Tarrant's analysis 1985, 10-13. For a more recent study cf. Nisbet 1990, 95-114.
[253] Croisille 1964, 472.
[254] For Anthony's wife, Fulvia Plutarch mentions (*Ant.* 10.3): οὐ ταλασίαν οὐδὲ οἰκουρίαν φρονοῦν γύναιον and ἄρχοντος ἄρχειν καὶ στρατηγοῦντος στρατηγεῖν βουλόμενον ("who wished to rule a ruler and command a commander"); and see also *RE* 7 Fulvia 113 cols 281-4.
[255] In Tacitus' analysis Agrippina's masculine behaviour stands in contrast to Messalina's sexual promiscuity, who *per lasciviam…rebus Romanis inludenti* ("treated the Roman empire as a toy", *Ann.* 12.7).

of masculine power runs parallel with that of Clytemnestra's in our tragedy. Both of them transcend their female role aiming at supreme power.[256] Tacitus, whose *Annals* (mostly the books 11-16 which embrace the account of Claudius' reign) constitute the main source of information for the earliest days of the principate, criticizes the masculine character of Agrippina Minor and describes her imposing in Rome an *adductum et quasi virile servitium* ("a tight-drawn, almost masculine tyranny", *Ann.* 12.7). He presents Agrippina of the Claudian books as a *femina dux* and through his diction and his use of the pejorative words *servitium*, *domination*, and *regnum*,[257] which connote abuse of authority and power, he emphasizes Agrippina's extravagance of ambitions and naked lust for autonomy and power. In her attempt to preserve her domination and her establishment as a head of the state lies also her adulterous affairs with Marcus Lepidus and Pallas.[258] Likewise Clytemnestra's adultery with Aegisthus will lead to Agamemnon's murder, furnishing thus her political aim, namely to gain power for herself and to become the sole authority.

Agrippina's authority is recognizable and exemplified by her presentation on the official coinage, already after her marriage with Claudius. As Ginsburg points out it was "the first time that the wife of the reigning emperor was portrayed together with her husband on an imperial coin",[259] a fact that indicates further "her determination to have her power publicly recognized and institutionalized".[260] Moreover, her political powers, evident enough from the way Tacitus puts emphasis on Agrippina's "proximity to the emperor and her pre-eminence"[261] at senatorial business[262] advertise her desire and hope for a partnership in the Empire (*imperii sociam*, *Ann.* 12.37)[263].

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[256] Cf. Champlin 2003, 98.
[257] Cf. Ginsburg 2006, 17-22. See also Santoro L' Hoir 1994, 25, who underlines that by this portrayal of Agrippina Tacitus "insinuates that Rome, under the Julio – Claudians, had been chronically suffering from an aggravated gynarchy, from which it very nearly expired."
[258] Tac. *Ann.* 14.2.2.
[259] Ginsburg 2006, 69.
[260] See Wood 1988, 421 who comments Agrippina's visibility on the coinage and states that her "portrait profile, identified by inscription and adorned with the corn-ear crown of Ceres, appeared on reverses of coins of her husband and her son, … During the first two years of her son's reign, her presentation on coins is more remarkable: in the year 54, she is represented along with Nero on the reverse of *aurei* and *denarii*, in pair of confronted busts which give the images equal importance, and it is her titles rather than his which encircle the flan."
[261] Santoro L'Hoir 1994, 23.
[262] Cf. Tac. *Ann.* 12.37 and 12.56. See also Dio 60.33.7: Ἡ δὲ Ἀγριππῖνα καὶ δημοσίᾳ πολλάκις αὐτῷ καὶ χρηματίζοντι καὶ πρεσβείας ἀκροωμένῳ παρῆν, ἐπὶ βήματος ἰδίου καθημένη. Καὶ ἦν καὶ τοῦτο οὐδενὸς ἔλαττον θέαμα.
[263] Clytemnestra will use the phrase *consors regni* (l. 978) to addresses Aegisthus after having murdered Agamemnon, in order to face the defiant Electra.

Yet, her aspiration to become an emperor will constitute the main accusation Nero will level against her[264] and consequently will lead her to her ruin.

But it is not only the position of power which Agrippina enjoyed and her aspiration to a masculine role that link Clytemnestra with herself. Although none of them knows any feminine weaknesses, still in the one female trait they have been endowed with, namely their jealousy towards their female antagonists, their *modus operandi* bears many resemblances. Thus, Cassandra in our tragedy is depicted as the beautiful and prominent rival whose coming and installation in Agamemnon's house threatens Clytemnestra's power and domination and therefore she will be led out to her death by the queen. Agrippina operates in the same manner; in a brutal struggle for power she will eliminate her female rival for the emperor's hand, Lollia Paulina[265] and Calpurnia[266] whose beauty was praised in a casual conversation by the emperor, Claudius.

Actually, Claudius himself and his behaviour offer another means of assessing the resemblances between Seneca's era and *Agamemnon.* Tacitus' portrayal of Claudius acknowledges his skilful and victorious foreign policy and gives him credit for his invasion of Britain and the conquest of Mauretania, "the greatest imperial successes since the time of Augustus".[267] Nevertheless, the emperor proves himself weak and "ignorant of his wife's and freedmens' machinations, which led him to despotism, arbitrary murder, and injustice, dereliction of parental duty and eventual death".[268] Somewhat analogous in Seneca's tragedy is the conquest of Troy, an achievement which is worthy of great praise and boosts Agamemnon's prestige as a general. But in the same time the ten year old siege of Troy will entail nothing more than Agamemnon's absence from the political stage of Mycenae and eventually Agamemnon's failure to reaffirm his position and hold again state power.

Thus all the evidence leaves us little room for doubt that the women of Julio-Claudian era, and in particular Agrippina Minor, were the models that Seneca's

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[264] Tac. *Ann.* 14.11.
[265] Tac. *Ann.* 12.22: *atrox odii Agrippina ac Lolliae infensa ...molitur crimina et accusatorem* and Dio 60.32.4: τινας καὶ τῶν ἐπιφανῶν γυναικῶν ζηλοτυπήσασα ἔφθειρε καὶ τήν γε Παυλῖναν τὴν Λολλίαν.
[266] Tac. *Ann.* 12.22: *Et Calpurnia inlustris femina pervertitur. quia formam eius laudaverat princeps...unde ira Agrippinae citra ultima stetit* and Dio 60.33.2: καὶ Καλπουρνίαν γυναῖκα ... ἐφυγάδευσεν, ἢ ὡς λέγεται καὶ ἀπέκτεινεν, ἐπειδὴ τὸ κάλλος αὐτῆς ὁ Κλαύδιος ἐθαύμασε καὶ ἐπήνεσε.
[267] Momigliano 1961, 58. For more information on Claudius' invasion of Britain, see Levick 1990, 137-148.
[268] Vessey 1971, 408.

portrayal of Clytemnestra followed which drew her all the more far from the Aeschylean one. Of course some striking thematical resemblances between Seneca's character and Agrippina's representation that Tacitus makes are the clues of an analogous contemporary sensibility to anomalous and new forms of 'woman power'.

Seneca's Exposition: Rhetoric and Strategies in the *Agamemnon*

I.

According to Aristotle, *Poet.* 1355[b]25-27, rhetoric is the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatever, and since tragedy is a genre fundamentally engaged with speech-making and arguments, the tragic poets of the Greek classical period had shown a keen interest in the superior persuasive power of rhetoric through language.[269]

Rhetoric had also a strong appeal to Seneca so much so that his tragedies have been critisized severely on their rhetorical character.[270] Many features that appeared in his tragedies (the lengthy monologues, the stichomythic dialogues, the *sententiae*,[271] the *suasoriae* and the *controversiae*) were identified as being declamatory[272], thus showing the influence of Silver Age rhetoric on the one hand and his rhetorical inheritance from his father on the other.[273]

In what still remains one of the fullest surveys available on the rhetorical character of Seneca's tragedies, Canter, examining the percentage of the rhetorical elements employed by Seneca, has shown that, while the tragedy *Agamemnon* does not belong to the most rhetorical plays, nevertheless it does not lack rhetorical

[269] A complete list of works is too extensive to make enumeration practical. I single out three studies Karp 1977, 237-58, Toohey 1994, 153-175 and Rutherford 1999, 58, for speeches and verbal conflicts that appear in literature as early as Homer's *Iliad*. For a rhetorical aspect of Greek tragedy see also Kennedy 1963, 3-51; Solmsen 1975; Buxton 1982; Kitto 1961, 265-72; Conacher 1981, 3-25; Goldhill 1986, 224-43 and Bers 1994, 176-195. Detailed analysis on Sophoclean debates is given by Webster 1969[2], 148-155 and also by Long 1968, 155-160. For formal debates in Euripides see Collard 1975, 58-71 and Lloyd 1992, 94-9 while for the use of Euripides as a fount and source of oratorical expressions cf. North 1952, 1-33 also Wilson 1996, 310-331 and Cartledge 1997, 34. On the same topic see further Xanthakis-Karamanos 1979, 66-76.

[270] See how Eliot, 1972, ix comments Senecan drama in his introduction: "In the plays of Seneca, the drama is all in the word, and the word has no further reality behind it. His characters all seem to speak with the same voice, and at the top of it; they recite in turn."

[271] Cf. Quintilian, *Inst.* 10.1.130, who accuses Seneca of having "shattered the weight of his subject matter with the tiniest *sententiae*."

[272] See Canter, 1925, 55-69. For the connection between Seneca's drama and rhetoric see Runchina, 1960, 163-324. Secondary sources: Fitch 2002, 1-5; Boyle 1997, 31; McDonald 1966, 56-65 and Bonner, 1949.

[273] We know that Seneca's father near the end of his life had gathered for his sons a compilation of the *suasoriae* and *controversiae* of the famous rhetoricians he had heard. See *Contr.* 2.2.8-12.

treatment.[274] To put it in another way we can detect in the play features, omnipresent in the shaping of the scenes that owe much to declamation.[275] Although this tragedy does not culminate in the usual *agon* scene between the two main characters[276], Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, as in *Medea*, *Thyestes* or *Phaedra*,[277] nevertheless Clytemnestra's persuasive performance has superior power and impact both on the other characters she speaks with and on the audience. In what follows I will examine Seneca's *Agamemnon* from a rhetorical point of view. I would like to draw further attention to Clytemnestra's arguments, since she is the person who dominates the stage till the arrival of Cassandra and Agamemnon, with the latter to be confined to a brief only scene of twenty six lines long.[278] Starting with a section-by-section discussion of the Queen's speech and of the other characters she converses with, I will explore the surface level of Clytemnestra's persuasiveness and its immediate effect, with an emphasis to the hidden agenda of her manipulation. My concern will be to invite attention to her verbal performances and to highlight the way her plan of deceit is lurking behind each argument, exhibiting traits shown by classical orators and rhetoricians.

II.

Clytemnestra's entrance speech at the beginning of the second act is divided into three parts. The first part of it (108-124) begins with a self description of herself and her words *quid, segnis anime, tuta consilia expetis*? | *Quid fluctuaris?* (vv. 108-109: "oh, sluggish spirit! Why look for safe strategies? Why vacillate?") demonstrate at once a perplexed personality. But her perplexity is challenged as a seeming one by a close

[274] See the figures that Canter 1925 176-179 provides arranged in tables to show the percentage of rhetorical phenomena in Seneca's plays and especially table III which demonstrates the high occurrence of tropes in *Agamemnon*.
[275] See Bonner 1949, 161, who quotes the verses 35-6 as the most impressive example of Senecan declamation and v.694 as a reminiscence of *sententiae.* He also maintains (p.162) that the theme of this tragedy, the murder of the husband offered Seneca a grate opportunity for declamatory treatment.
[276] See however Peiper 1937, 271 who suggests that a scene between Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, which preceded the third *stasimon*, has now been lost.
[277] Cf. *Med.* 431-578, *Thy.* 970-1111; *Phaed.* 589-718.
[278] See Calder III 1976, 31-32 who, trying to resolve the problem of who is the hero of the play, proposes Cassandra.

analysis of her speech. For, although she plunges us immediately into her emotional condition with the view to present herself in the most helpless situation, her *modus elocutionis* in this first part has a heavy rhetorical colouring and ornamentation, which seldom occur in an impromptu speech and mark her speech far from ordinary, simple or disarrayed. In fact scarcely a sentence of her is without a figure of speech.[279] Notice the anaphora *quid*, *segnis*… | *quid fluctuaris* at lines 108-109, the epistrophe of the word *fides* (vv. 111-112: *et sceptra casta vidua tutari fide;* | *periere mores ius decus pietas fides*), and the metonymies *sceptra casta* for *regnum castum* (v. 111) and *Thessalica trabe* for *Thessalica navis* (v. 120). Clytemnestra incorporates also in her speech parenthesis (v. 123: *-quid timida loqueris furta et exilium et fugas?*) and alliteration (v. 115: *per scelera semper sceleribus tutum est iter*) and shows partiality for antithetical (vv. 122-123: *coniuncta socio profuge furtiva rate.* | *quid ..loqueris et exilium et fugas?*) and appositional structure (vv. 116-119: *...evolve femineos dolos,* | *quod ulla coniunx perfida…. .*| *....quod novercales manus* | *...quod ardens impia virgo*).[280] This last example is particularly telling: Clytemnestra's conscious choice of models interrupts the flow of the sentence in order to supply information and clarification of what kind of female tricks she herself has in mind.

Moreover, the very arrangement of her thoughts and argumentation bring home to us, not a mental or emotionally confused, but on the contrary a far lucid Clytemnestra, whose logical order of speech can be discerned. Tietze[281], lending a Stoic colouring to the figurative language, speaks of Seneca's heroines as *exempla* of *inconstantia* and does not fail to underline that "their clinical objectivity and rhetorical elaboration" militate against the statements we would normally expect from emotional confused characters. It is true that Clytemnestra's logical/rhetorical arrangement contrasts sharply with her emotional confusion, which should be more expectable in her situation. However, this incongruity does not mirror, in my opinion,

[279] See for instance how Longinus, *On the sublime*, 17, who highlights the importance of the figures of speech and provides advices on concealing the suspicion which is always attached to the sophisticated use of figures: τὸ τοίνυν ὕψος καὶ πάθος τῆς ἐπὶ τῷ σχηματίζειν ὑπονοίας ἀλέξημα καί θαυμαστή τις ἐπικουρία καθίσταται ...καί πᾶσαν ὑποψίαν ἐκπέφευγεν. On the figures of speech cf. also Quint. *Instit. Orat.* 9. 3-4, who, grouping them into two categories (those depending on the language and those on word arrangement), he ends his chapter with an appeal for moderation since *sicut ornent orationem opportune positae, ita ineptissimas esse cum inmodice petantur* ("though they are an ornament of oratory when deployed at the right moment, are utterly inept when they are too much sought after").

[280] Cicero at *Rhet. ad Alex*. (Ch. 6) points out that antithesis can occur both between the wording – verbal opposition- and between the sense. Antithesis in Clytemnestra's words resides in the sense, as the juxtaposition of contrasting ideas shows in lines 111-112, and 123-124.

[281] Cf. Tietze 1987, 140.

that Seneca's concern for rhetoric prevails over the needs of a correct characterization. Seneca's rhetoric is not inorganic and behind it we can gauge its relevance with the dramatic action of the play. Clytemnestra's rhetorical elaboration furthers the dramatic action, since it is in her arguments that we find the links her speech contains with the thematic material and the coming event, the murder of Agamemnon. In fact, Clytemnestra can be acknowledged as an orator[282]paving the way to her future deed, and not as a woman on the verge of emotional agitation, with her speech crucially supportive in significance. Without the important information her words provide us, namely her jealousy over Agamemnon's infidelities and her fear of losing her status, as well as the way the combined use of these two elements manipulates her interlocutors, our reaction to the tragic action would be a negative one, since the transformation of this emotional confused person to a treacherous murderer would involve a thematic irrelevance, a *non sequitur*

Thus, we can witness the logical arrangement of Clytemnestra's speech, since the first thing she says to herself is that now there is no need of asking *tuta consilia* (v. 109) since honour, right doing, piety and faith are gone. With this listing of lost virtues she declares that no path remains open: *clausa iam melior via est* (v. 109: "the better path is already closed"). After this assertion, normally we would expect her to admit that since nothing is left to be done it is best to do nothing; but arranging her arguments in a ring composition she ends up the first paragraph of her speech with the emphatic line: *per scelera semper sceleribus tutum est iter* (v. 115: "for crimes the safest path is already through crimes"). This line not only necessarily denies the closure of action proclaimed at line 109 which would have brought the beginning tragedy to the paradoxical inaction of an end. It also has a sort of metapoetical value, which balances the destabilizing potential of l. 109: the action of tragedy, as a genre displaying pains and crimes, must be again and again the fulfilment of crimes. Indeed, although we have heard Clytemnestra addressing her sluggish heart at line 108, this will not stop her from plotting crimes seven lines later.

In the next nine lines of her entrance monologue, Clytemnestra follows the same method of argumentation, which may involve metapoetical reflections – and thus lets us hear the voice of the author plotting his work, no less than the voice of the

[282] Medea's reasoned and calculated pleading to Creon (*Med.* 203-251) which contrasts with her passionate monologues (*Med.* 116-149), invites us to locate points of correspondence between these two Senecan heroines. On Medea's measured defence see Hine, 2000, 139.

character planning her action. She opens this part of her speech with another exhortation to herself: *evolve femineos dolos* (v. 116: "unfurl the tricks of womankind").

It was a common *topos* from Semonides onwards to connect the woman with *dolos*[283] that leads most often to more or less harmful. This expectation is confirmed in Seneca, as Clytemnestra goes on providing three examples of the arena of the female ignoble action, moving from a general statement – *ulla coniunx perfida* (v. 117: "any faithless wife") – to two more specific ones: a *noverca* and a *virgo*.[284] This list of various types of women conveys the impression that Clytemnestra might want to identify herself as a woman on the basis of these traditional paradigms. However, she uses the rhetorical figure of ἀπροσδόκητον to conclude with a completely different statement at line 124 *te decet maius nefas* ("you are suited to some greater outrage"). Thus, Clytemnestra turns to the past as a model of decisive action and these models, far from coming to her defence, manifest her intense desire to excel the female standards in the greatness of their deeds.

In the second part of her speech (131-144), after her Nurse's appeals to dissuade her, Clytemnestra continues in the same vein; she needs to fuel more the constructed image of her emotional turmoil, she had set out to achieve in her opening words. Here she shifts her emphasis more on her emotional disturbance. She presents herself as being locked in the prison of her passions. She has been driven by powers beyond her control. Pain, fear, jealousy and lust, all these strong emotions, have intertwined and captured her: *mixtus dolori subdidit stimulos timor;| invidia pulsat pectus, hinc animum iugo | premit cupido turpis* (vv. 133-135: "mixed with my pain, fear goads me on; jealousy pounds in my breast, and again rank lust oppresses my spirit"). Minute descriptions of emotions, such as this one with which Seneca has punctuated Clytemnestra's speech, as well as metaphors, which support the impact of the distress, are always on the lips of the tragic poet's heroines.[285] Thus, Clytemnestra

[283] It was traditionally considered inherent to tragedy to deal with actions characterized or provoked by deception. Cf. Fantuzzi 2006, 241-243, who distinguishes two categories of deceit. The first one when the deception is practiced by the protagonists on the other characters of the play (in the active or passive voice) and the other when it is practiced on themselves (auto-deception in the middle voice). Moreover, he maintains that we must always be aware of the deception the tragic poets themselves use, providing either pieces of, or even misleading, information, in the furtherance of their aim, namely to keep their audience concentrated on the play till the very last scene.

[284] From the three models that Clytemnestra lists *virgo* can be easily identified with Medea, Phaedra is the *noverca* par excellence while the *coniunx perfida* corresponds closely to Clytemnestra herself and also to Stheneboea, noted for her role in the banishment of Bellerephon. See further Tarrant, 1976, 196.

[285] Cf. the following instances: *Pha.* 101-3, 181-3, 382-3, 640-3 and *Med.* 939-43.

vividly depicts her mind being enveloped in a sheet of flames *inter istas mentis obsessae faces* (v. 136: "And amid these fires besetting my spirit"); she furthermore likens herself and her inner struggle towards her conflicting emotions to a ship that is being tossed up and down by the turbulent sea and being beset by the waves, and out of control at the end it disappears from the surface (*fluctibus variis agor,* | *ut cum hinc profundum ventus, hinc aestus rapit,* | *incerta dubitat unda cui cedat malo.* | *proinde omisi regimen e manibus meis* – vv. 138-141: "I am driven by conflicting waves, as when wind and tide pull the sea each way, and the waters hesitate, uncertain which sourge to yield to. So I have dropped the rudder from my hands").

Nevertheless, a closer examination of the speech shows that this seemingly contradiction, between her emotional condition and her logical argumentation, is the product of a rhetorical principle. Clytemnestra has given to her speech a considerable ethical impact by this prolonged and full of emotive words introduction (v. 131 *maiora cruciant*; v. 132 *flammae medullas et cor exurunt meum*; v. 137 *fessus..devictus… pessumdatus*; v. 140 *incerta dubitat unda cui cedat malo*; v. 143 *fluctibus dedimus ratem*). Such a choice manifests a sound rhetorical instinct for it places her in agreement with the most common means of persuasion used in forensic oratory, namely the speaker beginning his speech by establishing his ἦθος, his character.[286] Not only Aristotle (*Rhet.* 2, I, 2)[287] but also the Latin rhetoricians of Republican Rome appreciated the importance of the ἦθος. In the earlier Roman handbook on rhetoric, the anonymous *Ad Herennium* (5, 50, 63-51, 65) one of the figures of thought its author discusses in book 4, is the *notatio*, namely the character delineation which apart from the physical description comprises also "an analysis of the mental process" of the character.[288] Cicero too in his *De Oratore* discusses the role *ethos* plays as a means of securing the audience's good will.[289] Likewise,

[286] On ἦθος and its importance see Kennedy 1963, 37; Russell 1990, 197-212; Gill 1984, 149-166; Johnson 1984, 98-114; Carey 1994, 34-44.

[287] Aristotle recognized ethical appeal as one of the three kinds of proofs (πίστεις) that the orator can provide to his audience, and understood its function as a means to produce conviction, since by the establishment of his ἦθος, the speaker "should show himself to be of a certain character and should know how to put the judge into a certain frame of mind."

