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**Seneca's Ovidian Loci**

for Michael Paschalis (ed.), *Dramatic and Performance Space in Greek Tragedy and Seneca*

1. Introduction: *Der Einfluss Ovids auf den Tragiker Seneca*

The Senecan work of two critics represented in this volume offers an immediate cue for the present paper's theme.<sup>1</sup> Alessandro Schiesaro's *The Passions in Play* (Cambridge 2003) has recently given new emphasis to Ovid's Tereus, Procne and Philomela in *Metamorphoses* 6 as a privileged source for the tragic perversity and inventive cruelty of the *Thyestes*. On Schiesaro's reading, Seneca here identifies one of the most "proto-Senecan" episodes in Ovid,<sup>2</sup> and plots it into the moral and rhetorical universe of his own most characteristic drama:<sup>3</sup>

Both texts show that the words of poetry can reveal unexpected extremes of violence, and that there is no limit to the creativity of human wickedness.

The Tereus episode in the *Metamorphoses* is already meta-tragic in treatment, is already at the perverse end of Ovid's repertoire of family plots, and, in the grotesque depiction of the cutting out of Philomela's tongue, contains a moment which becomes a defining allusive precedent for both Senecan and Lucanian representations of bodily mutilation.<sup>4</sup> Schiesaro writes (in his book and elsewhere) about the interweaving of mythological and intertextual

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<sup>1</sup> This article works up a short paper (and a long handout) from the conference at Rethymno in May 2004; I am indebted to Michael Paschalis and to all the faculty and students of the University of Crete who offered such generous hospitality on that occasion. Revision and expansion began with a lunchtime colloquium in my own department (subtitled "three hours with a glue-stick in Athens airport"); in 2006 and early 2007 I was able to present evolving versions of the paper at the Classical Association of the Pacific Northwest (in Portland), and in lectures at Berkeley, Florida State University (as Langford Scholar), the University of Chicago, and Yale. The final product has been improved by the comments of generous colleagues and audience members at each venue; it shows a more long-standing debt to my former student Dan Curley, whose own work on Ovidian "metatheater" has influenced some of the ways in which I approach this material. My research was supported in part by a 2003-04 sabbatical fellowship from the American Philosophical Society, and a Lockwood Professorship of the Humanities at the University of Washington. My travel to Crete took place under the auspices of the University of Washington–University of Crete sister-university agreement; my especial thanks to Anna Kartsonis, chair of our UWUOC committee. English versions of ancient passages are (in the main) lightly adapted from the Loeb Classical Library, and borrow freely from other published translations too.

<sup>2</sup> "Proto-Senecan": for this way of formulating an intertextual relationship cf. Hinds 1998, 133; Hinds 2007a *passim*.

<sup>3</sup> Schiesaro 2003 *passim*, esp. 70-138; quotation from 78. Cf. Tarrant 1985, esp. on *Thy.* 272-7.

<sup>4</sup> Lucan: with *Ov. Met.* 6.555-60 cf. esp. *B.C.* 2.181-4, with Fantham 1992 ad loc. On the broader issue of allusive precedent for violence and the grotesque in Seneca and other post-Augustan writers, excellent brief overview in Boyle 1994 on *Tro.* 1115-17.

precedent in Senecan emplotments of tragic guilt,<sup>5</sup> and that theme will resonate here too – not least in my own treatment of just one key speech from the *Thyestes*, in my paper’s final pages.

So too, the final chapter of Cedric Littlewood’s *Self-Representation and Illusion in Senecan Tragedy* (Oxford 2004) treats the idea of intertextual awareness in the *Phaedra* through reexamination of that play’s patterns of allusion to Ovidian poetry, including (but not restricted to) the epistle from Phaedra to Hippolytus. We are reminded that the *Heroides*, themselves indebted to traditions of tragic monologue, are at times as considerable a source for Senecan tragedy as are the *Metamorphoses*; and (more broadly) that for Seneca, as for many later writers, poetic Ovidianism involves engagement with a tradition in which issues of genre, representation and literary self-fashioning, along with questions of interplay between mythic and literary historical memory, are already thoroughly explored and thematized.<sup>6</sup> The *Phaedra* ends with another of Seneca’s notorious descriptions of violent bodily distress, in the messenger-reported crash of Hippolytus’ chariot and its aftermath, and the key post-Attic model is again Ovidian: this time from the episode of the *Metamorphoses* in which Hippolytus narrates his own gruesome death and Italian reincarnation.

I will not be returning again to the *Phaedra* (except in passing); but one allusive event, given classic treatment some years ago by Charles Segal, will serve to signal the intensity of self-awareness which Seneca is capable of bringing, here and elsewhere, to his conversations with Ovid.<sup>7</sup> Such a signal is worth making at the outset, since (by contrast) in the main body of my paper I will often choose to pursue fainter intertextual trails, marked by more fragile and impalpable kinds of Ovidianism.