[288] Cf. McDonald 1966, 45.

[289] Cic. *De Orat.* 2, 43, 184: *Horum igitur exprimere mores oratione, iustos, integros,religiosos, timidos, perferentes iniuriarum, mirum quiddam valet; et hoc vel in principiis vel in re narranda vel in perorando tantam habet vim, si est suaviter et cum sensu tractatum, ut saepe plus quam causa valeat* ("And so to paint their characters in words,as being upright, stainless, conscientious, modest and long-suffering under justice, has a really wonderful effect; and this topic, whether in opening, or in stating the case, or in winding-up, is so compelling, when agreeably and feelingly handled, as often to be worth more than the merits of the case").

Quintilian accords much weight to the *ethos* which must be "such as to excite pleasure and affection in our hearers, while the chief merit in its expression lies in making it seem that all that we say derives from the nature of the facts and persons concerned and in the revelation of the character of the orator in such a way that all may recognise it."[290] Thus it is obvious the paramount significance the rhetoricians attached to the device of ethical description, since their success depended on being able to evoke *pathos* to their hearers, and move the audience and elicit their support.

Stirring an emotional response in the audience was, of course, the aim of Clytemnestra's ethical appeal. In my opinion we could speak of a double-sided reception of Clytemnestra's words, both as the expression of her emotional world and mainly as a carefully calculated manipulation in order to secure the good will of her hearers. She needed a performance that would galvanize the audience's sympathy and arouse their pity towards her. The portrayal of her emotional turmoil was even more important, since she was well known to the audience and her reputation, already familiar, would have disposed them unfavourably towards her. Therefore, the audience had to be convinced that a woman of such a strong passion and emotions could have acted in no other way, having in mind the circumstances that dictated her deed. Only if they were so convinced she could establish credit with them and would ingratiate herself with the audience. Her elaborate exposition of her emotional world helps Clytemnestra to build up a character of herself (*maiora cruciant*, v. 131: "My torments are too great" and *proinde omisi regimen e manibus meis*, v. 141: "So I have dropped the rudder from my hands"). In addition, her vivid mental perception of the events transmitted in an imaginative and descriptive language is coupled with the use of ἐνάργεια,[291] namely her skilful ability to paint her condition in words by her vivid metaphors: *flammae medullas et cor exurunt meum…* |*... fluctibus variis agor,* | *ut, cum hinc profundem ventus, hinc aestus rapit,* | *incerta dubitat unda cui cedat malo* | *...fluctibus dedimus ratem* (vv. 132-143). These similes are hardly negligible since, they create strong and intense pictures,[292] which will lend credence to her words in

[290] Quint. *Inst. Orat.* 6, 2, 13 *audientibus amabile atque iucundum, in quo exprimendo summa virtus ea est, ut fluere omnia ex natura rerum hominumque videantur utque mores dicentis ex oratione perluceant et quodammodo agnoscantur.*

[291] For the importance of ἐνάργεια in imprinting the facts in the imagination of the audience and setting them before their eyes, see Arist. *Rhet.* 3, 11, 2; for the use of metaphors see Cic. *De Orat.* 3.155-167; Quint. *Ints. Orat.* 6, 2, 32.

[292] For a list of functions of similes and moreover for the imagistic quality of them as an important factor in capturing the audience's attention and reinforcing their understanding and memory see Minchin 2001, 32-33.

the most crucial place of her speech just before launching forth into her argumentative discourse.

The argumentative part of Clytemnestra's speech (42 verses long, vv. 162-202), that comes after the stichomythia between herself and the Nurse, has the form of emotional arguments and is divided into three paragraphs. With an oratorical precision she distinguishes the undesirable consequences of Agamemnon's behaviour towards her daughter (vv. 164-167, private/personal area), towards the army during the Trojan War (vv. 174-191, public area) and finally towards herself and the rest of his family (vv. 194-199, private/personal area again). Following a geometrical pattern and moving from the specific to the general and back again to the specific, Clytemnestra aims at enlightening the audience about Agamemnon's character. One of the most common rhetorical means of persuasion used in the forensic oratory is the need to arouse hostility against the opponent, either by using key words (like anger, hate, resent) or by the manner of the presentation of the offence.[293] Although Clytemnestra's vocabulary does not include such words, nevertheless in this part of her speech, she tries her very best to present Agamemnon's behavior as an attack on important values and traditional principles.

In the first paragraph of her speech (vv. 162-173), Clytemnestra, points an accusatory finger at Agamemnon for not meeting his obligations in the private, domestic domain. As a father he had the duty to bring up his begotten children, still less he would have given his assent to the sacrifice of his daughter. Tarrant[294] has well remarked on his calm and untroubled disposition towards Calchas' soothsaying. It is precisely this kind of disposition together with Iphigenia's immolation that adds to the picture of Agamemnon, as committing the most barbaric and shocking crime a father could do. The crowning touch in Clytemnestra's words is the sarcastic *cum stetit ad aras ore sacrifico pater* (v. 166: "when he stood as father making sacrificial prayers at the altar"), with the word *pater* to emphasize Clytemnestra's ironic reference to Agamemnon.

Continuing her effort to throw the most unfavourable light upon Agamemnon's character, Clytemnestra now moves from the personal to the general, from Agamemnon's behaviour towards his family, namely his private affairs, to those of the state, namely his conduct during the Trojan War (vv. 174-191). She disparages

[293] Cf. Carey 1994, 29-30.
[294] Cf. Tarrant 1976, 206.

him for not using his power to help his comrades embarking on a series of amorous liaisons and being constantly occupied with his lustful affairs with Chryseis, Briseis and Cassandra (vv. 182-184: *inter ruentis Graeciae stragem ultimam | sine hoste victus marcet ac veneri vacat | reparatque amores*). Clytemnestra's contentious tone is evident enough from the way she presents Agamemnon's infatuation as a reversal of roles; the victorious king is now himself *amore captae captus* (v. 175) and returns home as *captae maritus* (v. 191). Hence, showing her inability to cope with her husband's sexual rivalries and adulteries, she pins the shame on the leader of the Trojan War by treating his behaviour as a hubristic act. Agamemnon by taking Chryseis, the daughter of the priest of Apollo Smintheus, as a war prize commits an act of sacrilege and impiety.[295]

At the closing paragraph (vv. 192-202) of her speech Clytemnestra shifts her interest back in the private, personal life. Starting with an exhortation to herself *accingere anime* (v. 192: "arm yourself, my spirit") she encapsulates the consequences of Agamemnon's infidelities towards herself and her children Orestes and Electra. She deploys a series of *hypophorae* (vv. 193-199), namely she raises questions which she then goes on to answer, urging herself to take action before her fear of marginalization becomes real *Pelopia Phrygiae sceptra dum teneant* (v. 194: "one when young Phrygian wives hold the sceptre of Pelops?'"), and before the arrival of a *furens noverca*[296] (v. 199). As the torrent of her questions abates, she concludes her speech with a set of imperatives: *misce cruorem, perde pereundo virum* (v. 201: "mingle your blood, destroy your man by self-destruction"), which demonstrate clearly her determination to proceed to the deed she has been planning and her refusal to be swayed by what her Nurse is going to argue against.

The scene that follows (vv. 203-225), viewed from the point of standard rhetoric is a situation that will call upon all the persuasive resources of the Nurse in order to succeed in persuading Clytemnestra not to follow the course of action she has planned. Engaged with a deliberative discourse and its rhetorical components, namely the exhortation and the dissuasion, the Nurse is ready to indulge in this battle of words trying to induce the queen to restrain from her plan of attack. Her speech, although not developed to the extent, that would allow us to speak of a fully-fledged

[295] Cf. Mader 1988, 60.

[296] Cf. Mader 1988, 61 who sees Clytemnestra's demonstration of maternal anxiety to safeguard her children against the stepmother as an *ad absurdum*, since in her opening words she has used the example of another *noverca*, Phaedra, as an illustrious model in order to stir herself into action.

deliberative oration (it is only 21 lines long), is a model of a well organized oration in miniature. Her speech is rhetorical in flavour since it has an exordium, a narration, a confirmation and a peroration, conforming to the standard arrangement laid down by the teachers of rhetoric.

The Nurse begins her speech by addressing Clytemnestra as *regina* (v. 203). She will typically use the language of restrain to urge her to be moderate.[297] She starts her *narration*, in order to describe the situation at the moment. Agamemnon, who is not indicated by name[298] in her narration, is coming home as a highly successful warrior, *victor venit | Asiae ferocis, ultor Europae*; (vv. 204-205: "he comes as victor over fierce Asia, avenger of Europe") as a result of his military exploits and the conquest of Troy after its long-lasting siege.[299]

Having marked Agamemnon out for his heroic labour and victory the Nurse then launches into her *confirmatio*, the proof in order to support the cause she is espousing. Firstly, at the beginning of her argumentation, she places a rhetorical question *hunc fraude nunc conaris et furto aggredi* (v. 207: "and now you attempt to attack him by treachery and stealth?") which she finally refutes with a s eries of forceful negative clauses (… *non Achilles…|… non melior Ajax…| non…Hector…| non tela Paridis..., non Memnon…| non Xanthus…| non ni vea…Cycnus…| non …Thressa…| non…| …Amazon*, vv. 208-217) highlighting the fact that Agamemnon has survived all the attacks of his enemies in the Trojan war. She thus concludes with an *a fortiori* argument that Clytemnestra's attempt will not end in success.

She then moves to her second argument. She goes on to imagine the consequences that would result from Agamemnon's slaying and the probable reaction of the Greeks to this murder that will not be left unavenged, having recourse to an *illustrandum*: *equos et arma classibusque horrens fretum | propone et alto sanguine exundans solum* (vv. 221-222: "picture horses, weapons, the sea bristling with

[297] The language of restraint, a *vox propria* of the Senecan Nurses, is an available resource for persuasion as Tarrant 1976, 212 points out.

[298] Agamemnon's name, although it appears in Aegisthus' speech once (in line 245), is not voiced by the main characters of the drama, namely Clytemnestra, her Nurse or even Cassandra. When his name is indicated is always by the chorus and the minor *dramatis personae* (Thyestes, Eurybates, Electra) and is always accompanied by flattering comments. Cf. l. 39, 364, 396, 779.

[299] Cf. Martina 1981, 204 who sustains that "…[la nutrice] di Seneca appare dotata di una vera e propria erudizione mitologica. E i riferimenti mitologici sono talvolta espressi in modo così conciso da richiedere in chi ascolta una vasta e profonda conoscenza dei miti." See also Strophius' complimentary words for Agamemnon's military deeds and the emphasis he also places upon the protracted occupation of Troy by his friend: *…cuius impulsum manu| cecidit decenni marte concussum Ilium* ("whose hand has toppled Ilium after ten years of warfare has shaken her", 920-921).

warships, the soil flooded deep with blood"). By picturing battle scenes, the marshalling of the warriors and bloodshed, the Nurse seeks to arouse Clytemnestra's fear. All these mental images, "pictures in the mind's eye",[300] are subtly calculated to appeal to her emotional world and intimidate her into inactivity. The Nurse concludes her appeal with the common device of peroration recapitulating her plea in two verbs *comprime adfectus truces | mentemque tibimet ipsa pacifica tuam* (vv. 224-224: "check yoru fierce passions, and reconcile your mind to yourself").

This Nurse-scene in *Agamemnon* has attracted the attention of the commentators, who register its deviation from the typical pattern found in other similar scenes in Seneca's other tragedies at the end of this kind of scenes.[301] For, according to the rules of rhetoric, we would expect Clytemnestra's reaction, if not refutation, to follow after the Nurse's exhortations; or rather what conventionally happens in Seneca's other tragedies at the end of these scenes, namely the concession of the Nurse to her mistress' arguments.[302] Instead, the scene ends abruptly with the arrival of Aegisthus and what we are going to witness is Clytemnestra espousing her Nurse's argument a few lines later, in the debate with her lover.

Clytemnestra's unexpected change of heart, although not an unusual feature of Seneca's tragic heroines,[303] is commonly construed by the scholars as revealing an influence of the Nurse's rhetorical competence and arguments to which the Queen has not been deaf.[304] Moreover, Martina suggested that another key factor that alters Clytemnestra's attitude is not only the Nurse's persuasive performance, but also the effect of her "mythological erudition", as her examples and themes, drawn from the *Iliad* and the Epic Cycle demonstrate.[305]

But we cannot adopt Martina's reading of the Nurse's literary knowledge as a ground solid enough upon to support Clytemnestra's complete volte-face and accept it

[300] The term belongs to Paivio 1983, 1-18, who states that mental images are more effective and dynamic than language and verbal techniques.
[301] Cf. Shelton 1983, 166. For an analytical discussion see Tarrant 1976, 192-194, who lists the major differences of this scene concerning the pattern of the debate. According to his explanations, Clytemnestra's speech which comes after the encounter with the Nurse leads to an increase of dramatic realism and power, the Nurse's unyielding stance is an independent scene, unconnected with what follows, and the lack of connection between the speeches of the *domina* and the *nutrix* can be justified if we suppose that the Nurse enters the scene after her mistress' speech and thus has not overheard Clytemnestra's revelation of her inner thoughts.
[302] For analogous scenes, where the Nurses revert and offer no opposition to their maidens' plan cf. *Pha.* 267-73, *HO* 538-540, 563-566, and see also the words of the *satelles* in *Thy.* 334-335.
[303] Cf. *Pha.* 250-251. *Med.* 926-928.
[304] See Tarrant 1976, 217 and Martina 1986, 125.
[305] Martina 1986-87, 117.

as genuine. For, as Fantham[306] aptly remarks Seneca's Nurse in order to intensify her efforts to support Agamemnon's military grandeur, she resorts to ascribing to him exploits belonging to Achilles, as the Homeric and pre- and post-Homeric legend testify. The tradition has it that after the death of Hector, it was Achilles who defeated Memnon of Ethiopia, Cycnus and the Amazonian warrior Penthesileia[307] and not Agamemnon, whose scanty heroic past was insufficient to furnish the Nurse with the appropriate arguments.

While the power of Fantham's remark is undeniable, I would like to suggest another point that weighs against the Nurse's manipulation, viewing her speech from a purely rhetorical angle. For although her method of persuasion is organized in a masterly way as my analysis above has tried to demonstrate, the Nurse fails to meet Clytemnestra's arguments, to such an extent that we could speak instead of their rhetorical irrelevance, since her words do not relate to any of the arguments the Queen had set out a few lines earlier. Much less they refute them, without, apparently, taking them in consideration.

It is well known that refutation of the opponent's counter arguments was recognized by the classical rhetoricians as the most important part of the usual argumentative discourse to which they devoted a great deal of attention. However cogent one's arguments may be the wisest strategy is not to keep the opposing argument out of sight. As Aristotle points out in the *Rhetoric* 3.17.15 "… it is only after having combated all the arguments, or the most important, or those which are plausible, or most easy to refute, that you should substantiate your own case."[308] Thus, discrediting the opposing views was regarded as the core and the central part of the discourse.

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[306] Fantham 1981-1982, 122-123 aptly remarks that since Agamemnon had few personal heroic deeds "Seneca is at a loss to fill the nurse's argument" and in order to strengthen her case he draws on the tradition of Trojan champions defeated not by Agamemnon but by Achilles.

[307] The defeat of Xantus, Simois, and Rhesus by Achilles is narrated by Homer in the *Iliad*. For the encounter between Achilles and Memnon, not mentioned in the *Iliad,* see Pind. *Ol.* 2,82, *Pyth.* 6.28ff, *Nem* 6.52-55, *Isthm.* 3.61-63, 5.39-41, 8.54 and Apollod. *Epit.* 5.3. The episode with Cycnus was treated in the *Cypria* and also in Ovid's *Met.* 12.71-145. For Penthesileia see Quint. Smyrn. 1.18ff.

[308] Arist. *Rhet.* 3.17.15... ἢ πρὸς πάντα ἢ τὰ μέγιστα ἢ τὰ εὐδοκιμοῦντα ἢ τὰ εὐέλεγκτα μαχεσάμενον οὕτω τὰ αὑτοῦ πιστὰ ποιητέον. See also *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 1.10.18 *tota spes vincendi ratioque persuadendi posita est in confirmatione et in confutatione. Nam cum adiumenta nostra exposuerimus contrariaque dissolverimus, absolute nimirum munus oratorium confecerimus* ("The entire hope of victory and the entire method of persuasion rest on proof and refutation, for when we have submitted our arguments and destroyed those of the opposition, we have, of course, completely fulfilled the speaker's function").

However, in the Nurse's speech the refutation of Clytemnestra's arguments is accorded no space whatsoever. In fact we get the distinct impression that she has not been listening to the Queen, since, throughout her rebuttal, she makes no attempt to nullify the two principal strands of Clytemnestra's indictment against Agamemnon, namely the sacrifice of Iphigenia and his infidelities.[309] The limelight of the Nurse's words is directed relentlessly and exclusively on Agamemnon as a hero, a leader and individual combatant, an aspect that Clytemnestra has a complete lack of interest in. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Nurse's speech, although manifests an excellence in performance,[310] has utterly failed to move Clytemnestra. In any case, what is more important, Clytemnestra does not ascribe to this speech any relevance in her change of opinion, in the way that Senecan Phaedra[311] for example does in the her title-play, and this fact reinforces our conviction[312] that Clytemnestra's change of mind that follows is rather a bogus one.

Clytemnestra's suddenly volte-face takes place in the next scene, during her dialogue with her lover, Aegisthus (vv. 226-309). Notwithstanding that Clytemnestra has ended her speech, 23 lines earlier, preaching a policy of retaliation against Agamemnon, now she appears to adopt a role far from the former subversive one and wants to withdraw from the conspiracy she and Aegisthus have planned: *Amor iugalis vincit ac flectit retro;* | *referimur illuc, unde non decuit prius* | *abire* (vv. 239-241: "Married love overcomes me and turns me back. I am reverting to the place I should never have left."). Her speech reverberates with echoes of her Nurse's advice that she herself now espouses.[313] And her change of mind, which as I have maintained above cannot be explained as being a result of the Nurse's appeal, has puzzled the scholars,

[309] In the verbal sparring that comes before their speeches the Nurse's words *redemit illa classis immotae moras* | *et maria pigro fixa languore impulit* ("she remedied the delays of the decalmed fleet, and mobilised seas fixed in sluggish idleness", 160-161) as a reaction to Clytemnestra's accusation of Agamemnon, cannot but be considered only a passing reference to the sacrifice of Iphigenia. No reference whatsoever is made to Agamemnon's infidelities.

[310] Supremacy in verbal performance did not always ensure the effectiveness of the speech. See for example the case of Nestor's speech in Homer, *Il.* 1.254-284 where, Nestor, even though τοῦ καὶ ἀπὸ γλώσσης μέλιτος γλυκίων ῥέεν αὐδή (1.249) did not have much success in the disagreement between Achilles and Agamemnon. See also Thucydides' encomium of Antiphon's speech, as the best defence of any known up to his time, despite the fact that it did not achieve its goal and at the ends he was convicted (8.68.2).

[311] Cf. Phaedra's words towards her Nurse in line 178 *Quae memoras scio vera esse, nutrix* and 250-251: *non omnis animo cessit ingenuo pudor.* | *paremus, altrix* with which Phaedra makes her Nurse co-operate.

[312] So also Croisille 1964, 467-9. My own position is thus diametrically opposed to that of Herrmann 1924, 412 who argues that "elle se laisse pourtant calmer par sa nourrice."

[313] For a list of the inverted echoes in Clytemnestra's speech see Tarrant 1976, 217.

who have adopted several distinctive readings in order to explain her startling reversal.

Thus, by presenting this reversion of Clytemnestra as a Senecan manoeuvre in order to rise the dramatic temperature, Tarrant in his commentary goes on to maintain that Clytemnestra is presented as having second thoughts but finally she yields under the cogency and superiority of Aegisthus' arguments.[314] Schenkeveld[315] followed suit underlying that the persuasive power of his speech was the vehicle that permitted Aegisthus to hold sway over the Queen. Still more recently Mader's[316] substantial article could build on this, and by studying the whole scene from a Stoic psychological point of view, places its emphasis on Aegisthus' calculation and ability to play with Clytemnestra's emotional feebleness and vulnerability to such an extent that he revitalizes and quickens all the feelings that had perplexed and confused her, namely shame, fear and jealousy.

On the other hand there are critics whose interpretation is on a totally different wavelength. Croisille led the way in a completely new direction, when she argued persuasively that Clytemnestra deceives Aegisthus into thinking that she has the intention of abandoning their plan with the view of driving him into despair and consequently into action.[317] Her theory has gained a lot of adherents among the scholars[318] who support that Clytemnestra's change of mind is a nebulous possibility, and that the scene between her and her lover mirrors her manipulating power over Aegisthus, which is certainly a force to be reckoned with.

Croisille's theory is most convincing, because if we read Clytemnestra's speech against the backdrop of her earlier utterances, we will fail to see Aegisthus' "ploy to bring home to Clytemnestra that without him as an accomplice, her position is untenable;"[319] her present speech rather demonstrates how skilfully she redefines

[314] See Tarrant 1976, 230 who observes that Seneca "in showing the conspiracy of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra so close to dissolution plays against the audience's foreknowledge of its ultimate success." Cf. also Tarrant 1976, 226, 229.
[315] Schenkeveld 1976, 399. See also Herington 1966, 454 who notes that "the inferior's arguments temporarily convince the superior." The same view is also followed by Giomini 1956, 17f, 56ff, 79f, and also Paratore 1952, 211 who remarks that Clytemnestra "da δίπους λέαινα si transforma in una tormentata succuba del suo drudo."
[316] Cf. Mader 1988, 64.
[317] Cf. Croisille 1964, 467.
[318] Cf. Calder 1976, 31-32 and of late Boyle 1983, 201 and 223, who notes that Aegisthus' prior presentation as a feeble and frightened together with Clytemnestra's hatred towards Agamemnon and her firmness to use *feminei doli* are strong arguments against Tarrant's theory of Clytemnestra being manipulated by Aegisthus.
[319] Cf. Mader 1988, 64.

her words to fit the changing circumstances and her method to test Aegisthus' readiness to put into practice their plan of Agamemnon's murder.

Because, it would have been next to impossible for such a character as Aegisthus to convince and tame the iron-willed Clytemnestra. Thyestes, already from the prologue, informed us that we are to expect a pallid Aegisthus: … *quid pudor gravat? | quid dextra dubio trepida consilio labat?* (vv. 49-50: "why is your face heavy with shame? Why does your hand tremble and falter, unsure of its purpose?"). But it is not only the information we are primed with before Aegisthus' arrival on stage; what he himself confirms in his opening speech does ring true with the earlier report. Woven into the texture of his speech are the constant references to his fear and his discouragement: *Quod tempus animo semper ac mente horrui | adest profecto, rebus extremum meis. |quid terga vertis, anime? quid primo impetu | deponis arma?* (vv. 226-229: "The time I have always feared in mind and spirit is painly upon me – the crisis in my affairs. Why turn aside, my spirit? Why lay down arms at the first onslaught?"), which makes it hard for us to accept Aegisthus as a doer and a man ready to swing into action.

Nevertheless, apart from Aegisthus' pusillanimity which is prominent enough to carry no conviction for Clytemnestra's persuasion, I would like to put forward another factor that renders vulnerable every argument about Aegisthus' persuasive power or strategy, since these do not seem to be borne out by his speech. On the contrary, it is Clytemnestra who displays extensive authority and power of speech that enables her to accommodate her discourse according to her new interlocutor.

Because, not only does Clytemnestra turn every argument of Aegisthus around to achieve expediency, but also she manages to divert Aegisthus' attention and lead their dialogue in the direction which she wants him to follow, using the fallacy of the red herring as a distractive strategy. It was a timeworn strategy from Aristotle onwards for the rhetoricians to use this diversionary tactic in order to lead away the discussion from the principal subject and so by shifting the debate "to a safer ground" to win the case.[320]

[320] Cf. Corbett and Connors 1999, 71. The logical fallacy of red herring (also know as *ignoratio elenchi*) is treated by Aristotle in *Rhetoric* (2.24-25) but more extensively in his work *Sophistical Refutations* where he classifies twelve types of false arguments and introduces the fallacy of the insertion of irrelevant matter as an extra linguistic source of false reasoning: "In refutations which are argued by means of some addition, you must examine whether the impossibility occurs none the less when the addition has been withdrawn. If so, then the answerer should make this fact clear and should state that he granted the addition not because he believed in it but for the sake of the argument, but that

Thus, the dialogue between Clytemnestra and Aegisthus begins with the later aiming at weakening the Queen's resistance and make her reconsider her previous thoughts (vv. 238-309). After stressing the fact that Agamemnon's success would have swollen his arrogance (vv. 250-252: *quid rere ad animum suapte natura trucem | Troiam addidisse? rex Mycenarum fuit, | veniet tyrannus; prospera animos efferunt*, "What do you think Troy's fall has added to a spirit that is naturally harsh? He was king of Mycenae, he will return as tyrant; success swells men's mind"), Aegisthus tries to fix Clytemnestra's perspective upon her husband's perfidies, since half of his opening speech (vv. 253-259) is revolved round Agamemnon's mistresses, the thrust of his attack (vv. 253-54: *effusa circa paelicum quanto venit | turba apparatu!*). Among them he gives to Cassandra a prominent role *sola sed turba eminet | tenetque regem famula veridici dei* (vv. 254-255: "but one stands out from the crowd and clasps the king – the handmaid of the prophetic god") and by emphasising the impact Cassandra's arrival would have on Clytemnestra's future as a woman and Queen (*ultimum est nuptae malum | palam maritam possidens paelex domum | nec regna socium ferre nec taedae sciunt*, vv. 257-259: "the worst disaster for a a wife is to have a mistress openly in control of the marital household. Neither thrones nor marriages can endure a partner") he expects to strike a sensitive chord, rekindling the flame of jealousy.

Much to his surprise, however, his expectations are frustrated. The former jealousy-plagued Queen has now adopted a *laisser faire* attitude towards Agamemnon's infidelities and the anger and the bitterness, which earlier had sprung into view in her argumentation as the moving forces that set her revenge plan and the crime in motion, have given now their place to the acceptance of them as natural and trivial. To Aegisthus' accusations levelled against Agamemnon, three lines (vv. 262-265: *permisit aliquid victor in captam sibi: | nec coniugem hoc respicere nec dominam decet. | lex alia solio est, alia privato in toro*) is all that Clytemnestra sees fit to devote to, underlying that Agamemnon as a man is allowed occasional sexual relationship with slaves and on the other hand as a king he has privileges out of the ordinary.[321] This last image of Agamemnon's "licence" as a king is most "historically" credible, since it appropriates the kind of defence of privileges which

his opponent has made no use of it at all for his argument" (*Soph.El.* 29). For more information see Schreiber 2003, 144-146 and Morris 1982, 137-138 on the fallacy of irrelevant thesis. For the use of this technique in Euripides' tragedies see Arnott 1978, 1-24.

[321] Cf. Tarrant 1976, 221.

Agamemnon had often adopted in the *Iliad* vis – à – vis Achilles.[322] It thus operates as an effective red herring since it leads Aegisthus away from Clytemnestra's sexual rivalries into the kingship and the rules that govern it.

The second part of his speech (vv. 268-283) is devoted to the deportment of the kings. He describes their action and rule as unfair (v. 270: *nobis maligni iudices, aequi sibi*) and not based on any principle but to their own personal interest. Those that are hated by them are guilty and can find no escape or allies and thus Clytemnestra will have nowhere to seek refuge in when she will be set aside and superseded by Agamemnon, the king (*Spartenne repetes spreta et Eurotan tuum | patriasque sedes profuga? non dant exitum | repudia regum;* vv. 281-283: "once set aside, will you return to your Sparta and Eurotas, and the refuge of your father's house? Divorce from a king allows no escape;"). But Clytemnestra having brought him where she wanted to, she now fires back at him her scornful comments on his low origins,[323] whom now she calls *dedecus nostrae domus* (v. 300: "infamy of our house") and commands him to depart since she is a *generosa* and she can not be attached to him, an *exul.* Clytemnestra's demonstration of "seigneurial status" drives Aegisthus to drop the guise of superiority[324] and while he has begun his speech addressing Clytemnestra as *pericli socia* ("partner of my danger", 234), his words now *si tu imperas, regina* ("if you command it, my queen", 303) reveal that he recognizes her position and authority and he is ready to follow her orders and be expelled. Having secured the recognition of her superiority from her lover, Clytemnestra now is ready to withdraw with him in order to put their plan into practice. She will appear again on stage at the last scene to encounter her daughter Electra (vv. 953-1000). But the rapid dialogue between the powerful now Queen and the defying Electra and their speeches no more than two lines, where they echo and contradict each other's words, are too brief for a rhetorical consideration.

In the foregoing pages I have attempted to interpret Seneca's *Agamemnon* from a rhetorical point of view. I have regarded the utterances of its characters as

[322] Cf. Hom. *Il.* 1.163-168 Achilles' words during his quarrel with Agamemnon Οὐ μὲν σοί ποτε ἶσον ἔχω γέρας, ... σοὶ τὸ γέρας πολὺ μεῖζον, ἐγὼ δ' ὀλίγον τε φίλον τε ἔρχομ' ἔχων ἐπὶ νῆας, ἐπεί κε κάμω πολεμίζων and what Agamemnon replies to him at ll. 184-187: ἐγὼ δέ κ' ἄγω Βρισηΐδα καλλιπάρῃον αὐτὸς ἰὼν κλισίην δε, τὸ σὸν γέρας, ὄφρ' ἐῢ εἰδῇς, ὅσσον φέρτερός εἰμι σέθεν, στυγέῃ δὲ καὶ ἄλλος ἶσον ἐμοὶ φάσθαι καὶ ὁμοιωθήμεναι ἄντην.

[323] Cf. Schenkeveld 1976, 397-403 who underlines that Seneca although he could have neglected the point about Aegisthus' base origins and incestuous birth, he nevertheless has five of his characters allude to them as a ling to Agamemnon's murder, emphasising the objective guilt of Aegisthus, being caught up in the hereditary familial curse.

[324] See Tarrant 1976, 229.

persuasive performances with Clytemnestra's argumentative structure and rhetorical skill being the persistent theme in my discussion. I have also tried to highlight the ways Clytemnestra is in full rhetorical control of her thoughts and feelings throughout the play and how by interlacing rhetoric and deceit in her arguments, she uses and abuses rhetoric to manipulate her environment and to elicit distinct reactions from her interlocutors.

Cassandra

Cassandra in Aeschylus

Cassandra[325] appears as early in literature as in Homer. Her name is mentioned twice in the *Iliad* and interestingly enough always in connection with her beauty. Thus in Book xiii we are told that the Cretan hero, Idomeneus, during his *aristeia* killed three important antagonists, among them Orthryoneus. Orthryoneus was a suitor for Priam's daughter Cassandra, the most beautiful daughter of the Trojan king, for whose hand he undertook the unattainable task of driving the Achaeans out of the land of Troy and as a consequence he got killed.[326] Cassandra then reappears in the last book; equal to the beauty of golden Aphrodite,[327] she is the first who having gone on a vantage point in the citadel, sees Priam bringing back to Troy the body of his slain son, Hector.

But her iliadic past and her appearance in Homer[328] are hard to square with the version we know from the post-Homeric epic Cycle. Cassandra's story was treated in at least two Cyclic poems (*Little Iliad*, *Cypria*[329]) where her activities were extended as far from her minor role in the Homeric epic as to emerge as an inspired prophetess, a forerunner of grief and death. It is true that her marginal role in the *Iliad* left Cyclic poets considerable scope for innovation and expansion efficient enough to foster the later tradition of her as the most well-known byword for an unwelcome harbinger of doom. And this established image of her is going to be followed also by the lyric poets, namely Stesichorus[330] and Pindar[331] and fully developed during the 6th and 5th

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[325] For a thorough analytical survey of Cassandra's role in the Greek literature see Mason 1959, 80-93 and Glaesener 1955, 157-173.

[326] *Il.* 13.365-6: ἦτεε δὲ Πριάμοιο θυγατρῶν εἶδος ἀρίστην,| Κασσάνδρην, ἀνάεδνον, ὑπέσχετο δὲ μέγα ἔργον

[327] *Il.* 24.699: ἰκέλη χρυσῇ Ἀφροδίτῃ.

[328] Cf. Schol. Hom. *Δ.* 52 (I 454 Erbse) οὐ γὰρ οἶδεν αὐτὴν (sc. Κασσάνδραν) μάντιν ὁ ποιητής

[329] For Cassandra's role in the *Little* Iliad see Mason 1959, 82. But her prophetic ability is a datum that was first attested in the *Cypria* I, 39, 9-11 Bernabé = Procl. *Chrest.* 80 Seve ἔπειτα δὲ Ἀφροδίτης ὑποθεμένης ναυπηγεῖται, καὶ Ἕλενος περὶ τῶν μελλόντων αὐτοῖς προθεσπίζει, καὶ ἡ Ἀφροδίτη Αἰνείαν συμπλεῖν αὐτῷ κελεύει. καὶ Κασσάνδρα περὶ τῶν μελλόντων προδηλοῖ.

[330] Although Stesichorus' poetry is partially extant many a scholar maintains that in his *Iliupersis* the scattered references convey the impression that it is Cassandra who prophesies of the construction of the Trojan horse and tries in vain to sound a note of warning to the Trojans against its coming into the city. For more information cf. West 1971, 262-64 and Page 1973, 47-65.

[331] In *Pyth.* 11, 33 she is described as μάντιν κόραν

century B.C. by the tragic poets mainly Aeschylus and Euripides.[332] In this chapter emphasis will be laid on the latter's presentation of Cassandra as a yardstick by which to compare and to examine how much far Seneca was conditioned by the Aeschylean tradition in creating his own Cassandra.

Aeschylus dedicates a whole scene to Cassandra 258 lines long, which suggests that he meant it to be important.[333] But what has puzzled the commentators and has attracted much attention even the ancient times is the fact that although Aeschylus takes care to place her in the foreground of our attention nevertheless Cassandra remains for a long span of time (290 lines) a *persona muta*.[334] As Schein aptly remarks she is on stage but "utterly ignored for *c.* 170 lines, then neglected for *c.* 80 more, and then silent for about another 40 lines in the face of Clytemnestra's invitation and command to enter the palace."[335]

Cassandra enters the stage at line 782 with Agamemnon in his chariot, as a captive taken by the victorious king in the war. Her entrance is not announced, her name is not mentioned and for her silence no explanation is proffered. Rather Aeschylus creates a series of exchanges between Agamemnon and the Chorus, Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, and the Chorus and Clytemnestra that surround and emphasize Cassandra's silent presence. Attention to her is first drawn by Agamemnon's last words introducing her to Clytemnestra as ἐξαίρετον | ἄνθος, στρατοῦ δώρημα (954-55: "the choicest flower, my army's gift").[336] Just before yielding to Clytemnestra's persuasions and treading on the spread red carpet to meet

[332] Cassandra is also supposed to have been the protagonist in the lost Sophoclean tragedies *Lakonian Women*, *Captive Women* and *Locrian Ajax*. In Euripides Cassandra appears both in his lost tragedy *Alexandros* and in the *Trojan Women*. For more information on Euripides' Cassandra cf. Scodel 1980, 22-23, Coles 1974, 23-32; Hamilton 1985, 53-73; Papadopoulou 2002, 513-527 And for a comparison between the Euripidean and Aescylean Cassandra see Mason op. cit. (n. 1) 84-93; Neblung 1997, 68-71; Croally 1994, 228-231; Padel 1995, 38-40.

[333] Although it is a commonly held opinion that Sophocles was the first who had introduced into the tragedy the third speaking actor, Knox 1972, 104-124, at 110 sustains that Aeschylus himself uses this device. For while there is no scene in the *Agamemnon* having three speaking actors, Casssandra without a third speaking actor could not come on stage with Agamemnon and it's only for this entrance that a third actor is required.

[334] Although in Homer silence is considered to be a *decorum* for a woman (cf. *Od.* 1.356-59) Aeschylus' disposition to silent *personae* has been noticed and parodied by Aristophanes in his *Frogs* (911-915); Aristophanes presents Euripides quarrelling with Aeschylus over the right to occupy the "chair of tragedy", as a prize to be awarded to the best tragic poet, and accusing the latter of resorting to pure charlatanism in order to capture his spectators' attention while his play went on and on. For a detailed study of Aeschylean silences see Taplin 1972, 57-97.

[335] Cf. Schein 1982, 13.

[336] This phrase of Agamemnon, as well as other expressions throughout the whole scene of Cassandra's introduction to Clytemnestra have been considered as elements by which the motif of marriage is fleshed out. For more information on this see Rehm 1994, 44.

his death he centres his discussion around Cassandra demanding from his wife to welcome τὴν ξένην | τήνδε (950-51) with kindness into the palace; a demand that will not be met.

After the carpet scene and the choral song (975-1034) a renewal of interest in silent Cassandra will take place, as she will be the focal point of the exchange between the Chorus and Clytemnestra.[337] The latter having secured the success of her first plan – Agamemnon's murder – she comes again on stage to fetch Cassandra. Her first words colour to a significant extent her attitude towards her husband's concubine, whose name is heard for the first time till now. Clytemnestra's way of addressing ἔἴσω κομίζου καὶ σύ, Κασσάνδραν λέγω (1035) is not polite but rather "cold and coldly authoritative"[338] and the imperative tone of voice interspersed in her speech, points Cassandra's existence as an object acted upon and the queen's single abiding concern not to be disregarded. The language renders this perfectly clear. Note the imperative moods κομίζου (1035), ἔκβαινε (1039), μηδ' ὑπερφρόνει (1039), the repetition of δούλων (1038), δουλίας (1041), δούλοις (1045) and their bitter contrast to ἀρχαιοπλούτων δεσποτῶν (1043).[339] Clytemnestra urges Cassandra to yield to necessity (1042: ἀνάγκη)[340] and her command to dismount in order to enter the palace is phrased in strikingly similar terms to those she had used for Agamemnon before;[341] but whilst her bidding was previously couched in an "almost nauseating flattery"[342] this time she employs, as Fraenkel aptly remarks, a rather brusque manner of curt order.[343]

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[337] Taplin 1972, 77 notes that Aeschylus by shifting the focus of his play sometimes to Cassandra sometimes to the purple cloth and sometimes to the choral song "plays a delicate – and unusual – game with his audience …aiming at having a vague curiosity about her, and yet not to ask specific questions."

[338] Cf. Karamitrou 1999, 381.

[339] See Denniston and Page 1957, 160 who underline that Clytemnestra whenever the occasion arises wounds Cassandra. Apart from the sarcastic example she offers as a consolation for Cassandra (the slavery of Hercules himself) the meaning that the phrase πολλῶν μέτα δούλων conveys is that Cassandra is now just one among a herd of slaves. Later on, however, this degrading status will be an accepted fact by Cassandra herself who will confess φέρειν γὰρ χρὴ τὸ δούλιον ζυγόν (1226).

[340] Reference to necessity in connection with Cassandra will also be made by the chorus at line 1071. Rivier, 1968, 37 points out that the word ἀνάγκη "mesure l'emprise de la puissance divine sur le tout de l'être humain, et dans des circonstances exceptionnelles, la vigueur don't elle use pour modeler le cours de sa vie, orienter sa conduite, investir sa consince."

[341] Compare the excessive blandishments that the lines ἔκβαιν' ἀπήνης τῆσδε, μὴ χαμαὶ τιθεὶς | τὸν σὸν πόδ, ὦναξ, Ἰλίου πορθήτορα (906-7) convey with the straightforward way of issuing orders that ἔκβαιν' ἀπήνης τῆσδε, μηδ' ὑπερφρόνει in line 1039 reveals.

[342] Cf. Lloyd-Jones 1970, 64 n. 895.

[343] Cf. Fraenkel 1950, vol. II, 467.

As Clytemnestra finishes her speech we are immediately curious to hear Cassandra's reaction. Instead she still remains mute and it is the Chorus that acting as a bridge between the two women and translating, so to say, the queen's order to Cassandra will speak and join in the conversation with Clytemnestra. In their conversation it is very clear where the chorus' sympathy lies. In the exchange which follows we can gauge the distance of their attitude in comparison with that of Clytemnestra's towards Cassandra. Their speech possesses a compassionate tone that is, on the one hand, achieved by their use of the optative πείθοι' ἄν (1049) replacing Clytemnestra's direct commands and their depiction of her as a newly captured wild animal (1063)[344] and on the other, manifestly illustrated by the verb ἐποικτίρω (1069) and their pathetic expression towards Cassandra ὦ τάλαινα (1070). But Cassandra's lack of understanding and the Chorus' feelings of pity accentuate the brutality of Clytemnestra's conduct, who being in haste to prepare the sacrifices comes to the conclusion that Cassandra's silence arises out of her ignorance of Greek[345] and her barbarian provenance.[346]

But can we read Cassandra's silence as dependent on her barbaric origin? As McClure underlines "Cassandra is quite remarkable for she is the only woman addressed by Clytemnestra in the play … and the only character impervious to her speech".[347] Why, then, does Aeschylus render this important presence a silent one?

Modern scholars adopt several distinctive readings. Goldhill, to start with, has put forward the suggestion that Clytemnestra's inability to render Cassandra her interlocutor manifests a breakdown of communication, which we will witness again when Cassandra will be "possessed of complete insight, an absolutely true language. But ironically enough, this is language which is incapable of being understood,

[344]This Chorus' remark that serves as a stage direction makes clear that Cassandra is not sitting immobile, insensible of her position; she is either cowering in terror or furiously agitated. Cf. Denniston and Page 1957, 164.

[345] McCoskey 1998, 45 maintains that "first emphasising Cassandra's ignorance of Greek, "the sign of culture and civilization," Clytemnestra then negates Cassandra's 'native' language by reducing her communicative potential to non-verbal means the waving of her 'barbarian hand'."

[346] Note her instruction to Cassandra σὺ δ' ἀντὶ φωνῆς φράζε καρβάνῳ χερί (1061 "instead of speech, make a sigh with thy barbarian hand"). But much as Clytemnestra may try to distance herself from the barbarian slave it has been observed that she herself resorts to a "vocabulary of barbarism" in her extravagant speech of praise to Agamemnon which evokes imitation and echoes of an Egyptian hymn of praise. For more information see Wilamovitz 1927, 287; Bacon 1961, 40-41and Hall 1989, 203-7. McCoskey 1998, 46 also suggests that "ironically, many of the ways in which Clytemnestra tries to symbolize Cassandra's s difference are the exact ones that the play uses to characterize Clytemnestra herself".

[347] Cf. McClure 1997, 122.

incapable of being received."[348] Taplin, on the other side, acknowledges Cassandra's silence as mystic and unexpected, and places his emphasis rather on its breaking which he sees as a means employed by Aeschylus to arouse all its mystery and lead us on to the crucial scene that will take us from mystification to insight.[349] Two more recent articles have indeed advanced the subject further. Thalmann's discussion was easily able to demonstrate Cassandra's speechlessness as a symbol of her resistance towards Clytemnestra's mastery of speech. "To try to resist Clytemnestra on her own terms would be dangerous and probably futile; but silence, and apparent absence of any response at all, is the one attitude that renders Clytemnestra's skill with language impotent."[350] Still more recently, in a substantial analysis of the scene, McClure could build on this and draws our attention to the double significance that this silence assumes. To quote her remark "Cassandra's silence…shows her conformity to prescribed gender roles and simultaneously reflects her social status as barbarian and other (1050-52). But … serves another purpose; it temporarily hinders Clytemnestra by rendering her fatal weapon, her control of language, ineffectual."[351] Hence Clytemnestra, as she is unable to employ upon Cassandra her rhetorical power and her expert use of persuasion[352], wastes no more time in being scorned in her efforts at "civilised restraint"[353] and makes her exit.

Once Clytemnestra departs, Cassandra's speech becomes possible. Being on stage as an embodiment of Trojan suffering, as a person in total desperation[354] she sets herself the typically female duty of lamenting.[355] Her speech, which betokens compliance with the normative and stereotypical feminine verbal genres, is fraught with a heavy preponderance of interjections followed by adjectives that connote self-

[348] Cf. Goldhill 1984, 26.
[349] Cf. Taplin 1972, 78.
[350] Cf. Thalmann 1985, 228-9.
[351] Cf. McClure 1999, 93-94.
[352] Morgan 1994, 123 examining the mirror-scenes throughout the whole trilogy, *Oresteia*, sustains that in Clytemnestra's unsuccessful attempt to put Cassandra under her persuasion spell lies a strong parallel with her failure to persuade Orestes in *Choephori.*
[353] Cf. Karamitrou 1999, 382.
[354] Cf. Rehm 1994, 45 who views Cassandra as the very epitome of "the innocent female dominated by males, both divine (Apollo) and mortal (Agamemnon). She even must suffer death at the hands of a woman "too much like a man"."
[355] In the whole scene the recurrence of terms that define Cassandra's song as a lament is striking: γόοις (1079), γοερὰ (1176), ἰὼ (1136, 1146, 1156, 1167), ἰοὺ, ἰού (1214), θροῶ (1137), ἀναστένω (1285), κωκύσουσα (1313), θρῆνον (1322). For lamentation in general in Greek tradition see Alexiou 1974.

condolence. Her wailing over her misfortunes starts with the cry ὀτοτοτοῖ[356] a common interjection typical feature of all lamentations. "In a play in which lamentation is conspicuously absent, it is noteworthy that the chorus immediately identify Cassandra as a mourner (θρηνητοῦ, 1075) who laments things that have happened in the remote past and things that have not yet happened".[357] Mazzoldi commenting on this scene points out that Cassandra's faculty of speech progressively grows: from two lines in the first pair of stanzas, to three lines in the second and third and finally five and six lines after the third pair onwards.[358]

After her glossolalic utterance, Cassandra sets out her startling disclosures. The first part of her speech, which is mainly in lyric metre (1072-117)[359] oscillates between two lodestones: the past and the present. In the field of her vision she describes Atreus' crime and the Thyestean banquet,[360] but as her vision progresses and reaches the present the act of the impending murder takes shape. Now she sees a wife ready to commit her husband's murder, ready to cast upon him the net of death and she reveals it to the chorus.

But it is something of a surprise to find that Cassandra's detailed knowledge is not met with the chorus' approval. At least, not always. For while they understand the full meaning that Cassandra's words convey in connection with the past facts and recognize her reputation as a prophetess καὶ μὴν κλέος σου μαντικὸν πεπυσμένοι | ἦμεν (1098-99: "thy fame to read the future had reached our ears") nevertheless when she starts her prophetic speech (1136-1172) their attempts to grasp her forebodings and what will really happen end in failure, be they never so close to it, through Cassandra's prophesies. In reality what poses problems for them is the

[356] According to Heirman's (1975, 258) analytical survey the ὀτοτοῖ is frequently used by all tragic poets in order to give utterance to the feelings predominantly of their female characters. What is more interesting though in the instances recorded by Heirman is that the Orientals outnumber the Greeks by six to four.

[357] Cf. McClure 1999, 95. And see also Foley 2001, 93 who comments that "…the barbarian slave concubine, with her repeated reminders of proper wifely etiquette and her demonstrated loyalty to the patriline, becomes a foil whose presence highlights the inappropriate and destructive behavior of the unfaithful wife and demands pity and sympathy for her plight from the audience onstage (the chorus) and off."

[358] Cf. Mazzoldi 2001, 185. She also draws our attention to the homonymic *jeu de mots* and the way Aeschylus plays upon the name of Apollo.

[359] Cf. Rehm 1994, 46 who observes that "Aeschylus raises the dramatic stakes by having Kassandra draw the Chorus out of dialogue meter and into her dance at the very moment she envisions Agamenon's death."

[360] Leahy 1969, 150 maintains that Cassandra's point of view of the Thyestean feast helps the audience evaluate Aegisthus' version of the story when he will appear on stage saying nothing about Thyestes having committed the "first act of criminal folly and that Aegisthus' own side of the family is therefore also enmeshed in the ancient crime."

figurative use of language, and they are themselves unable to interpret Cassandra's imagistic and metaphorical prophecies.[361] Their misunderstanding is reflected in their words; they call her θεοφόρητος and liken her to Philomela's cry, as if enthousiasmos and uninterrupted mourning were one and the same thing.[362]

But Cassandra tries her last resources of persuasion. In the second part of her speech (1178-1330 spoken) wishing to persuade them "she employs the common argument that the truth of her visions of the past should prove the truth of her prophecies about the future"[363] and in order to make her words more cogent she discloses to them that Apollo was the source of her prophetic powers and how he had bestowed his favour on herself.[364] For a moment it seems that the communication between Cassandra and the chorus has been restored since they confess: ἡμῖν γε μὲν δὴ πιστὰ θεσπίζειν δοκεῖς (1213: "and yet to us at least the prophecies thou utterest seem true enough".)

Hence Cassandra starts again revealing the impending murder; but she employs the striking metaphors (cowardly wolf, amphisbaena)[365] to refer to its perpetrators and this, together with her imaginative language, render once more her words incomprehensible to the chorus (line 1245). Not even when she explicitly states Ἀγαμέμνονός σέ φημ' ἐπόψεσθαι μόρον (1246: "I say you shalt look upon Agamemnon dead") do they feel disposed to believe her. They still know and ignore just as it suits the plot, and their question τίνος πρὸς ἀνδρὸς τοῦτ' ἄχος πορσύνεται; (1251: "what man is he that contrived this wickedness?"), while Cassandra had unequivocally spoken of a woman ready to slay a husband (1231), exhibits the chorus as being in a total state of bewilderment and in a total lack of understanding.

The prophet, schooled to lose her credibility, is rejected once again. She starts her last speech and this time she puts her emphasis on her own misery, the tragedy of her position, and on her death. Distressed by grief she feels a sensation of heat and

[361] See Morgan 1994, 125. Cf. also Knox 1972, 114 who points out that when Cassandra does speak "only two reactions are possible: bewilderment…or rejection."
[362] For a comparison between Philomela's and Cassandra's plight see Marino 1974, 30-31.
[363] Cf. Denniston and Page 1957, 166.
[364] Much acumen has been lavished by many commentators on answering the puzzling question whether the story of Cassandra's treatment by Apollo as given here was Aeschylus' own invention. For more information cf. Leahy 1969, 152-177; Kovacs 1987, 326-33, and Fraenkel 1950, 554-555, vol. III.
[365] *Ag.* 1224, 1233. For the metaphors Cassandra employs in her prophetic speech see Garson 1983, 33-39.

breaks into her initial shout; Mazzoldi sustains that "il fuoco (πῦρ) … rappresenta la concretizzazione della divinità che prende possesso di lei per l'ultima volta. Il grido ὀτοτοῖ, accompagnato dall'invocazione ad Apollo (1257), costituisce la ripresa della formula rituale con cui si era aperta la sua divinazione."[366] What differentiates this prophetic speech from the previous ones is the fact that Cassandra's visions leave the past and present and extend into the future, disclosing the coming of Orestes as the avenger of her murder. Consoling herself with that thought and conscious of Troy's total destruction she is ready to face her impending death and finishes her speech dwelling on the vicissitudes and fickleness of human fortune (1327-1330). "Through the madness and misery and the phantasmagoria of terrifying images that beset her mind, there comes from time to time, and especially at last, a large sense of the nature of human affairs and unbreakable strength of spirit."[367] And this startling contradiction is the part and parcel of Aeschylus' presentation of Cassandra. Distressed by grief, and gifted with a prophetic power still she never lacks the acumen and self-possession necessary to enable her to arrange her thoughts and express them coherently.

Although her prophetic power penetrates the whole scene nevertheless modern scholars[368] hold unanimously the opinion that Cassandra is not at all a mad speaker. "She is not irrevocably out of her mind, but her observations and thoughts are described in singularly coherent order, and for the most part in straightforward language."[369] The only references to her being mad or possessed by Apollo are made by Clytemnestra in line 1064 (μαίνεταί) and by the chorus when they call her θεοφόρητος (1140) and express their certainty that a δαίμων has fallen upon her (1175). And one might be tempted to think that Clytemnestra's and the chorus' estimations can easily be explained: the former being unable to accept the prophetess' insubordination to her power and orders, and the latter being unwilling to accept as true what Cassandra reveals about Agamemnon's murder. But what interpretation would we place on Cassandra's own words when she speaks about ὀρθομαντείας πόνος (1215) and πῦρ (1256)? O'Brien-Moore points out that by these two hints

[366] Cf. Mazzoldi 2001, 198.
[367] Cf. Karamitrou 1999, 387. Cf. also Bollack 1981, 9-13.
[368] Cf. Denniston and Page 1957, 165; Padel 1995, 38-40; O'Brien – Moore 1924, 96-101.
[369] Cf. Heirman 1975, 266.

Aeschylus might have wanted to "indicate that the god in some fashion entered Cassandra's body, possessed her, but if so it is very hazily indicated."[370]

In conclusion we can but agree with Schein, who aptly points out that in Aeschylus "[Cassandra] is gifted with a power which is divine, and to that extent she is more than human. But at the same time, her helplessness, suffering, and imminent death clearly indicate her mortality, and the contradiction between this mortality and that divine power makes her plight especially moving."[371]

Cassandra in Seneca

Prophecy delivered by a divinity, a sheer or a shade has always been a favourite device among the tragic and epic poets[372] in order to generate suspense in the narrative through sporadic clues and to pave the way for the resolution of the action and the fate of their characters.

In Seneca's tragedies, however, the gods are silent and do no t become involved in the plot, leaving the characters alone with their problems and their sufferings.[373] Thus, in the absence of the divine apparatus and by abandoning the use of the traditional celestial machinery, Seneca cuts himself from the opportunity to use the gods as his prophetic spokesmen. He entrusted therefore prophecy to those qualified agents to predict the future, namely ghosts[374] and mortals who are prophetically endowed.

Seneca's *Agamemnon* is a clear case in point since in this tragedy the mantic function is entrusted not only to a ghost[375] but also to a prophetess who is conversant with the sphere of manticism, Cassandra.

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[370] Cf. O'Brien – Moore 1924, 97.
[371] Cf. Schein 1982, 12.
[372] For more information on the use of prophecy as an epic device cf. Moore 1921, 100.
[373] Cf. Wesolowska 1990, 81.
[374] Seneca's predilection for employing ghosts in his tragedies, in the furtherance of his own literary agenda has been recorded early enough. Cf. Eliot 1927 xxix, and Rose 1960, 373.
[375] Superhuman apparitions, a stylistic device commonly used by Seneca in his prologues is attested also in *Herc.Fur* and *Thy.* For a detailed analysis of the occurrences of the supernatural see Braginton, 1933. Although nothing certain can be said of the chronological composition of Seneca's tragedies Shelton, 1977, 34 comparing the similar opening scenes of *Ag.* and *Thy.* concluded that *Ag.* was

My intention in this chapter is not only to present my reading of the Senecan Cassandra. Rather, I aim to examine the way Seneca presents the prophetess Cassandra and whether he can be seen modelling his character with an eye to the primary prototype which Aeschylus had depicted in his tragedy. My discussion will advance in two stages: first I will sketch an outline of Cassandra, and then I shall consider how far this character corresponds with the Aeschylus' one.

When the play begins, the ghost of Thyestes appears on stage.[376] He had come in the dead of night from the nether world from where he has been released only for a limited time. His restricted appearance (56 lines long) has a dual-purpose function;[377] on the one hand he will explain to the audience the situation in the house of Agamemnon from a position of a superior knowledge[378] and on the other he will reveal the mainspring and the leitmotiv of the whole play, namely the lust for revenge which had destroyed the house of Tantalus and will continue in doing so.[379] His expository monologue[380] shot through with appalling visions and a catalogue of famous sinners starts with a recollection of the crimes of Tantalus and of Atreus.

Both of them belong to the past, nevertheless their recollection is "so painful…that a grotesque situation occurs when [Thyestes] wants to flee back to the horrors of the Underworld"[381]: *libet reverti* (v. 12: "I want to go back"). But his extensive knowledge of the past does not only fill in some of the background; it also proceeds up to the point at which the narrative proper begins, and anticipates (*libet reverti*) that the atrocity which is going to take place on the stage may even scare the author/witness of other terrible crimes. Agamemnon is about to return home to Argos and the audience hears Thyestes anticipating [ ] Agamemnon's doomed destiny[382]:

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composed before *Thy.* maintaining that "both contain elements of Senecan innovation, but also that Seneca used first in *Ag.* techniques which he improved when he later wrote *Thy.*" For other opinions that *Ag.* is earlier see also Leo 1878, 133; Hansen 1934, 60-67; Fitch 1981, 289-307 and more recently Nisbet 1990, 95-114. For a different view cf. Birt 1911, 352 and Calder III 1976, 27-36.

[376] Cf. Paratore 1988, 275 who sustains that this apparition of Thyestes' ghost "è indubbiamente esemplata su quella dell' ombra di Clitemestra nelle *Eumenidi* eschilee, che stimola le Erinni a perseguitare Oreste."

[377] Cf. Shelton 1977, 36.

[378] See Shelton 1983, 162 who aptly remarks that Thyestes "…is not an unbiased observer, because he had once been a participant in the grisly affairs of Argos and because he carried with him to the Underworld his desire for revenge."

[379] Viansino 1993, vol. II, 150 marks the different interpretation that Thyestes and Cassandra place on Agamemnon's murder; for the former it is an act of family revenge, whereas for Cassandra it is a political revenge.

[380] For Seneca's introductory monologues as an Euripidean characteristic see Tarrant 1976, 157-161.

[381] Shelton 1983, 160.

[382] Tarrant 1976, 178 who aptly remarks that the future of the participle *daturus* stresses the inevitability of Agamemnon's death.

adest – daturus coniugi iugulum suae (v. 43: "and is here – doomed to offer his throat to his own wife"). What is interesting enough is that all the information about the king's impending death is telescoped in a single line. Yet this needs take us by no surprise since Thyestes is mainly given the role of witnessing the past and comparing it to the present, whereas the whole arrangement of the plot is designed by Seneca to entrust to a more clairvoyant *persona* the vital prophecy of Agamemnon's murder namely to the prophetess Cassandra.

Cassandra's appearance on stage takes place in only two of the five acts, and it has always puzzled the scholars as to whether - despite her limited presence on the scene - she should be viewed as the real protagonist of the drama.[383] At any rate even though she does not appear until half way through the play she has been talked about almost from the beginning and from the moment of her entrance at 586-8 "she dominates the play, providing a model of triumphal human behaviour"[384] and she is the one who utters the last word of the tragedy. To our surprise not only did she, a captive, precede Agamemnon's, the king's, arrival but she has been given a rather spectacular entrance[385]: she arrives as a leader of the Trojan *thiasos*, replete with attendants and accompanied by a numerous retinue, whereas Agamemnon enters alone with his wife.[386] The impression we have received from the particular references made to her by the other characters is refined and the terms they use to describe Cassandra invite us to accept her as an inspired prophetess of Phoebus. Thus Aegisthus sees her as *famula veridici dei* (v. 255: "the handmaid of the prophetic god") stressing at the same time that she overshadows the other *paelices* that accompany Agamemnon *sola sed turba eminet* (v. 254: "but one stands out from the crowd").[387] For Clytemnestra she is a *sacra virgo* (v. 177: "a holy virgin") and a *Phrygiae vatis* (v. 189: "the Phrygian prophet") and just before Cassandra's entrance to the scene, the terms she uses in order to present her *celso gradu* (v. 587: "with

[383] For Corsaro 1978-79, 322 Cassandra is the incarnation of the Stoic virtue and dignity and consequently the real protagonist since "…non poteva essere altrimenti per un filosofo come Seneca, per il quale filosofare è imparare a morire." For a contrary view see Giomini 1956, 7; Croisille 1964, 465 and Motto and Clark 1985, 141.
[384] Cf. Boyle 1997, 42.
[385] See Casali 1995, 176.
[386] Cf. Calder III 1976, 32.
[387] Marcucci 1994, 196 n.20 draws our attention to the similar depiction of Iole's entrance into the city in the XI epistle of the *Heroides*, in the letter of the Ovidian Deianira to Hercules (125-130) and considers "…questo comportamento, questo incedere nella città vittoriosa, una caratteristica delle prigioniere amanti del vincitore e, per questa loro condizione per così dire privilegiata, sprezzanti del loro status di *captivae*." For another example cf. Ov. *Fast.*, III. 467.

proud step"), *effrena Phoebas entheas laurus quatit* (v. 588: "theunbridled priestess of Phoebus shakes the god-filled laurel") all suggest that Cassandra has been thrown into a prophetic perception.

And this is obvious enough from the first words she utters. Once she arrives on the stage we are soon confronted with her ecstatic state. The authoritative tone and the commands she issues towards the chorus, her fellow Trojan women,[388] colour to a significant extent that Cassandra is a far cry from the captive posture we would expect she should have adopted. Note the imperative *cohibete lacrimas* (v. 659: "hold back the tears") with which she begins her speech and the other two *vestra ...| lugete gemitu funera* (vv. 660-61: "mourn your own dead") and *cladibus questus meis | removete* (vv. 663-64: "keep your keening apart from my tragedies") in her first five lines of her speech with which she "discourages the chorus [to mourn] while proposing herself as suitable to the task."[389] The chorus' sympathy for Cassandra can easily be explained by the bonds of womanhood as well as friendship and loyalty towards their former young princess. But Cassandra, herself, even forbids the Trojan chorus to cry at all; much less would she have allowed them to grieve for her own disasters.

There is nothing that can console her; not even the chorus' suggestion that the power of communal mourning is able to reduce the bitter pain of grief (*iuvat in medium | deflere suos* vv. 666-67: "it helps to mourn one's losses in companion").[390] She starts tearing the holy fillets from her head; for now she knows that there is no way to resist the harsh force of the fortune and that even if she supplicates it will be to no purpose: she is the last surviving descendant of Priam's family who suffers through the destruction of Troy. No words what so ever are pledged to describe the crimes concerning the blood – feud between Atreus and Thyestes. Her speech to the Trojan women has a specific Trojan scope, and is devoted to the outrages that have been committed against her country and her family by the Greeks.[391] And this

[388] Pratt 1983, 113 has argued that in order "to bring out the Trojan side of the issue, Seneca shifts from the chorus of Greek women to a chorus of Trojan captive women", while Calder III 1975, 34 sees this secondary chorus as Seneca's innovation in order to substitute for Aeschylus' old men. Apart from *Ag.* a secondary chorus is also employed in the *H. F.* and in the *H. O.* For more details cf. Sutton 1986, 41-42 and Davis 1993, 107.
[389] Cf. Tarrant 1976, 296.
[390] Cf. Fantham 1981-82, 125.
[391] Cf. Sapio 1995, 7 who neatly comments that "la vendetta della profetessa si carica … di una sfumatura patriottica che manca in Eschilo."

recollection of her family's sorrows, which reaches a p eak with Hecuba's metamorphosis, drives Cassandra into a fit of ecstatic passion.

This passion is made visible in her physical behaviour and is depicted in the chorus' words at lines 710-719: suddenly she becomes scenically immobile (v. 710 s*ilet repente*), with a pale complexion (v. 710 *pallor*) and her body shaking with fear. Her frenzy grows worse, testified by her erected fillets (v. 712 *stetere vittae*), her dishevelled hair (v. 712 *mollis horrescit coma*), palpitating heart, and fixed eyes. And the chorus finish her description recognizing that before their eyes they behold a *maenas impatiens dei* (v. 719: "a maenad unwilling to endure the god").[392] But it is not only the Trojan chorus that notice her prophetic status; also Cassandra recognizes it in herself as her apostrophe to Phoebus manifestly denotes *cui nunc vagor vesana? cui bacchor furens?* | *iam Troia cecidit: falsa quid vates ago?* (vv. 724-725: "for whom do I drift in frenzy now? for whom do I play the crazed maenad? Now Troy has fallen, what business have I, as a failed prophetess?").

Moreover these distraught questions also illustrate Cassandra's hopelessness and the dire straits she is in. Troy has fallen already and the general mood is one of complete and utter despair. In this first speech of hers, indeed, we can detect some motifs of the desperation speech that can be found in the poetry mainly of the fifth century.[393] Thus Cassandra states summarily at the beginning (vv. 695-709) the situation of her family and of her town; no one is left: her father, her brothers and sisters have all perished (vv. 699-701: *quae patria restat, quis pater, quae iam soror?* | *bibere tumuli sanguinem atque arae meum.* | *quid illa felix turba fraterni gregis?*). After the siege nothing remained in Troy apart from sad old men and the empty palace (vv. 702-703: *regia miseri senes* | *vacua relicti*). Then in the rest of her speech there are immanent the fore mentioned tell-tale questions: what have I to do? where am I? (vv. 725-726: *quid...ago?* | *ubi sum?*). And the prophetess concludes with the decision to die: you father I follow (v. 742: *te sequor,... pater*); today this skiff of Phlegethon shall bear royal souls (v. 752-53: *haec hodie ratis* | *Phlegethontis atri regias animas vehet*). This overwhelming desire of Cassandra for the underworld, similar to what Thyestes earlier had longed for, emphasizes "il piacere di lasciare un

[392] The term *maenas* is always connoting women being in a state of possession. Cf. *Med.* 382, 806,849,
[393] See Fowler 1987, 5-38. The structure of a desperation speech consists of four parts. It begins with a cry of anguish followed by a rhetorical question (what should I do? Or, where should I go?) and then the hero makes some impossible suggestions also in form of questions, which will be rejected. The speech concludes with the hero's proposed action that, in case of a heroic figure, is more often than not the decision to suicide or to die.

mondo in cui non le è rimasto alcun affetto, per ritrovare quelli perduti."[394] It is as if Cassandra's despair concerns not only the fall of Troy, but the conclusion of her role as a prophetess of ruin (the ruin of Troy); cf. 724-5: *cui bacchor furens? | iam Troia cecidit.*

Just before carrying out her wish she had a clairvoyant vision, which introduces her to a new prophetic task. Her indulgence in her reverie is defined by the polar opposition of *lux* and *nox* at line 726. This opposition works on a number of levels. Fundamentally, it is a distinction between darkness and light, night and day. But metaphorically the distinction is between madness and sanity and as Tarrant notes this sudden darkness is a mark of the onset of madness and hallucinations.[395] Her prophetic eyes envision a mad Spartan woman (vv. 734-36: *vecors… Lacaena cultu*) carrying a sword. But her prevision of Clytemnestra's act is conveyed behind the barrage of the animal imagery and figurative language she uses: the king of the beasts will soon be defeated by his lioness (vv. 738-40: *victor ferarum … | morsus cruentos passus audacis leae*)[396] and thus it both renders hard for the audience to grasp the full importance of her speech and underlines the radical un-naturality of what is going to happen on the scene.

And as Cassandra finishes her first speech changing from trimeters to a lyric meters she beholds a band of avenging furies.[397] But prophesying has exhausted her and as her clairvoyant vision has reached its utmost, the prophetess suddenly falls to the ground in a faint. The chorus[398] undertake the task to revive her as the victorious king is seen to approach the stage with his wife.

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[394] Cf. Sapio 1995, 8.

[395] Cf. Tarrant 1976, 307.

[396] Tarrant 1976, 309 comments that Cassandra depicts Agamemnon's murder as an unnatural act since it was a commonplace that animals of the same breed do not attack each other.

[397] This part of Cassandra's speech has always puzzled scholars not only because it is sung in lyric meters but mainly because there is no clear reference to whom the lines 766-768 allude and the commentators do not share the same way of thinking. Thus, Calder III 1974, 227-228 maintains that these lines refer to Priam and recall *Aen.* 2.557-58; for Richter the owner of the *vastum corpus* is Tantalus while for Viansino it is Geryon.

[398] Hardly any other part of this tragedy has been pulled so much hither and thither as this choral song. Much controversy surrounds the issue whether the lines 777-781 must be attributed to the Trojan or to the Argive women. As far as Cadler III 1975, 34 is concerned, these lines are the last words the Trojan chorus utter before leaving the stage with Clytemnestra. But Grimal 1981, 134-135 suggests a rather different interpretation from the one Calder III offers us. According to him the lines 777-781 are spoken by the chorus of Argive women and they demonstrate their concern towards Cassandra. "Il est important que les femmes d'Argos aient pitié de Cassandre. Leur geste introduit une nuance de pathétique. En même temps, elles savent que le premier objet qui frappera ses regards au seuil du palais soit le corps évanoui de la jeune femme. Cela ne pourrait être que de mauvais augure. Pitié et *religio* s'unissent dans leur esprit."

The whole episode of Agamemnon's arrival on stage deserves our attention not solely because of the revealing dialogue between Agamemnon and Cassandra, who after his orders to the slaves comes to life again, but also because of the way Seneca has chosen to present his title-hero. For Motto and Clark Agamemnon's depiction in the midst of the hostile captive chorus is richly ironic and pathetic.[399] In the exchange that follows between him and Cassandra, Agamemnon's lack of understanding the prophetess's forebodings reminds us of the bewildered Aeschylean chorus and their inability to interpret Cassandra's premonition. He speaks about festal days and preaches security to his slave whereas Cassandra speaks about death[400] as a haven of tranquility *mihi mori est securitas* (v. 797: "for me death is security")[401] and her words allude to an equation between the victorious king and the vanquished Trojans, an idea which is going to prevail in Cassandra's next speech. But he pays no heed what so ever to her;[402] it is next to impossible for him to understand that it is too early to declare his arrival to his home and wife[403] a victory. And the king exits ordering his slaves to guard Cassandra in order to preserve her from self-destruction, until she throws off the god's influence (v. 800: *dum excutiat deum*).

As the Argive king leaves the stage, the chorus sing of another "mighty child of Argos", namely Hercules. Their glorifying ode dwells on t he extraordinary circumstances of Hercules' birth and on hi s labors and they finish their song

[399] Motto and Clark 1985,139. Cf. Corsaro 1978, 304 and also the interesting comment that Grimal, 1981, 136 offers us: "Sénèque a cetrainement voulu considerer….le roi dans sa réalité d'homme, non dans la majesté de sa condition. … Mais au moment même où il va franchir le seuil de sa maison, retrouvant ainsi … sa vie familière, c'ést la vue de Cassandre qui frappe son regard, et, à ce spectacle, il n'ést plus un roi puissant, mais un homme aimant, amoureux, qui n'a souci plus urgent que de reanimer la jeune fille."

[400] As Mazzoli 1993, 207 remarks neither Agamemnon nor Cassendra fear death but for different reason each: "Cassandra perché, realizzando l'opzione del *sapiens*, non la giudica un pericolo, anzi si prepara fin d'ora con "stoica" determinazione al cammino dell'Ade già percorso dal suo sguardo invasato nei vv. 750-774; Agamennone perché, pur considerandola, viceversa, *periclum*, se ne ritiene, dal cieco punto di vista del *potens*, personalmente immune."

[401] Death is also depicted by the Trojan slaves as a *portus aeterna placidus quiete* (592: "a tranquil harbour of eternal calm"). Cf. also Mader 1982, 79 who sustains that "against a l ife of slavery Cassandra holds up the ideal of the liberty afforded by death."

[402] Cf. Shelton 1983, 172 who notes that in the dialogue between Agamemnon and Cassandra emphasis is laid on the contrast between false blessings and true, between ignorance and wisdom.

[403] What is striking also in this episode is the reigned silence of Clytemnestra. But is she on the stage during Agamemnon's and Cassandra's dialogue? The answer to the question must be in the affirmative since as the chorus inform us in 780, she has been arrived on stage with her husband and from that moment she remains silent throughout Agamemnon's and Cassandra's dialogue. It is evident enough that Seneca did not want to follow Aeschylus' elaborated encounter scene of the two spouses. Cf. Grimal 1981,132 who comments that "La rencontre des deus époux sera seulement mimée, muette, le drama sera tout entire dans les attitudes et les gestes."

comparing Agamemnon and Hercules as conquerors of Troy (v. 865). [404] Thus, as S. Marcucci comments "tutto il quarto coro… serve per introdurre la "catastrofe" tragica, serve per ricordare al lettore quello che fin dall'inizio del drama era dato per sottinteso: l'utilizzo di uno schema narrativo uguale per la vicenda di Ercole e quella di Agamennone non poteva che condurre quest'ultimo a morire come il suo predecessore."[405]

After this choral song the fifth act of the play, where a generous amount of space is allotted to Cassandra's prophecy of Agamemnon's murder, begins. Now the prophetess all alone on the stage launches into her vision, but in a rather unusual way. As Sapio aptly remarks "il discorso – visione consente il passaggio dall'esterno all'interno e apre alla mente dello spettatore le porte della reggia mostrando una scena inaccessibile ai suoi occhi."[406] Her speech bears strong resemblance to a classical messenger speech not only because of description of the offstage murder of Agamemnon at the same moment that it, itself, takes place but mainly because of the vocabulary of vision the prophetess employs and to which our attention is drawn.[407] Note the verbs *video*,[408] *spectemus* and the nouns *oculis*, and *imago* that occurred within only three lines (vv. 873-75).

What also needs attention in her speech, before we examine her prophecy, is the oddity in her expression *vicimus victi Phryges* (v. 869: "we have conquered, we conquered Phrygians!"). This paradox penetrates the whole tragedy since the motif *vincere*/*vinci* is the part and parcel of the drama. Thus earlier, Clytemnestra referred to Agamemnon as *captae captus* (v. 175) and Eurybates, when in his narration speaks of Agamemnon's humiliating return, employs the same oxymoric pattern: *...victo similes...*|*...victor* (vv. 412-13: "…though a conqueror, like one conquered"). And here Cassandra annihilates the victors by appropriating their victory. As Mader comments, this line "describes the "reversal", from physical defeat to metaphorical

[404] A similar comparison, although hardly flattering, between the two Argive heroes has already been stressed prior in the play by the Trojan chorus in 613: in the case of Hercules Troy was conquered by his supreme forces whereas in the case of Agamemnon it was the deception that leaded to its seizure.
[405] Marcucci 1994, 203.
[406] Cf. Sapio 1995, 10.
[407] For more information on Cassandra's speech as ἀγγελικὴν ῥῆσιν see Amoroso 1981, 336 and Corsaro 1978, 317-319. See also Tarrant 1978, 254 who draws our attention to an exact parallel with Cassandra's offstage description from a papyrus fragment of a postclassical tragedy (*P. Oxy.* 2746).
[408] Cf. La Penna 1987, 99-119 for a discussion on *vidi* "evocativo – patetico" and *vidi* "didascalico."

victory, of Cassandra and the Trojans… and the idea of defeat' is then extended to the Greeks."[409]

But it is high time Cassandra started *ex officio* her prediction. Her prophetic eyes behold a feast spread into the palace and Agamemnon in broidered vestments sitting on a lofty couch. Indeed Seneca abandoning the Aeschylean version and follows Homer and Sophocles since he chooses the banquet hall as the setting of his description of Agamemnon's murder.[410] This permits him to let Cassandra's prophecy about the future start exactly at the same point where the retrospective of Thyestes had begun (v. 11), and to naturally connect — thanks also to the witnessing role of the latter — the new atrocity going to take place in the house of the Atreides to the atrocius banquet of Thyestes.

In this last vision of hers (vv. 875-909), the dramatic crux of the whole play, two points present themselves with immediate attraction. To start with it is interesting the way in which Cassandra describes the murder scene and the comments she makes draw a parallelism between the events at Troy and at Argos and enhance the parity of the common hazard and similar fate between Agamemnon and Priam. Thus, the Argive banquet reminds her of Priam's feast in order to celebrate the victory he thought he had won against the Greeks; the couches gleam with Trojan purple (v. 877: *ostro lectus Iliaco nitet*) and the wine is served in the golden cups of Assaracus (v. 878: *merumque in auro veteris Assaraci trahunt*). And what grows more ominous is that Agamemnon is wearing the proud spoils once belonging to Priam (vv. 879-880: *et ipse picta veste sublimis iacet, | Priami superbas corpore exuvias gerens*),[411] and the donning of the Trojan king's clothes will soon grant him "a victory as hollow as Priam's."[412]

But apart from that what is more surprising is Cassandra's vision itself (vv. 881-909). Her prophetic powers beset her mind and her vision is drawn closer and closer to the impending murder; however she still is singularly in her right mind and the straightforward language she employs and the information she furnishes us with

[409] Cf. Mader 1982, 80.
[410] Cf. *Od.* 4.524-37, 11.409-24 and *El.* 203.
[411] Aricò 1990, 38 perceives Agamemnon's act to throw off the Trojan *exuviae* and to put on the mantle woven by Clytemnestra's hand, by a woman and at the same time an enemy, as the final degradation of the hero.
[412] Shelton 1983, 175. See also Corsaro 1978, 319 who notices that "…nelle parole allucinate della Cassandra senecana i fatti della casa dei Pelopidi rimangono in ombra, mentre balzano in primo piano i motivi dell'*Iliupersis* e della rivalsa d'Ilio, sanzionata appunto dalla morte ingominiosa del *rex regum*."

do not allow for a margin of error or misunderstanding. Thus we could not but agree with Sapio who comments that "l'uso puntuale dei pronomi e dei patrominici (v. 897 e 907) non lascia spazio ad indeterminatezze."[413]

After the delivery of her prophecy Cassandra remains silent and we won't hear from her again not until the end of the play. The last words of the tragedy belong to her: *veniet et vobis furor* (1012: "Madness will come upon you too"). As Giomini aptly remarks with that phrase "si chiude il drama di Cassandra; si apre quello di Clitemnestra e di Egisto,"[414] since Cassandra alludes to the coming of Orestes[415] and to his killing Clytemnestra and Aegisthus as an act of revenge. And Cassandra marches off to meet her death: *ne trahite, vestros ipsa praecedam gradus* (v. 1004: "Do not drag me, I shall walk before you"). Not less than Thyestes "she is happy to die because death will liberate her from the ugliness of this world."[416]

Conclusion

In the foregoing outline we have tried to show the way Seneca depicts the prophetess Cassandra. Now it's high time we discussed how far the Senecan design of Cassandra distances from the primary prototype which Aeschylus had depicted in his tragedy.

The Aeschylean tradition has saddled Cassandra with the role of the inspired forerunner of death and grief who when she speaks bewilderment and rejection could only result. Her figurative language and the metaphors she uses prevent the chorus and the audience from grasping the full meaning of her words. For them she is just a crying nightingale, a crying Philomela. Her vision oscillates between the past and the present and extends into the future. Sapio comments that "… in Eschilo … l'assassinio del re si legge attraverso un mosaico che si ricostruisce per mezzo di tasselli sparsi in un ordine che non è logico ma proprio del delirio della mente, in cui

[413] Cf. Sapio 1995, 11.
[414] Giomini 1956,206. Cf. also Caviglia 164.
[415] Cf. Calder III 1976, 36.
[416] Cf. Shelton 1983, 177.

il ricorso continuo ad allusioni non comprensibili al coro e a metafore riprese dal mondo animale contribuiscono all'indistinzione della visione."[417]

But does Seneca in describing his Cassandra hark back to his predecessor? I believe the answer to be in the negative. Quite recently, in opposition to Tarrant's view that "Seneca had never read Aeschylus"[418] J. Lavery argued, charting the points of contact between Seneca's *Agamemnon* and Aeschylus' one, that although there is a strong inference that Seneca was aware of Aeschylus's play nevertheless his Cassandra is "not that close to the woman of *Agamemnon*". [419]

Further support for this assumption is to be found in the pointed remark Tarrant made in his commentary that "Seneca's source for a clairvoyant vision of Cassandra cannot be identified but such a theatrical stroke would suit a post-Euripidean tragedy". [420]

Still more recently in a substantial article S. Marcucci could built on this and has advanced the subject farther. Marcucci sustained that Seneca can be seen clearly modelling his Cassandra with an eye to her subsequent history in the Hellenistic theatre, namely in Lycophron's *Alexandra* noting that "Licofrone può essere considerato se non la fonte diretta di Seneca, almeno un quanto mai probabile mediatore."[421] And she produces establishing proofs: the use of present tense in both tragedies, the same structure of the discussion (Paris, Hector, Troilus), and mainly Cassandra's reference to *resurgis Troia* (v. 870) which also occurs in *Alexandra*. "Anche nell'autore ellenistico, Cassandra termina tutta la sua profezia parlando della 'rinascita' troiana in Roma, della potenza di una nuova Troia fondata da Enea, suo 'nipote' (vv. 1226-1231)."[422]

Lycophron's *Alexandra* has the form of a lengthy messenger speech,[423] written in iambic trimeters. The action of the play takes place at the time that Paris departed Troy for Sparta during which a messenger reports to Priam the prophesies

[417] Sapio 1995, 11. Parke and Wormell 1956, xxxv, also sustain that "the Cassandra's language is modelled on that of the Delphic responses, and there can be little doubt that she herself is in part the dramatic representation of the Pythia in ecstasy."
[418] Cf. Tarrant 1978, 213-63
[419] Cf. Lavery 2004, 192.
[420] Cf. Tarrant 1976, 336.
[421] Cf. Marcucci 1996, 89.
[422] Cf. Marcucci 1996, 95.
[423] For an attempt to assign the *Alexandra* to its proper literary genre see Fusillo 1984, 495-500; Fountoulakis 1998, 291-295 and West 2000, 153-166.

uttered by his daughter Cassandra (called here Alexandra[424]). Cassandra's vaticinations cover the Trojan War and its aftermath and predict the sufferings on the journey home and the failed returns of a number of veterans of the Greek host. And finally, the prophetess' inspired ravings culminate to a lengthy encomium of the rising power of Rome and the glory of Troy that shall be revived in Italy by Aeneas and the Romans who claim descent from the Trojans (vv.1226-1280)[425].

If we consider the fact that Lycophron is the only known forerunner of Seneca who charges Cassandra to narrate and re-examine the matter of Trojan war and the fall of Troy from the Trojan point of view it is possible and tempting to embrace Marcucci's point of view, since this tone of praise and optimism is a common denominator between the prophetic vision of the Senecan and Lycophronian Cassandra. Yet at the same time, apart from this obvious close link, one element I wish to highlight here is the different way each of the two authors present the rise of Rome.

To start with, on the one hand, Lycophron, as it has been maintained, [426] displays a thoroughgoing derogatory tone towards the Greek heroes and their exploits to such an extent that taints his story with a "destructive animus"[427] towards the Homeric version of the Trojan saga. Thus, Achilles the epitome of andreia, the archetypal relentless warrior of the *Iliad* is presented by Cassandra in a way that estranges him from his conventional glory. He is transformed into a risible and feminized character who, being in Skyros and dressed like a girl weaves at the loom (vv. 277-78 καὶ θῆλυν ἀμφὶ σῶμα τλήσεται πέπλον δῦναι, παρ' ἱστοῖς κερκίδος ψαύσας κρότων).[428] What is more, Lycophron allots to the martial Iliadic hero an attitude that runs counter and in striking contrast to the heroic glorified dimension Homer preserved for him as he directs our attention to Achilles' being terrified by

[424] For the name Alexandra as a designation in Lycophron of Priam's daughter see West 1984, 136 and Lambin 2003, 148.
[425] These lines have received a great deal of dispute over the problem of authorship and chronology of the play. Already in antiquity the *scholia vetera* have drawn the attention to the problem with the following observation: ἐντεῦθεν περὶ Ῥωμαίων λέγει καὶ Λυκόφρονος ἑτέρου νομιστέον εἶναι τὸ ποίημα, οὐ τοῦ γράψαντος τὴν τραγῳδίαν· συνήθης γὰρ ὢν Φιλαδέλφῳ οὐκ ἂν περὶ Ῥωμαίων διελέγετο. For a modern approach to the problem see Momigliano, 1942, 53-64 and 1945, 49-53; Hurst, 1976, 231-235; West, 1983, 114-135 and 1984, 127-151; Gigante Lanzara, 1998, 401-418 and 2000; Kosmetatou 2000, 32-53; Musti 2001, 201-26; Fantuzzi and Hunter 2002, 519-520.
[426] See Mazzoldi 2001, 250 who remarks that Lycophron prefers the version that "carichi il più possible di negatività i Greci o che li presenta in condizioni ridicole o degradanti."
[427] Cf. Hutchinson 1988, 258.
[428] Fantuzzi forthcoming remarks that Achilles' stay at Skyros is presented "as a sort of extreme, undue, and unnatural dishonour" for the hero. On the blame of Achilles in Lycophron's *Alexandra* see Durbec 2008, 13-30.

Hector in his dreams (vv. 280-81).[429] Besides, not by chance, the word κλέος that occurs three times in the whole poem is applicable only to Hector and Hecuba the victims of Achilles and Odysseus, of the two great Greek heroes of epic tradition.[430] Likewise, Odysseus receives by Lycophron the same humiliating treatment (vv. 648-819). Apart from the fact that his seven-years-long suffering on the island Calypso detained him is "reduced… to a brief and pleasurable tryst"[431] (v. 744), Cassandra presents Odysseus' wanderings in a way that negates his Homeric glory and heroism, since she suppresses his most distinguished trait, namely his sharp intelligence. Her hostile tone is not a whit washed down not even when her narration reaches upon Odysseus' safe return to his home land. Not only does she express her wish that Poseidon will steadily keep on pu rsuing Odysseus (vv. 766-769) now that he has reached Ithaca but she also makes the focus of her attention Penelope. The faithful par excellence wife of Odysseus, the most loyal and devoted character in the *Odyssey* is here in the most negative representation, described as whore, playing with a great air of propriety: βασσάρα σεμνῶς κασωρεύουσα (vv. 771-72). As Gigante Lanzara aptly remarks the word βασσάρα is a term that indicates literary the wolf "ma si estende metaforicamente a rappresentare la baccante in quanto donna rivestita di pellice e a sua volta evocatrice di orge".[432] Equally the way Cassandra refers to the fate of Agamemnon and to his murder by Clytemnestra (ll. 1099-1107) invites the reader to a reconsideration of the epic heroism. The whole murder scene is encapsulated in nine verses. The Greek chief, as a lamb, entangled in his bath in the meshes of the net tries to find with his blind hand a way among the tasseled seams (v. 1102: κροσσωτοὺς ῥαφάς). It has been pointed out that the word κροσσωτός, which is a common word, a word in everyday use in connection with the vividness of the whole murder-scene's description results in a "grotesque sharpness."[433] Thus, Lycophron as a result of the continuous diminishing of the deeds and the feats of the Greek chiefs and in general the Greek heroism he ends up praising the Romans.

[429] See West 2003, 79-95. This image apart from excite further ridicule presenting Achilles alarmed by a dream is in marked contrast with the account of Homer in *Il.* 22.136-38 where, when Achilles in relentless pursuit finally bears down upon Hector the latter flees in terror (Ἕκτορα δ', ὡς ἐνόησεν, ἔλε τρόμος·οὐδ' ἄρ' ἔτ' ἔτλη / αὖθι μένειν, ὀπίσω δὲ πύλας λίπε, βῆ δὲ φοβηθείς·).
[430] Cf. Durbec 2007, 431.
[431] Cf. Sens 2010, 310ff.
[432] Cf. Gigante Lanzara 1995, 93. For a consideration of Cassandra's "*Odyssey*" see Gigante Lanzara 1997, 43-68.
[433] Cf. Hutchinson 1988, 259.

On the other hand, in Seneca's *Agamemnon* the theme of *resurgis Troia* (v. 870) is a source of a great delight[434] for Cassandra and is seen as a recompense for the sufferings of the Trojans. Therefore, whereas Lycophron indirectly eulogizes Rome via a disparagement of the traditional greatness of the Greek heroes, Seneca reviews the Trojan War mainly as the germ from which the new national reality of Rome has to stem. He does not operate an explicit understatement of the values of the Greek heroes at Troy, but revises the perspective from which his Hellenistic predecessor has seen the Trojan War: the fall of Troy is only the prefix to the birth of Rome.

But the glorification of Rome is not the only substantial point of contact between Seneca's and Lycophron's Cassandra. Another feature that associates Seneca's Cassandra with the Lycophronian one, whereas at the same time distances the Senecan design from the predominant poetic trend drawn in the Aeschylean tragedy, is the role of the god Apollo in connection with the prophetess. In Aeschylus Cassandra asserts with emphasis that Apollo is responsible for her approaching death (vv. 1275-76 καὶ νῦν ὁ μάντις μάντιν ἐκπράξας ἐμέ / ἀπήγαγ' ἐς τοιάσδε θανάσιμους τύχας: "and now the prophet, having undone me, his prophetess, hath brought me to this deadly pass") [435], as she has offended the god and has made a wrong choice in denying Apollo's love (v. 1208 ξυναινέσασα Λοξίαν ἐψευσάμην: "I promised consent to Loxias, but broke my word"). But this element is entirely absent if we consider Cassandra's handling in Lycophron. In his case the prophetess does not openly charge Apollo as the source of the vicissitudes of her life. We only learn from her briefly that she has spurned the God's desire for her denying to him the joys of love (vv. 352-53: "I who spurned from my maiden bed the god Thoraios, Lord of Ptoön") and how he punished her by making her unable to convince the others of the truth of her prophesies (vv. 1454-56: "The Lesbian god of credence me deprived, and with false slanders overspread my words and my unerring skill in prophecy"). Although it is not said explicitly that Apollo inspires Cassandra "we are to assume that her knowledge emanates from the god."[436] The same, as we have already explain, we witness also in

[434] Degiovanni 2004, 386 comments that Cassandra's manifestation of delight seems to align her more to the Euripidean Cassandra, since it is a decisive step away from the anguish Cassandra displays in Aeschylus.
[435] See Fraenkel 1950, *ad loc.* For a different interpretation see Denniston and Page 1957, *ad loc* and Mazzoldi 2001, 97. For an answer to the question whether Aeschylean Cassandra was "an innocent victim of outrage or a sinner justly punished" see Kovacs 1987, 326-334.
[436] Cf. Lowe 2004, 309. Also Cusset 2006, 58 remarks "c'est la parole active de Cassandre qui donne une présence à Apollon; c'est le travail tortueux (et torturé) de la prophétesse qui crée le divin inspirateur."

Seneca. While we are encouraged, by the terms she is introduced to us, to accept Cassandra as the inspired prophetess of Apollo and believe that Apollo is the source of her knowledge nevertheless the tragic poet has not portrayed Apollo shaping Cassandra's course of action. The Senecan Cassandra does not attribute responsibility to the god for her misfortunes but blames fortune for making her her victim (*Fortuna vires ipsa consumpsit suas* v. 698: "Fortune has used up all her resources").

In the light of the above observations it is better understood how much far Seneca was conditioned by his predecessors' poetry in depicting his prophetess. One final point should however be made in order to pay due attention to a considerable difference textured in the words of the Senecan Cassandra. Aeschylean Cassandra's startling revelations fraught with ambiguous and imaginative language render her being incomprehensible, a person that the Chorus can only try to "comfort and humour her."[437] Likewise, Lycophron affords us a similar glimpse at his Alexandra to such an extent as to be considered as "an extension of Priam's daughter's prophecies in *Agamemnon.*"[438] The Alexandrian Cassandra displays a puzzling obscure[439] language which blurs the relation between the incomprehensible and the real. With an increased number of animal imagery and numerous recondite words she results in a total failure at the level of ἐνάργεια.[440]

In Seneca, however, the prophetess even though all the references made to her depict her as an inspired prophetess of Phoebus thrown into a prophetic perception nevertheless when she will be alone upon the stage her vision is comprehensible and her minute description and her language free from animal imagery and figurative expressions will render her speech comprehensible and clear. "La visione…è quanto più possible chiara e particolareggiata… per nulla disturbata dai fumi del delirio."[441]

[437] Cf. Greenhalgh 1969, 254. For the language used by Cassandra in her ecstatic prophecy and its connection with the phenomenon of 'glossolalia' see Crippa 1990, 487-508.
[438] Cf. Cusset 2002, 142.
[439] For the enigmatic style and the obscure nature of the *Alexandra* see Lambin, 2003, 129-150 and for the assimilation between Cassandra and the Sybil see Cusset 2004, 53-60. Also Hopkinson 1988, 230 aptly remarks that Lycophron supplies us with another justification for the fact that Cassandra was never believed since she was "not even understood."
[440] See Fantuzzi-Hunter 2002, 526.
[441] Sapio 1995, 11. For a different opinion see Giomini 1956, 161-62 who sustains that "la Cassandra senecana non ama dare una soluzione alla sua profezia; resta sempre nel campo dell'oscuritá e di immagini indistinte; in questo si stacca dalla Cassandra eschilea che ha bandito ogni ambage, ogni riluttante evanescenza dal suo vaticinio."

"My prophetic madness has never shown things to my eyes so clearly" she, herself, admits.[442]

Or maybe not? How can we be sure whether this statement belongs to Cassandra and not to Seneca who speaks through her? Could it not be one of those kinds of declarations Seneca uses often in his plays that serve as a metapoetic signal? As it has been pointed out "several Senecan characters seem to wear the robe of the inspired poet in the process of creation"[443] and can be seen as the incarnation of the dramatist. Thus, for example, Medea's desire to outdo the other accounts of her story, her previous deeds (v. 50: *maiora iam me scelera post partus decent*) has been considered as equivalent to Seneca's desire to surpass his predecessor playwrights. Equally in Seneca's *Agamemnon* Cassandra assumes the function of the dramatist, offering insights on the poetics of the tragedy. I hold the view that behind Cassandra's announcement is hiding Seneca's declaration of poetics that what he is going to present has gone against the predominant poetic trends of his Greek and maybe Hellenistic context, at least as far as the clarity of Cassandra's speech is concerned. Cassandra's statement that her prophecy will be clear and understandable for the audience runs parallel with Seneca's desire to surpass the previous poetic retellings of her story whose perplexing and baffling nature rendered her the archetypal character whose valid warnings are fated to be disbelieved and dismissed because of their incomprehensibility and obscurity.

But apart from this metatheatrical function, what we witness in Cassandra's emphasis on the *enargeia* of her vision[444] (vv. 872-73: *tam clara...ostendit oculis*) may be an example of Seneca's rhetorical defence of clarity against obscurity. The importance of *sapheneia* goes back at least to Aristotle.[445] Already, in the Aristotelian tradition one of the primary qualities of style was considered to be the clearness: "In regard to style, one of its chief merits may be defined as perspicuity. This is shown by the fact that the speech, if it does not make the meaning clear, will not perform its proper function".[446] Also, Aristotle's pupil and successor, Theophrastus, reorganizing

[442] *Ag.* 872.
[443] Cf. Schiesaro 1997, 92. See also Boyle 1988, 94 who aptly remarks that "the 'anxiety of influence' which dominates the behaviour of characters such as Phaedra, Hippolytus, Atreus, Thyestes, Aegisthus mirrors Seneca's own anxiety before the prescriptive parental figure of the Graeco-Roman poetic tradition."
[444] Staley 2010, 61.
[445] See Fortenbaugh 2007, 119.
[446] Arist. *Rhet.*1404b2-3: λέξεως ἀρετὴ σαφῆ εἶναι· σημεῖον γὰρ ὅτι ὁ λόγος, ἐὰν μὴ δηλοῖ, οὐ ποιήσει τὸ ἑαυτοῦ ἔργον.

his master's theory in his (lost) treatise *On Style* has classified clarity as one of his four virtues of style together with correctness, appropriateness and ornamentation. [447]

A similar position seems to have been adopted by the Roman rhetoricians too. The earliest Latin rhetorical treatise of the anonymous author of the *ad Herennium* offers a prime, although succinct, illustration of clarity as a quality that should characterize an appropriate and finished style: "Clarity renders language plain and intelligible. It is achieved by two means, the use of current terms and of proper terms."[448] Expanding upon this, Cicero shows praise on clarity and defines it as an essential feature of correct Latin style which we will attain by "employing words in customary use that indicate literally the meaning that we desire to be conveyed and made clear, without ambiguity of language or style, avoiding excessively long periodic structure, not spinning out metaphors drawn from other things, not breaking the structure of the sentences, not using the wrong tenses, not mixing up the persons, not perverting the order".[449] In a similar way, Quintilian lists clarity as a positive attribute of style: "For my own part, I regard clearness as the first essential of a good style: there must be propriety in our words, their order must be straightforward, the conclusion of the period must not be long postponed, there must be nothing lacking and nothing superfluous. Thus our language will be approved by the learned and clear to the uneducated. ... For if what we say is not less not more than is required, and it is clear and systematically arranged, the whole matter will be plain and obvious even to a not too attentive audience."[450] All this admiration of clarity displayed by the Greek and Roman rhetoricians could have enticed Seneca into avoiding ambiguity as a defect of language, a fault of style. Having also in mind that the Stoic stylistic canons regard clarity as a "version of the doctrine of the virtues or excellences, the ἀρεταί of λόγος"[451] as Diogenes Laertius reports (Ἀρεταὶ δὲ λόγου εἰσὶ πέντε, Ἑλληνισμός,

[447] Cf. Walker 2000, 47ff. For a more detailed treatment see Kennedy 1963, 273-84 and Innes 1985, 251-63.
[448] *Ad Her.* 4. 17f: *Explanatio est quae reddit apertam et dilucidam orationem. Ea conparatur duabus rebus, usitatis verbis et propriis.*
[449] Cic. *de orat.* 3. 49: *verbis usitatis ac proprie demonstrantibus ea quae significari ac declarari volemus sine ambiguo verbo aut sermone, non nimis longa continuatione verborum, non valde productis eis quae similitudinis causa ex aliis rebus transferuntur, non di scerptis sententiis, non praeposteris temporibus, non confusis personis, non perturbato ordine.*
[450] Quin. *Inst. orat.* 8.2.22ff: *Nobis prima sit virtus perspicuitas, propria verba, rectus ordo, non in longum dilata conclusio, nihil neque desit neque superfluat: ita sermo et doctis probabilis et planus imperitis erit. ... Nam si neque pauciora quam oportet neque plura neque inordinata aut indistincta dixerimus, erunt dilucida et negligenter quoque audientibus aperta.*
[451] See Atherton 1988, 396.

σαφήνεια, συντομία, πρέπον, κατασκευή),[452] it is obvious enough why Seneca chooses not to deviate from the virtue of clarity since his tragedies "are informed by his Stoic epistemology."[453] Thus, Seneca presents us with his Cassandra, who does not fall victim to the vice of obscurity as her forerunners do and whose language is notable for its clarity

In conclusion, when all facts are taken into account, the balance of evidence entitles us to agree that whatever Seneca's poetic sources may in fact have been, novelty and freshness are here deployed in depicting his Cassandra accordingly to his own literary agenda.

[452] D.L. 7.59ff.
[453] Cf. Staley 2010, 54.

The chorus

The Chorus in Aeschylus

Every ancient Greek tragedy that we know of has a chorus attached to it, as a prime component of the play. From Aristotle's *Poetics* to modern times the role and the presentation of the chorus in Greek tragic plays have been the topic of intense discussion. [454]

In the present chapter I shall begin with a detailed close reading of the chorus' dramatic role in the Aeschylean and the Senecan *Agamemnon* and I shall indicate to what degree these choruses are integrated into the play and what effect they have on the audience's interpretation of the action, behaviour, and decision of the human characters, with an intention to explain the way each of these choruses operates in the play. Without understating the difference between Aeschylus' and Seneca' choruses in terms of dramatic function and relevance, I will highlight the surprising interaction between dramatic action and choral song in Seneca's *Agamemnon*. This consistent interaction has been often downplayed by modern scholars and in fact appears to be rather exceptional in Seneca's plays, where usually the choral odes are hardly anything more than *embolima*. I will conclude with the conjecture (but a plausible one) that Seneca's choral technique may perhaps be interpreted as modelled after the peculiarly strong interaction between chorus and dramatic action in the prototypal play by Aeschylus.

The variety of Aeschylus' tragic choruses is evident; yet the most striking feature is his remarkable predilection for cross-sex choruses[455] where the central character and the chorus are of opposite gender and this double perspective leads to a clash of sexes which produces tensions and conflicts in the play.

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[454] The relevant passage from Aristotle runs: καὶ τὸν χορὸν δὲ ἕνα δεῖ ὑπολαβεῖν τῶν ὑποκριτῶν, καὶ μόριον εἶναι τοῦ ὅλου καὶ συναγωνίζεσθαι μὴ ὥσπερ Εὐριπίδηι ἀλλ'ὥσπερ Σοφοκλεῖ ("And one should handle the chorus as one of the actors, and it should be a constituent part of the whole and should join in the action, not as in Euripides, but as in Sophocles", 1456[a]25-7). Several scholars have tended to treat more generally the topic of the chorus as *dramatic persona*. See Schlegel 1846, 76-77; Kranz 1933, 220-22 and Kirkwood 1958, 181-214. For more recent studies cf. Kaimio 1970, 9-17; Podlecki 1972, 187-204; Taplin 1977, 69-70, 251-52; Burton 1980, 1–4; Rosenmeyer 1982, 145-87; Davidson 1986, 75; Gardiner 1987, 3, 5, 183; Bacon 1994–95, 6-24; Goldhill 1996, 254–55; Gould 1996, 219, 232; Easterling 1997, 163, 165; Mastronarde 1998, 57, 71–72; Silk 1998, 197–202 and Bierl 2001, 18–20, 38, 44;

[455] See Castellani 1989, 1 and also Foley 2003, 13.

The *Agamemnon* is an eminently suitable case in point. The play is endowed with a chorus of Argive elders men who play the feminine role in contrast to the Queen's masculine stature and "their impotence, set against Klytaimnestra's excessive authority, is one more link in the nexus of perversions so prominent in the *Agamemnon*".[456] What is more interesting is that the Elders do not stand outside of the play, delivering a commentary from an unbiased, authoritative position. It is a chorus that is remarkably prominent as regards the play's structure and the tragic fiction encompasses them.

In the prologue action has been initiated by the watchman who in a jubilant mood gives a warning for the arrival of Agamemnon. The Chorus appears immediately after him, without any precursory mention or any preparation for their entrance. Their entrance song, the longest parodos in the entire corpus of Greek tragedy, [457] consists of recited anapaests (40-103) which precedes their lyric song (104-257). They do not introduce themselves until the verse 72. The lines 72 till 82 reveal, admittedly at the beginning, in a vague way the Chorus's identity, in that they seem to be a group of old men (vv. 72-75 ἡμεῖς ...σαρκὶ παλαιᾷ ...μίμνομεν ἰσχὺν...νέμοντες ἐπὶ σκήπτροις "We… because of our ancient flesh … were left behind …guiding our strength upon staffs").[458] Then, in giving the reason why they appear on the scene, they further identify themselves and bring out certain aspects of their own position. They are a consultative committee of the city,[459] assembled Argive elders, and they are drawn by a natural curiosity and desire to find out what is going on in the city and why the Queen[460] is offering sacrifice (vv. 83-103). As the authoritative spokesmen of the citizens (v. 104 κύριός εἰμι θροεῖν "I have the authority to tell") they give information for the background of the play and their song

[456] Ganz 1983, 84. Cf. also Winnington-Ingram 1948, 146 who aptly remark that *Agamemnon* is a play where "the man-husband, king, and general- is routed upon every plane by the woman"
[457] Scott 1984, 34 notices that this lengthy parodos is required since the chorus is composed of old men who walk at a slow pace towards the center of the orchestra.
[458] Choral reference to old age and feebleness as a major hindrance to action is a trope found where the chorus is comprised of elders. Throughout the *Agamemnon* there is a strong emphasis on the chorus' old age (vv.584, 1619-1623) and thus, it has been suggested that by evincing the powerlessness their old age imposes, the Argive Elders give to the audience a justified perspective from which to understand their later inactivity, when the play comes to its crux, the murder of their king (cf. Thomson 1966, vol. II, 103). For a different view see Winnington-Ingram 1954, 23.
[459] Clytemnestra herself addresses them as πρέσβος Ἀργείων (vv. 855, 1393).
[460] Whether Clytemnestra was present during the parodos of the chorus or not "one of the the most disputed stage directions in Greek tragedy" see Taplin 1977, 280ff and Pool 1983, 71-116.

narrates the events of ten years before the dramatic date of the play, namely the departure of the Greeks against Troy.[461]

The structure of their narration is interesting. It has been suggested that the Chorus is in a totally confused state of mind and its confusion is "consistently expressed [by Aeschylus] within textual structures, such as ring composition and circular thought patterns".[462] In fact the chorus' perplexity and confusion, a fundamental principle and aspect of its characterization, operate as a continuing motif as the play moves on.[463] Thus, in the parodos the mood of justification for the expedition on Troy (the sons of Atreus departed against Troy as the righteous avengers sent by Zeus to punish Paris: πέμπει ξένιος Ζεὺς, v. 61) is counterpointed by the dark implications this attack will have on Agamemnon as a father – the sacrifice of his daughter – and as a commander – the loss of so many men for the sake of Helen (vv. 61-67).This "paradox of right and wrong"[464] in their narration is terribly confusing and leads the Elders in a helpless bewilderment.

In the second part of the parodos, the lyric song (vv. 104-257), after an abrupt change of subject that leads to the first break of their narration – the dialogue of the men with the Queen about the present situation in order that the Chorus draw their attention far away from the unpleasant implications that their account of the past has for the future – the thoughts are turned back at Aulis. The Chorus describes the portent of the two eagles and hare sent to the Atridae and the double interpretation that Calchas placed on it: Troy will be captured by the Atridae (v. 126 χρόνῳ μὲν ἀργεῖ Πριάμου πόλιν ἅδε κέλευθος "in time this expedition will capture the city of Priam") but the omen is overshadowed by an uneasy sense of foreboding: Artemis[465] is likely to be offended by the death of the hare and will demand in return a second sacrifice, that of Iphigenia's (vv. 133-159). This stark contrast between the auspicious and sinister side of the portent, which is also underlined by their refrain line (v. 121,

[461] Smethurst 1972, 89-93 points out that Aeschylus gives to the Argive elders the role of purveyor of the story in order to provide a link between the dramatic action and the lessons of the *Oresteia* since "the strength or prowess of the elders lies in song, i.e., persuasion, which the *Oresteia* legitimates as an important instrument of authority: it is Athena … who uses persuasion to appease the Furies (*Eum.* 885)….Thus, given her authority, we can infer that her use of verbal exposition provides a parallel for the elders' authority."

[462] Cf. Sienkewitz 1980, 136.

[463] Cf. Gantz 1983, 78. For the confused state of mind that dominates the Argive elders as they confront the action of the play see also Lebeck 1971 and Scott 1969, 336-346.

[464] Cf Lebeck 1971, 8.

[465] For the role of Artemis in the play and for the motivation of her anger see Furley 1986, 109-121 and Grassi 1961, 139ff. For the echoes of Archilochus' epode (fr.172-81W), in which Lycambes is advised by the means of the fable of the fox and the eagle, in this portent see West 1979, 1-6.

138, 159 αἴλινον αἴλινον εἰπέ, τό δ'εὖ νικάτω "Cry sorrow, sorrow, but may good prevail!")[466] reflects the chorus' mental state and leads to a second break of their narration as they turn to Zeus and their hymn (vv. 160-183)[467] "becomes a form of religious escape used to avoid conclusions which are inevitable consequences of events at Aulis, i.e., Agamemnon's eventual death."[468] They turn to him praying for a relief from the heavy burden of anxiety (vv. 165-66 τὸ μάταν ἀπὸ φροντίδος ἄχθος) and by expressing their faith in Zeus they end up their pious chant with a clear warning, hinting at the role of the god as a "causal agent of the surrounding events",[469] that men will learn through sufferings (vv. 176-78 τὸν φρονεῖν βροτοὺς ὁδώσαντα, τὸν «πάθει μάθος» θέντα κυρίως ἔχειν "Zeus who set mortals on the road to understand, who made 'learning by suffering' into an effective law").

In the final section of the parodos (vv. 184-257), the Chorus describes the dilemma of Agamemnon and finally the sacrifice of Iphigenia and as Fraenkel aptly points out in his commentary "it is made clear by the connective particle (καὶ τότε) that what happened to Agamemnon is a case in point, a παράδειγμα illustrating the sovereign power of Zeus over men and the manner in which the god leads through suffering to wisdom."[470] But once again the Chorus breaks its narration trying to hush the actual sacrifice (v. 248 τὰ δ'ἔνθεν οὔτ'εἶδον οὔτ'ἐννέπω "what followed I did not see and do not say") and the elders confine themselves to express their trust to the function of Justice. "This pattern of covering over thoughts about an unhappy future by hopeful words of faith is characteristic of these old men who find themselves unable to unite the events of the past comfortably with their conception of justice."[471]

The confusing and disquieting atmosphere of the parodos is not contravened by the first stasimon (367-487), which is wholly consistent with the character the Elders have thus far displayed. The Chorus, after hearing from Clytemnestra that the Greeks have conquered Troy and convinced now that Troy is taken reveres Zeus for

[466] Ferrari 1938, 377 remarks that "In questa *parodos* tutte le antinomie si raccolgono in un unico motive che le accomuna: il bene e il male appaiono indossolubilmente congiunti. Eschilo propone così quello che sarà il tema fondamentale della sua tragedia, anzi dell'intera trilogia. Con arte finissima il poeta ha affidato questo suo motive all'ἐφύμνιον: αἴλινον αἴλινον εἰπέ, τό δ'εὖ νικάτω."
[467] For a detailed account of the hymn to Zeus see Smith 1980 and Dawe 1966, 1-21, who suggested its transposition between the lines 217 and 218.
[468] Cf. Sienkewitz 1980, 137. See also Gantz 1983, 77 who maintains that this Hymn to Zeus is not "a statement of faith in divine power" but rather a "cry of despair from men who are not yet ready to understand the working of justice."
[469] Cf. Reeves 1960, 167.
[470] Cf. Fraenkel 1950, 113.
[471] Cf. Scott 1984, 41.

the punishment he inflicted on the Trojans and especially on Paris because of his immoderate pride (v. 376 πνεόντων μεῖζον ἢ δικαίως "men puff themselves up more than is right") and excessive wealth (vv. 381-384 οὐ γάρ ἐστιν ἔπαλξις πλούτου πρὸς κόρον ἀνδρὶ λακτίσαντι μέγαν Δίκας βωμὸν εἰς ἀφάνειαν "there is no defence against surfeit of wealth for a man who has kicked the great altar of Justice into oblivion"). Next, they describe Helen's departure for Troy (403-408), Menelaus' distress (408-428) and the mourning of the Argive people for the loss of men in the war (429-455).

The final antistrophe (456-474) ends on the note of the inevitability of suffering that awaits those who have caused so many deaths (v. 461 τῶν πολυκτόνων) since the gods are not oblivious of the bloodshed. The final thought not only does it drive them to declare that they themselves would never want to be a sacker of cities (v. 472 μήτ' εἴην προλιπόρθης) but fills them with an unshakable premonition of the heavy price that must be paid and disaster that loom ahead for Agamemnon. Their anxiety about the future of the returning Agamemnon made them return in the epode to the beacon's report and resort to skepticism; while at the beginning they have recited the fall of Troy, now express their doubts about the truth of the news (vv. 478-84 τίς οἶδεν, ἤ τι θεῖον ἐστιν μὴ ψύθος; ...τίς ὧδε παιδνὸς ἢ φρενῶν κεκομμένος....γυναικὸς αἰχμᾷ πρέπει πρὸ τοῦ φανέντος χάριν ξυναινέσαι). This surprising change of their mind "similar to the narrative breaks in the parodos …reflects the confusion of these men in the face of their beloved king's fate."[472]

The second choral ode (681-782) takes us back to the time of the outbreak of the war. The elders "take their time in this comfortable and safe reminiscence of the past"[473] since their focus in the first five stanzas is the departure and the arrival of Helen at Troy and her harmful nature which becomes evident and is expanded by a mythical illustration: the fable of lion cub (717-736). As Harriott aptly remarks "the story shows how men can fail to make essential distinctions between wild and tame and how they can be mistaken about the true nature of a creature. In the trilogy this kind of misunderstanding is an important theme, applicable to several of the persons of the myth."[474] The last three stanzas are devoted to the woes that spring for those

[472] Cf. Sienkewicz 1980, 139. For a brief survey of the explanations that critics put forward to clarify this contradiction of the Elders see Beer 1982, 39-45. Fletcher 1999, 47 maintains that in the first stasimon we hear three different choral voices – the voice of the poet, the chorus, and the words of characters in the chorus' narrative – that "shatter the initial authoritative confidence of the elders; but in the epode the chorus reasserts itself and takes control of the narrative once again."
[473] Cf. Scott 1984, 53.
[474] Cf. Harriott 1982, 13. For more information about the parable of the lion cub see Knox 1952, 17-25.

who pursue impious deeds (δυσσεβές ἔργον,750-762) and acts of outrage (ὕβρις, 763-772). But "to shatter their pleasant excursion into the abstract theorizing about the past"[475] Agamemnon enters on s tage as they end the ode with the grim words: "Justice directs all thing to their end" (780 πᾶν δ'ἐπὶ τέρμα νωμᾷ). In the anapestic coda Agamemnon is herald as πτολίπορθε (v. 780), a word that surely remind to the audience the hidden menace and the disquieting atmosphere of the previous choral ode (v. 472); the chorus warns him against false, insincere friends and at the same time express openly their disapproval for the king's expedition for the many deaths of men it involved. But Agamemnon is safely home and thus "for the moment, in the presence of their master, victory becomes a satisfactory rejoinder to earlier fears and the success of the war the warrant for its undertaking."[476]

However, seconds later, in the stasimon that follows Agamemnon's walk over the fatal tapestries and his entrance into the palace (975-1034), the disruption of this happiness for the home coming King is intensified. The third stasimon is so related to the preceding choral odes since it demonstrates convincingly the intense agitation of the Chorus' mind; their agony and fear is expressed through images of physical distress (vv. 975-977 τίπτε μοι τόδ'ἐμπέδως δεῖμα προστατήριον καρδίας τερασκόπου ποτᾶται, "why, why does this fear persistently hover about, standing guard in front of my prophetic heart?") and unpleasant sounds[477] (v. 979 μαντιπολεῖ δ'ἀκέλευστος ἄμισθος ἀοιδά "whence comes this presaging song, unbidden, unhired? " and vv. 990-991 τὸν δ'ἄνευ λύρας ὅμως ὑμνῳδεῖ θρῆνον Ἐρινύος αὐτοδίδακτος ἔσωθεν "yet still within my soul, self-taught, sings out the Fury's lament"). Their perplexity emanates from the fact that their king had a s afe return home unpunished "nevertheless they cannot quite accept a justice which approves such things, and as the critical moment draws nearer, their confusion in the face of the Erinyes' claims becomes stronger." [478]

The style and the content of this coral ode is tied to the movement of the action and foregrounds the bewilderment on the part of chorus, which in the following scene with Cassandra (vv. 1072-1177) is the fundamental backdrop to their answers and reaction. As Murray aptly remarks we witness "the curse of disbelief working on

[475] Cf. Scott 1984, 56.
[476] Cf. Gantz 1983, 81.
[477] Cf. Scott 1969, 338.
[478] Cf. Gantz 1983, 82. For a detailed analysis of the third stasimon see Scott 1969, 336-346. Scott maintains that for the chorus "to have their innate sense of justice fully edified, their king must die; to satisfy their belief in the justice of Zeus, their king must live. If he dies, they will lose their faith in Zeus as the enforcer of justice; if he lives, they will see that there are bloody exceptions to the most basic laws of the ordered universe."

the elders, without their knowledge. At first they do not understand; when forced to understand they do no t believe, and quickly forget."[479] Moreover the chorus' confusion and anxiety are evident enough from the structure of the scene which reverses the normal epirrhematic structure.[480] In the most common epirrhematic scenes, namely in the dialogues between the chorus and actor, the actor replies to the lyrics of the chorus in spoken verses. In the Cassandra scene at the beginning, Cassandra addresses the elders in dochmiacs, while the chorus speaks in iambic trimeters expressing their failure to understand her prophesies about the source of Agamemnon's death trying to silence her. Yet, suddenly (1114-24) the chorus abandons their iambic trimeters and, imitating the chief meter of Cassandra's song, sings lines of dochmiacs. "Even as they seek to quiet the Trojan princess and profess ignorance of the meaning of her words, the music betrays the inner fear that their king may die. Perplexity still reigns in their minds."[481] With Cassandra's exit the scene ends and the chorus restates the essential element of its dilemma (vv. 1335-1342): Agamemnon was granted by the Gods to capture the city of Priam and an honourable homecoming; but if he should pay for the deaths and bloodshed what mortal can boast that he was born with a fortune free of harm?[482]

The final and clearest example of the elders' confusion comes in the next scene, fueled by the death cries of Agamemnon (vv. 1346-1371) which cause the physical dissolution of the chorus' unity into twelve individuals.[483] These twelve chorus' members embark on a discussion about what they should do and each one proposes a different course of action. Their thoughts are developed through the use of ring composition: the first five speak in favour of decisive action (vv. 1348-1357); the next two raise their objection to the immediate action (vv. 1358-1361). With the eighth and ninth member (vv. 1362-1365) the proposal for action is repeated but at the

[479] Murray 1920, 221.
[480] A term applied by Kranz 1933, 14ff.
[481] Cf. Scott 1984, 66. So Dhuga 2005, 351: "The chorus is now ridden with the very anxiety it sought to suppress; that anxiety is expressed…not only by the words that the chorus now utters, words so unlike its previous demands for Cassandra's silence, but also by the panicked dochmiacs in which those panicked words issue forth."
[482] Scott 1969, 345 emphasizing the fact that the elders despite all they have heard from Cassandra state that Agamemnon should be protected by the Gods he comments "this is the closest to a firm statement which these men have uttered in a long while, but it is in vain."
[483] Pöhlmann 1997, 3 comments: "The situation after the death cry of Agamemnon in itself makes it imperative that the chorus, which is closely associated with Agamemnon, come immediately to his rescue. However, a dramatic convention appears to stand in its way. The chorus clearly may not enter the *skene.* Aeschylus neatly sidesteps this conflict between the demands of the situation and dramatic technique by means of the remarkable aforementioned discussion scene: it cleverly avoids the intended entry of the chorus into the palace."

end (vv. 1366-1371) the chorus resorts to its usual method and express doubts about Agamemnon's dying appeals. They must have a clear knowledge of how the son of Atreus is faring, before making any decision (v. 1371 τρανῶς Ἀτρείδην εἰδέναι κυροῦνθ' ὅπως). Thus the structure of this scene and at the same time "the actual physical dissolution of the chorus, is employed by Aeschylus to emphasize the chorus' confusion at Agamemnon's death."[484]

With the appearance of Clytemnestra standing over the bodies of her victims the play reaches its climax. What will follow till the end of the play is the dialogue of Chorus with Clytemnestra first (vv. 1372-1576) and then with Aegisthus (vv. 1577-1673). As Gantz aptly remarks the purpose of these series of exchange is the "disappointment in the elders' failure to conclude the play's action."[485] The chorus aghast at the terrible deed regard Clytemnestra's attitude as madness and threaten her with banishment, as a sufficient punishment for the slaying of Agamemnon (v.v. 1410-11 ἀπέδικες ἀπέταμες, ἀπόπολις δ'ἔσῃ, μῖσος ὄβριμον ἀστοῖς "you have cast them aside, you have cut them off; you shall be banished from the city, mightily hated by the community"). As the play comes full circle "the physical weakness and indecisiveness of the chorus after the murder is thus transformed into, and complemented by, an inner ἀμηχανία."[486]

The play ends with the scene of chorus' confrontation with Aegisthus who claims that he, himself alone, was the planner and the perpetrator of the murder. But the chorus taunts him for letting Clytemnestra join in the murder and soon their confrontation degenerates into a trade of threats and physical conflict as the Elders challenge Aegisthus' bodyguards with their staves (vv. 1649-1653).[487] However "grotesque, even farcical"[488] the scene might appear we cannot adopt the reading of some scholars who view this choral action as "authoritative and forceful"[489] since the chorus's unusual silent exit at the end of the play manifest their disillusionment and helplessness. Scott's remark is apposite: "The elders are a symbol of great despair as they find no words to express their feelings and walk offstage. From the moment of the death of Agamemnon, the chorus has had difficulty in maintaining the pattern of

[484] Cf. Sienkewicz 1980, 141.
[485] Cf. Gantz 1983, 84 who points out that the elders'' "impotence, set against Klytemnestra's excessive authority, is one more link in the nexus of perversion so prominent in the *Agamemnon.*"
[486] Cf. O'Daly 1985, 17.
[487] For the distribution of these lines see Brown 1951, 133-35. And for the crucial question whether the chorus brandish swords see Denniston and Page 1957, 220-221.
[488] Cf. Fraenkel 1950, 782.
[489] Cf. Dhuga 2005, 340. So Fraenkel 1950, 784 and Foley 2003, 16.

singing that it achieved so effectively in the parodos and the early stasima. Its weak and irregular exit is a fitting culmination of this progressive disability."[490]

In conclusion, in view of what has been said above the chorus of elders in Aeschylus' Agamemnon is a constant presence, from their entrance till the end of the play, and they do not stand outside of it. Their role is integral to the tragic shape of the play, which mirrors their mental confusion as their faith to the gods is shattered. "By the end of the *Eumenides* faith in the gods will be restored. But that peaceful conclusion is distant, and in the next two plays men learn much about the attitudes of their gods."[491]

The Chorus in Seneca

Although in fifth-century Attic tragedy the choral odes were always intended to have an important function and relation to the drama it is almost a foregone conclusion that the Latin tragedy has not followed this tendency. It is often asserted that during the period of half a millennium that separates the Athenian dramatists from Seneca the handling of the chorus underwent radical alterations.[492]

Seneca's use of chorus[493] has attracted the bulk of critical attention behind which often lurks a hostile judgment against the dramatist's work. His choral odes are regarded "as mere act-dividers, that their relationship with the play's action is loose

[490] Cf. Scott 1984, 77.
[491] Cf. Scott 1969, 346
[492] See Garton 1972, 196-97 who sustains that "comedy stimulated interest in domestic drama, the love theme, the confidant; and while it helped to drain the vitality out of the chorus, the assurance of its typology was bound to affect such recurrent tragic figures as the tyrant and the nurse". We should also take into consideration Vitruvius' account (Vitr. 5.6.2) of the plan of the Roman theatre where the orchestra was allotted to the seats of the senators. This restriction of the stage suggested a limitation on the number and the movement of the chorus. On the other hand Grimal 1973, 3 underlines that "il est probable que ce goût pour les *cantica* n'était pas hérité de la tragédie hellénistique, mais venait, en grande partie, des origines nationales, italiques, du théâtre latin."
[493] For general information on the Senecan chorus see Leo 1897, 509-518; Marx 1932; Cattin 1959, Zwierlein 1966; Bishop 1964, Mazzoli 1986-87, 99-112 and Castagna 1996.

and unconvincing".[494] The most recent study on the subject concludes: "Sometimes the interventions presents a very *naïve* view and produce a form of dramatic irony, sometimes the intervention will be more detached and philosophical".[495] In *Agamemnon*, a drama which has long suffered critical disapprobation, the choral odes have languished in dark neglect since the appearance of two distinct choruses has been considered an important element that renders the play ill-formed and static, one of Seneca's weakest dramas. The present chapter seeks to demonstrate, through the analysis of the choral odes of *Agamemnon*, the close interplay between the odes and the action of the drama.

Although in the majority of Senecan corpus the identity of the chorus is not defined in terms of age, nationality or sex in the *Agamemnon* the identity of the chorus is clearly stated. What is noticeable is that this play is the only one among Seneca's authentic tragedies[496] to have two choruses; a main one whose members identify themselves twice: as they begin to sing the ode 2:

Canite o pubes inclita, Phoebum!
tibi festa caput turba coronat,
tibi virgineas
laurum quatiens, *de more comas*
innuba fudit stirps Inachia (vv. 310-15)

"Sing, illustrious folk, of Phoebus! For you the festive crowd wears wreaths, for you unmarried Inachian girls let down their maiden hair in ritual, waving the laurel."

and at their closing words of the same ode:

tibi votivam
matres Graiae lampada iactant (vv. 351-52)

[494] Cf. Davis, 1989, 421. Runchina 1960,234 comments that "Nel caso delle tragedie di Seneca i cori si trovano al culmine di quella evoluzione iniziata da Euripide, per cui essi si distaccano dallo svolgimento dell'azione ed assumono il carattere d'intermezzi corali che, inseriti nel dramma, lo dividono in cinque atti". For this notorious problem in Senecan critique see: Herrmann 1924, 376; Canter 1925, 34; Henry and Walker 1963, 1; Mendell 1941, 136; Calder III 1976-77, 318-19; Shelton 1978, 40-44; Tarrant 1978, 228 and Sutton 1986, 35-38.
[495] Cf. Hill 2000, 587.
[496] Two choruses have *Hercules on Oeta* and *Octavia* but these two tragedies remain under serious suspicion about their authenticity.

"for you the votive torch is tossed by matrons of Greece"

This primary chorus consists of Mycenaeans women, Argive maidens who will sing the odes 1, 2 a nd 4.[497] The secondary chorus is "one of the most effectively characterized choruses in Seneca"[498] since its entrance is heralded by Clytemnestra herself. It consists of Trojan women, a chorus of captive maidens who enters the scene with Cassandra taking up the role of the chorus leader:

Sed ecce, turba tristis incomptae comas
Iliades adsunt, quas super celso gradu
effrena Phoebas entheas laurus quatit. (vv. 586-88)

"But see, the women of Ilium are here, a sad group, their hair dishevelled, and pacing tall among them the unbridled priestess of Phoebus shakes the god-filled laurel."

As in the majority of Seneca's plays the dramatist does not provide a reasonable motive for the initial appearance of the chorus in the parodos of the play.[499]

The prologue has already established the background of the story; the play opens with the ghost of Thyestes who recalls the crimes that have destroyed the house of Tantalus and as "a well-informed observer"[500] announces Agamemnon's homeward journey from Troy and foretells that the bloodshed in the family will continue. Then the chorus of the Argive maidens arrives at the end of Act 1.[501] This situation is not unusual, for in every Senecan play (*Troades* is perhaps the only deviation from this norm) the entry of the chorus is delayed until after the first scene.

[497] Tarrant 1976, 324 remarks that the fourth ode "is sung by the Argive chorus; the chorus of Trojan captives would hardly choose this moment to glorify Hercules and, through him, Argos."
[498] Cf. Davis 1993, 57.
[499] The only two exceptions to this rule are *Medea* where the chorus enters in order to sing the epithalamium, the wedding song for the bride and groom and *Troades* where the chorus is composed of Hecuba's fellow prisoners of war.
[500] Cf. Shelton 1983, 162.
[501] Much of scholarly debate about Seneca's plays has concentrated on the entrances and exits of the choruses during the plays since we are deprived of explicit stage directions. Thus, in *Agamemnon* while there is a consensus among commentators that the chorus enters after the end of the first scene (cf. Calder 1975, 33 and Tarrant 1976, 181) agreement for the onstage presence of the chorus during the play cannot be reached. Sutton 1986, 37-40 taking as a principle that if the chorus announces at their ode the entry of a person, its presence on stage should be guaranteed for the ensuing act concludes that the chorus is certainly present during the Act 3 and 4, followed by Davis 1993, 23. For a totally different approach see Calder 1975, 32-35.

The first ode (vv. 57-107) is a philosophical ode and its subject is the fortune and its effect on the nature of kingship. It serves as an introduction to the first episode.[502] It falls into four sections. After its four-line introduction (vv. 57-61) on the instability and the anxieties of the royal families the chorus continues with a parallelism between the violent natural element and the detrimental effect of fortune to the fates of kings (vv. 62-76). The following lines (vv. 77-86) are devoted to the degradation in the royal halls and the last part of the ode (vv. 87-100) is dedicated to the vulnerability of the greatness and of the prosperity. The ode concludes with the golden mean that one should follow namely the life of moderation (vv. 101-107).

Considering the ode in isolation is "general and dispassionate",[503] imbued with an impersonal tone. But the correctness of this description receives partial verification when the choral song is viewed in the light of the prologue. Even though the first ode is not a direct response to the events of Act one the chorus' words in fact relate closely to what has been said by Thyestes.[504] Reference to the crimes that take place in the royal halls and especially to the *iura pudorque | et coniugii sacrata fides | fugiunt aulas* (vv. 79-81: "Right and shame and the hallowed loyalties of marriage, abandon palaces") cannot fail to remind to the audience Thyestes' own crime and his words *natae nefandos petere concubitus iubet* (v. 30). "The Chorus speaks of the destruction of kingdoms in terms of structure: *arces* (v. 77), *aulas* (v. 81), *domos* (v. 84), while Thyestes speaks of his royal 'house' in terms of the destruction of familial relationships."[505] Moreover chorus' words *licet arma vacent cessentque doli*, */ sidunt ipso pondere magna* (vv. 87-88: "Though weapons sleep and treacheries cease, greatness sinks by its very weight") are clearly intended to recall with ironic remark what Thyestes had mentioned moments ago for Agamemnon's murder:

rex ille regum, ductor Agamemnon ducum,

…

[502] Dewey 1968, 1 remarks that "The first choral ode is sometimes used as the bridge between the powerful prologues and the world in which the crisis of evil, indicated in the protasis, will take place."
[503] Cf. Shelton 1983, 162. See also Stevens 1992, 214 who aptly points out that Seneca "has done everything possible to isolate the Chorus from the tragic action…. It knows nothing about the future murder of Agamemnon, about the present machinations of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, or even, it seems, about the moral implications of the past conflict between Atreus and Thyestes."
[504] I cannot agree with what Tarrant 1976, 181 sustains that "In *Agamemnon* the dramatic isolation of the opening chorus is complete: no line of the ode reveals either a definite *persona* or a specific allusion to the situation revealed by Thyestes' ghost."
[505] Cf. Stevens 1992, 203. Stevens in his dissertation offers an illuminating discussion of the structural analogues and aural echoes between the prologue and the first ode (pp. 198-205).

enses secures tela

.....

iam scelera prope sunt, iam dolus caedes cruor (vv. 39-47)

"That famous king of kings, leader of leaders, Agamemnon ... swords, axes, spears ....now crimes are near, now treachery, slaughter, gore"

In addition when the Chorus offers a series of images, of *exempla* in order to illustrate the vulnerability of greatness, of those who have power and wealth its list culminates in the image of the bull in the herd which is chosen for a sacrifice[506] because of its greater size: *placet in vulnus maxima cervix* (v. 100: "the loftiest neck is chosen for the axe"). For an attentive audience this last image would easily be understood as a specific allusion to the sacrificial language Thyestes utilizes for the murder of Agamemnon in his prologue (vv. 43-46):

adest – daturus coniugi iugulum suae

...

ictu bipennis regium video caput;

"and is here – doomed to offer his throat to his own wife ...I see a king's head split by the heavy blow of a double-bladed axe"

However, if we look at the ode more closely we can detect one stylistic element that is pertinent in relation not only to what we have just heard from Thyestes but mostly in relation to what we are about to see as the drama starts to unfold. The Chorus' predilection for maritime images (*vela secundis inflata Notis / ventos nimium timuere suos;* vv. 90-91: "Sails that are filled with favouring southerlies fear the winds that are all too helpful;") mirrors Thyestes' employment of nautical imagery when he describes Agamemnon's ships *cuius secutae mille vexillum rates / Iliaca velis maria texerunt suis*, vv. 40-41: "behind whose banner a thousand ships hid the seas of Ilium with their sails") but mostly forebodes Eurybates' report in Act three for the storm which overtook the Greeks on the return voyage from Troy. In fact when we

[506] Davis 1993, 170 remarks that the motif of sacrifice penetrates the play and "most tellingly Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon is likened to the sacrificial killing of a bull."

compare this choral song with Eurybates' narrative we are supplied with unmistakable reference points. The words they chose *non sic Libycis Syrtibus aequor* | *furit alternos volvere fluctus,* | *non Euxini* | *turget ab imis commota vadis* (vv. 64-67: "not so does the sea in the Libyan Syrtes roll in rage wave upon wave; not so in the Euxine do the waters swell from the lowest depths") aim undoubtedly to recall the words of Eurybates' account: *Libycusque harenas Auster ac Syrtes agit* (v. 480: "the Libyan Auster buffeted the sandy Syrtes") and *fervetque semper fluctus alterna vice* (v. 561: "the waves always seethe in ebb or flow").

But most strikingly the nautical imagery that the Argive maidens employ for the noxious sea bears a strong resemblance to Clytemnestra's condition to such a degree that the commentators find difficult to escape the conclusion that the ode "serves as a program or almost a metonomy for her and the acts she will commit."[507] The verbal correspondence is evident enough. When the Queen appears on stage immediately after the end of this ode she reveals her emotional distress and her first words (vv. 108-9 *Quid, segnis anime, ...* | *quid fluctuaris*) evoking the sea clearly demonstrate that Clytemnestra is "plagued by a metaphorical"[508] storm. Furthermore in the dialogue with her Nurse Clytemnestra will elaborate more effectively on her helpless situation and her lack of self control using a seafaring metaphor:

... fluctibus variis agor,
ut cum hinc profundum ventus, hinc aestus rapit,
incerta dubitat unda cui cedat malo.
proinde omisi regimen e manibus meis –
....
hoc ire pergam; fluctibus dedimus ratem (vv. 138-143)

"I am driven by conflicting waves, as when wind and tide pull the sea each way, and the waters hesitate, uncertain which scourge to yield to. So I have dropped the rudder from my hands... there I shall proceed; I have given up the boat to the waves."

[507] Cf. Stevens 1992, 217. For the way Clytemnestra is linked to *Fortuna* throughout the first ode see the analysis of Stevens 1992, 217-223.
[508] Cf. Davis 1993, 167 who aptly remarks that "the chorus' choice of the image of storm is…singularly appropriate to the protagonist of this tragedy, to both Clytemnestra and Agamemnon, for both prove victims of the tempest."

The choral song ends on a note of quiet life employing again an allegorical figure relating to the sea; it is fortune the man who is content with the lot and hug the shore where the breeze is *tuta* (v. 105 "safe"). Clytemnestra will soon use the same word "ironically reversing"[509] Chorus' words; first to reject the safe strategies (v. 108 *tuta consilia*) and secondly to assert that *per scelera semper sceleribus tutum est iter* (v. 115). "The juxtaposition of her words with the Chorus' words gives the impression of continuity, as though the dramatic dialogue is being continued."[510]

The next appearance of the Chorus (vv. 310-388) follows the debate between Clytemnestra, her Nurse and Aegisthus, a debate in which the adulterous relation and the joint conspiracy between Clytemnestra and Aegisthus is disclosed.[511] Yet, the hopeful tone of the second choral ode, a hymn of joyful thanksgiving, not only does it bolster our impression that the chorus has not witnessed the sinister dialogue of the two conspirators but taints its song with heavy irony.[512] Tarrant sustains that "its most obvious dramatic function is to provide a variation in tone and outlook from the frenetic and introspective emotions of the first two acts and the brooding pessimism of the first ode."[513] But other commentators do not subscribe to his conclusion and underline the ironic connection between this ode and the rest of the play.[514]

Indeed if we consider the five gods the chorus singles out and summons we cannot but agree with Seidensticker who notes that the gods addressed in the hymn ironically all have reason to be displeased and angry with Agamemnon, and thus are paradigmatically chosen.[515]

The song begins with a joyous salute to Apollo: *canite, o pube s inclita, Phoebum!* (v. 310: "Sing, illustrious folk, of Phoebus"). Apollo "a Troy's faithful

[509] Tarrant 1976, 194.
[510] Cf. Stevens 1992, 216
[511] See Monteleone 1979, 324-343 who expressing his doubts whether the order of the choral odes I, II, IV in the manuscripts of the play is the original one, proposes a textual emendation, namely the transposition of the ode II in the place of the IV.
[512] Shelton 1983, 167 comments that "the second chorus is as unaware of Clytemnestra's anguish as the first was of Thyestes', and its happy thanksgiving hymn is in stark contrast to the scenes which precede it, and the messenger's report which follows." Moreover, Bishop 1968, 203 examining the hymn from a metrical point of view notes that no other anapestic choral ode is a hymn and concludes "…the hymn is a tragic prayer: the gods invoked do not prevent the terrible round of disaster and catastrophes, but contrary to the hymn they countenance them and wait for their occurrence."
[513] Tarrant 1976, 231.
[514] Dewey 1968, 233 aptly remarks: "There is of course dramatic irony in the ode, for the Mycenaean chorus would scarcely rejoice if it knew to what fate its king had returned." See also Giomini 1956, 91 for the relationship between the gods the chorus appeals to and the history of the house and Lefèvre 1973, 81f.
[515] Cf. Seidensticker 1969, 131f.

ally"[516] is a bizarre choice. What is even more odd is that the Greek chorus address him as *victor ... Phoebe* (vv. 323-24). Tarrant neatly extricated himself from an awkward position by his emendation of *victor* to *vinclo*[517] while other critics adopt a distinctive reading. Seidensticker points out that Apollo was robbed of Cassandra by Agamemnon while for Giomini the reference to Apollo alludes to the birth of Aegisthus who claimed the god as his father (v. 294, *auctore Phoebo gignor*). Therefore the first god in the chorus' prayer is "associated with the forces of vengeance against Agamemnon."[518]

The next deity to be invoked is Juno (vv. 340-355) who is summoned to receive Agamemnon's laurel wreaths as victor (*tu nunc laurus Agamemmonias | accipe victrix*, vv. 346-47: "Now receive Agamemnon's laurel wreaths as victor"). Tarrant notes that it was a Roman custom for a victorious commander to place his *laurus* on the statue of Iuppiter Optimus Maximus and not to Argive Hera.[519] In order to reconcile these conflicting indications we are tempted to prefer Seidensticker's interpretation tint with irony: Juno as the goddess of marriage too, will soon receive Agamemnon's "laurels" that Clytemnestra will dedicate when she gets her revenge for her dishonourable marriage.[520] Stevens aptly remarks that the word *laurus* is a grim synecdoche: instead of the laurels the audience will have to understand that Clytemnestra will offer the head of Agamemnon.[521] Further support for this is to be found in the lines 353-55:

ad tua coniunx candida tauri
delubra cadet,
nescia aratri,
nullo collum signata iugo

"In your temple will fall the white wife of the bull who knows nothing of the plough, whose neck was never scarred by the yoke."

[516] Tarrant 1976, 232.
[517] Tarrant 1976, 235-36.
[518] Cf. Davis 1993, 209.
[519] Tarrant 1976, 241.
[520] Seidensticker 1969, 131, n. 163.
[521] Cf. Stevens 1992, 238.

Here the description of the cow that is being offered as a sacrifice to Juno prepares us for Clytemnestra's ordering of sacrifices just before the entrance of Agamemnon (v. 585, *et nivea magnas victima ante aras cadat*) and for Cassandra's vision of Agamemnon's death (*qualisque ad ar as colla taurorum popa / designat oculis antequam ferro petat* vv. 898-99: "just as an attendant at the altar marks out the bull's necks by eye before striking with the steel").

The prayer to Pallas then follows (vv. 356-367). Pallas was the Greek goddess from whose altars Cassandra was snatched by Ajax and in revenge the goddess destroyed the Greek fleet. What is striking enough is that the words that describe the ceremony in this part of the hymn: *colit et reserat veniente dea templa sacerdos; | tibi nexilibus turba coronis | redimita venit* (vv. 361-64: "and the priestess opens the temple at your approach. To you there comes a throng enwreathed in woven garlands ;") recall Agamemnon's entrance announcement at lines 778-81:

En deos tandem suos
victrice lauru cinctus Agamemnon adit,
et festa coniunx obvios illi tulit
gressus, reditque iuncta concordi gradu.

"See, at last Agamemnon comes before his own gods, crowned with the victor's laurel; his wife went out to meet him in festive mood, and returns walking in concord at his side."

Stevens notes that "the description of Agamemnon's advent in language recalling Pallas' confirms that one of the functions of this ode is to make Agamemnon appear as god."[522]

The choice of Diana (vv. 368-381) in a hymn of public thanksgiving for the returning Agamemnon is as inappropriate as Apollo's appearance, since she herself is a Trojan friendly deity too. The audience can neither ignore the role she played in the expedition nor her demand for the sacrifice of Iphigenia which will become Clytemnestra's primary motive for murdering Agamemnon. Diana had also a key role in the story of Niobe; Niobe, an offspring of Tantalus, was punished by Apollo and

[522] Cf. Stevens 1992, 241.

Diana for insulting their mother Latona. The killing of her seven sons and daughters "exemplifies the ruthlessness of gods ready to destroy innocent lives in their revenge upon an offender."[523] The words *Tandalidos matris* (v. 375) cannot fail to remind us of Niobe, an ancestor of Agamenon. Hence, Agamemnon "is another Tantalid who, in slightly different way, is himself slain because he killed his daughter."[524]

The last deity to appeal to is Jupiter (vv. 382-388). We cannot fail to notice the overt irony if we consider that Agamemnon is a new Priam and that the Trojan King was slain at Jupiter's altars. The Chorus refers to him as "ruler with the lightning's power"[525] but also as *generis nostri* (v. 385) and asks him to look with favour upon Agamemnon who is fourth in the line of descent from Jupiter, after Tantalus, Pelops and Atreus. Agamemnon is a *non degenerem prolem* (vv. 386-87) "to his ancestors Tantalus and Atreus who conducted human sacrifices, nor to Pelops who, as he will be, was sacrificed for a divine gathering."[526] Stevens draws our attention to the imperative *cape dona* (v. 386) and underlines that the imperatives in this ode reveal "the active role of chorus in bringing the gods to the *locus* of this 'sacrifice'."[527]

The third choral ode of *Agamemnon* is delivered by the secondary Chorus of the play, the captive Trojan women (vv. 589-658). Although this ode "is the most consistently personal of the odes"[528], and also closely bound to the dramatic situation and context, nevertheless it has proved difficult as far as stage direction is concerned. Calder speaks of Seneca's novelty since he substituted a chorus of Argive maidens for Aeschylus' old men in order "to secure economy in staging. The actors playing the women of Mycenae *exeunt* into the *scaenae frons* at 396a and re-enter stage-right as captive Trojan Stoics at 589."[529]

The Trojan prisoners, who have been brought to Argos by Agamemnon, are women whose uprooting underlines the special bond of womanhood as well as friendship and loyalty between them and the princess Cassandra. Their role is usually seen as an illustration of human mutability. But I would like to place another interpretation on t he introduction of this subsidiary chorus. They are weak and

[523] Fantham 2004, 70. Tarrant remarks that Seneca alludes to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 6. 188-92 for the elements of the Niobe story.
[524] Stevens 1992, 244.
[525] Davis 1993, 212 notes that this reference to Jupiter looks forward to the Act 3 where Eurybates will narrate the storm which Jupiter himself has approved.
[526] Cf. Stevens 1992, 243.
[527] Cf. Stevens 1992, 244.
[528] Cf. Tarrant 1976, 285.
[529] Calder III 1975, 34.

timorous, and in contrast to them Cassandra appears all the more to be strong, and unswervingly bold even at the expense of her life. Thus, in my opinion they serve as a foil for Cassandra, a standard of "normal femininity" against which the audience measures the priestess and finds her mightier, and larger than life. Purposefully they lose force when Cassandra is present, eclipsing them with her greatness and at the last part of the play, when all attention is concentrated on the narration of Agamemnon's murder they fade and recede far into the background since they have no further dramatic reason for being.[530]

The first stanza of the ode begins with an oxymoron: *dulce malum* (v. 589). The captive chorus appears to be a strong advocator of *libera mors*. Using nautical imagery they describe death as a *portus aeterna placidus quiete* (v. 592: "a tranquil harbour of eternal calm"), untouched by any storm of fortune and their words invite the audience to hark back to what Eurybates has just narrated about Agamemnon's disaster at sea. It has been pointed out[531] that this first part of the ode is modeled upon Horace (*Carm.* 3.3.1-8). But whereas the Horatian text refers to the just and steadfast man who cannot be shaken by any kind of threat, Seneca applies this idea to death, as the word *hunc* demonstrates. In the Senecan passage "the port of death is immune to the same onslaughts as was the just man."[532] This first part of the ode ends with "a series of philosophical clichés"[533] providing a list of the perils that do not frighten the wise man (vv. 596-603).

The rest of the ode (vv. 611-58) comprises the Trojan captives' *Iliou persis* constructed in the language of *Aeneid* II.[534] They start their recollection of the fatal night (vv. 611-24) emphasizing that Troy was not conquered by legitimate means, by war or by arms as formerly fell to Hercules' arrows. For ten years resisted the attacks since neither *falsus Achilles* nor Patroclus could defeat it, and its destiny was to perish by the deception of a single night. Note that this part ends with the word *furto* placed at the end to emphasize treachery.

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[530] Aricò 1996, 142 thus comments: "Cassandra, dunque, si stacca dal coro: non solo non recepisce la sua lettura degli eventi, ma neppure accetta di coinvolgersi nel pathos di un lutto collettivo. …Cassandra lo confina in un patetico autocommiserante lirismo."
[531] See Tarrant 1976, 287-88.
[532] Cf. Stevens 1992, 248. See also pp. 245-251 for a detailed analysis of the first stanza of this ode in view with Horace's *Carm.* 3.3.1-8.
[533] Cf. Davis 1993, 109.
[534] For the strong resemblances and parallels between Virgil's portrayal of the fall of Troy and Chorus' narration see Stevens 1992, 253-64.

The central part of the ode (vv. 625-36) is devoted to the employment of the gift of the horse and the treachery it represents. The word *dono*, will recur again in Cassandra's description of Agamemnon's downfall: *perisse dono, feminae – stupro, dolo* (v. 1009).

The Trojan women call next to mind the festive atmosphere at Troy during the horse's entry (vv. 637-48). This account of the Trojans' rejoicing "provides the audience with an ironic reminder that a similar situation is now occurring at Argos where victory celebrations are being planned along with murder plots, and where a king will soon die."[535] What is really noteworthy is that when Agamemnon returns in triumph will use the same words addressing Cassandra: *optatus ille portus aerumnis adest / festus dies est* (vv. 790-91: "the longed-for heaven from sufferings is here at hand; This is a festive day!").

The last part of the ode (vv. 649-658) is dedicated to the death of Priam "and create[s] the certain impression that the entire ode about Troy has some bearing on the fate of Agamemnon."[536] The equation between Priam and Agamemnon will be established later in the play; "Agamemnon in the robes of Priam (880), and drinking from the cup of Assaracus (878), dies, not merely stabbed as in Aeschylus, but beheaded by Clytemnestra, as the Vergilian Priam by Pyrrhus."[537] The ode ends as the chorus enters into a lyric *kommos* with Cassandra.

The fourth choral ode (808-866) begins after the arrival of Agamemnon on stage. The subject of this mythological ode is a eulogy on Hercules, the Argive hero *par excellence*. It is delivered by the Argive chorus since it would be odd for the chorus of the Trojan slaves to sing about the glory of Hercules. Tarrant comments that this choral song is "a mere interlude separating Agamemnon's entry into the palace from Cassandra's report of his death,"[538] while Calder sees it as an *embolimon*, a choral interlude which is necessary for "the passage of dramatic time so that the banquet and murder may be prepared."[539]

Again, I cannot agree with the interpretation of this ode as lacking in functional connection to the tragic action. It is divided in two parts. The first part focuses on t he birth of Hercules (vv. 812-28). The chorus narrates that for his

[535] Cf. Shelton 1983, 170.
[536] Cf. Stevens 1992, 261.
[537] Cf. Calder III 1976, 34.
[538] Cf. Tarrant 1976, 323. See also Pratt 1939, 37 who draws attention to the "interludial nature of the *stasimon*."
[539] Calder III 1975, 34.

conception the night was lengthened since the sun and the moon have been ordered by Jupiter to slow their progress. "The words spoken by the Chorus in praise of Hercules have been used by Thyestes to rouse Aegisthus and the natural world to crime."[540] Note the final words of Thyestes in Act 1: *Phoebum moramur. redde iam mundo diem* (v. 56: "I am delaying Phoebus. Now restore daylight to the world").

The second part of the ode dwells on the Hercules' labours[541] (vv. 829-66).But what is striking enough is that the Chorus presents the standard catalogue of the eleven labours but replaces the twelfth one, namely the cleaning of Augean stables with the sack of Troy. The interpretation that has been suggested, and that appeals to me most, is that the capture of Troy can be considered as having a close connection with the events in the life of Agamemnon.[542]

Yet, there has been a great uneasiness of many of the commentators whether there is any close connection between the labours of Hercules and Agamemnon. It is true that the ode at the beginning and at the end compares Agamemnon with Hercules since both are *nobiles cives* of Argos and conquerors of Troy. But regardless this implicit comparison, the majority of the critics is inclined to the view that the ode is dramatically irrelevant and speaks of "minor thematic relevance."[543] Most recently**,** however, Stevens adopted a rather different interpretation of the ode, which again points to its structural role in and connection with the protagonists of the play. According to him the ode is not aimed at comparing Agamemnon to Hercules but rather Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. He argues that "at the end of the ode celebrating the labors of Hercules, Cassandra announces the resumption of a new and more vivid vision with the words *Res agitur intus magna*, i.e., 'a deed worthy of a Roman emperor (like Augustus),' or 'a truly Herculean labor,' is being performed within the palace (867 cf. *De Ira* 3.19.2)."[544] Moreover he remarks that Cassandra's words

victor ferarum colla summissuss iacet
ignobili sub dente Marmarici lupi,
morsus cruentos passus audacis leae. (vv. 738-40)

[540] Stevens 1992, 278.
[541] For the indications that the portrayal of each labour has upon Agamemnon's murder scene see Stevens 1992, 279-84.
[542] Davis 1993, 117.
[543] Cf. Boyle 1983, 228, n. 61. See also Davis 1993, 118. Tarrant 1972, 194-99 notes that the connection between Agamemnon and Hercules are "superficial cross references."
[544] Stevens 1992, 274-75.

"The conqueror of wild beasts lies with neck bowed bebeath the ignoble jaws of the Marmaric wolf, after suffering the bloody bites of the daring lionness."

should prepared us for this inversion of comparison. In this animal imagery Clytemnestra is depicted as a lioness ready to overcome the lion. It is true that "the lion is a symbol not only of the house of Atreus, but of Hercules. The female devours the male; the queen consumes the praise intended for her king."[545]

Conclusion

In considering the choral odes of the Aeschylean and the Senecan *Agamemnon* our analysis has shown that the odes of the Aeschylean chorus are part of the play in the very strongest sense: the tragic fiction encompasses them and they are almost always on stage. In their songs, the Argive Elders reveal a consistent identity of a dramatically essential character whose confused state of mind and inner conflict "reflect the paradox of right and wrong that runs throughout the trilogy."[546]

Seneca, on the other hand writes in a period where the use of the chorus was not a constituent feature of tragedy. It has been often asserted that his choruses appear to be a separate element that is not consonant with the action of the tragedy, marring thus the structural unity of the whole play. Yet, as our analysis has revealed, the four odes of the *Agamemnon* are closely tied to the action of the play. Each of the odes comes in obvious contrast with the action that precedes it or follows it. It is true that the chorus does not have the power as a character to alter or impede Agamemnon's fate or Clytemnestra's and Aegisthus' treacherous action. But it is through the chorus' use of imagery and the interplay of its words that it will be possible to observe the irony, the tread that binds *Agamemnon*'s odes to the episodes. It has been said,

[545] Stevens 1992, 275.
[546] See Lebeck 1971, 8.

correctly, that in Seneca's *Agamemnon* "the Chorus changes our impression of what the action signifies, and in doing so, it a cts as a full partner in the dramatic presentation to the audience."[547] This "partnership" is perhaps not as consistent and emphatic as in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, but certainly it is in contrast with Seneca's usual choral technique, and thus perhaps in the wake of the modelling example of the prototypal *Agamemnon* by Aeschylus, where the connection between action and choral song had been as emphatic as nowhere else in the surviving corpus of the Greek tragedies.

[547] Cf. Stevens 1992, 288.

Final Conclusion

Since the nineteenth century, Seneca's tragedies have been consistently linked with and compared to the tragedies of fifth-century Athens as their primary models[548]. Tarrant points out that this was inevitable since there were no Roman predecessors or successors available for comparison, thus rendering fifth-century Athenian tragedy the only other corpus of serious drama to survive from antiquity.[549] And Boyle[550] aptly labels Seneca's tragedies a "palimpsestic text", pointing out that "beneath each tragedy are a host of subtexts – Greek and Roman, Attic, Hellenistic, republican, Augustan and early imperial" serving as a model.

In the case of Seneca's *Agamemnon* Boyle's view seems at first most appropriate. Whilst Seneca revolves around the basic outline of Aeschylus' plot, direct knowledge of Aeschylus has been either totally denied or recognized only as far as the scenes of the arrival of the herald and his narration of the sea storm on the one hand, and of Cassandra's prophetic speech about the imminent murder of Agamemnon and of herself on the other, are concerned.[551]

Still, more recently, in the lemma "Seneca" of "Brill's New Pauly"[552] we read: "Seneca's dramas owe their structure largely to the Greek classics. Based on known tragedies by Euripides are "Hercules (furens)", "Troades", "Medea" and "Phaedra", whereas "Oeidipus" is based on Sophocles." Also "Phoenissae" and "Thyestes" owe their most important themes to these two tragedians. Only the source of "Agamemnon" remains a puzzle to scholars.

I have set out to show how Seneca in his *Agamemnon* chooses to conform to, or to deviate from the Greek prototype, and to explain the reasons of Seneca's stance and relation towards it. Our enquiry has sought to display the ways in which Seneca lets his protagonists speak at different levels of language, rhetoric and argumentation according to the new nuances of their role. Without presupposing that in every case

[548] For more information cf. Coffey 1957, 144-9, and Snell 1964, 24ff. For Seneca's display dramaturgical features foreign to fifth-century Attic tragedy see also Boyle 1997, 10f.
[549] Cf. Tarrant 1995, 216ff.
[550] See Boyle 1997, 89.
[551] For the possible literary sources on which Seneca drew cf. Tarrant 1976, 8-23.
[552] L. Annaeus S. In *Brill's New Pauly Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World*, eds. H. Cancik and H. Schneider, Leiden-Boston 2008, pp. 271-278, p. 274f.

Seneca had an eye for the Aeschylean precedent, I tried to see these Senecan nuances in contrast with it. My argument has been that also in the cases that Seneca had not considered it, this starting ancient Greek point may help us better to understand the characterization of Seneca's characters because the Greek prototype serves as a foil for Seneca.

My investigation hopes not only to demonstrate Seneca's own learning and sophistication, but also, by comparing and contrasting old and new contexts, parallelisms and differences between them, to illuminate the way in which Seneca's text is to be read.

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