PHAEDRA

hic dicet ensis, quem tumultu territus  
liquit stuprator civium accursum timens.

THESEUS

quod *facinus*, heu me, cerno? quod monstrum intuo?  
regale *patriis* asperum *signis ebur*  
*capulo* refulget, gentis Actaeae decus.

(Sen. *Phaed.* 896-900)

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<sup>5</sup> Schiesaro 2003, 78, again, on *Met.* 6 and *Thyestes*: “By remembering and repeating well-known criminal deeds, those of Tereus and Procne, Seneca is already raising the moral stakes of his own writing, since his rewriting will necessarily exemplify a new, bloodier advance in the literary depiction of horrors, and will necessarily result in yet another brutal breach of the *decorum* of silence”; cf. (for Senecan tragedy more broadly) Schiesaro 1997.

<sup>6</sup> Littlewood 2004, 259-301, esp. 264-5 on issues of genre thrown into relief by the *Heroides*.

<sup>7</sup> Segal 1986, 130-1, 170-1, 211-12.

PH. This sword will tell you: frightened by the outcry the rapist left it, fearing that citizens would gather. TH. Oh! What crime do I see? What monstrosity do I behold? Royal ivory carved with my father's emblems gleams on the hilt – the glory of our Attic house.

Theseus, seeking the culprit who has (as he believes) violated Phaedra, recognizes his own inherited sword,<sup>8</sup> left behind (so Phaedra claims) by the rapist – and is thus led to condemn his son Hippolytus to death. We recognize the inherited sword too, in a moment of concentrated mythological and intertextual continuity. It is the same one whose last-minute recognition by Theseus' father Aegeus established Theseus' identity and thus saved the father from being misled by Medea into killing the son ... in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*:

sumpserat ignara Theseus data pocula dextra,  
cum pater in capulo gladii cognovit eburno  
signa sui generis facinusque excussit ab ore.  
(Ov. *Met.* 7.421-3)

Theseus had taken and raised the cup in his unwitting hand, when the father recognized the emblems of his own house on the ivory hilt of the son's sword – and dashed the crime from his lips.

The inherited sword recurs, then, but the inherited lesson is misread. The father fails to learn from his own father's experience the danger of trusting a wife and stepmother with murderous designs on his son. Instead, the *signa* on the sword, which led to a true inference in the case of Aegeus and Theseus, lead to a false inference in the case of Theseus and Hippolytus; the recognition of the token prevents filicide in one generation, but causes it in the next. Theseus' initial question "*quod facinus, heu me, cerno?*" encapsulates his failure: in mistakenly seeing and believing this *facinus* he is led to commit the real *facinus* himself – the one which his father had successfully avoided (*facinusque excussit ab ore*). One allusive event, to be sure, but suggestive enough of a potent Ovidian presence within the imaginative space of Senecan drama. Tragic and intertextual repetition, mythic and poetological paternity, the problematic transfer of meaning from generation to generation: these are useful terms to bear in mind in what follows.

If Theseus' sword is readable as a kind of emblem of allusive virtuosity, the fact is that some kind of interaction with Ovid turns out to be a more or less continuous feature of all Senecan tragedy. A useful demonstration of this has for some time been available in Rainer Jakobi's *Der Einfluss Ovids auf den Tragiker Seneca* (Berlin 1988), a two-hundred

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<sup>8</sup> Following Zwierlein 1986 and Coffey-Mayer 1990 I read D. Heinsius' *patriis* for *parvis* in *Phaed.* 899, an emendation strongly supported by the pattern of allusion under discussion here: cf. Jakobi 1988, 83.

page inventory of annotated sources and imitations, organized play by play and line by line within each play. The *Metamorphoses* provides Jakobi with the bulk of his *loci similes*, with the *Heroides* a respectable runner-up; and his monograph also rehearses the verbal correspondences between *Heroides* 12, *Metamorphoses* 7 and Seneca's *Medea* which lend substance to the conjecture that Ovid's own lost tragic *Medea* was a key text for the later dramatist. My treatment will eschew Jakobi's commentatorial linearity, while embracing something of the (no less commentatorial) catholicity of his lists of parallels. That it, I shall be alert not just to strongly signalled allusions but also to a kind of background Ovidianism (if I may so term it) discernible within the seemingly indiscriminate intertextuality of a Senecan *topos*. The aim will be to complement the expected purple passages with some larger (if less tidy) impressions of the dramatic, rhetorical and conceptual space which Ovid and his poetry occupy in Seneca's tragic imagination.

## 2. Tragic and Ovidian Thebes as Senecan settings

Dramatic space in Seneca is always intertextual space, not just in the broad sense in which *any* text with *any* relation to *any* context can be termed intertextual, but in the more specific sense that the mythological system within which Seneca's tragic plots are mobilized is a system always already constituted by previous literary texts. And since that is still such a broad statement that it can apply just as well to Aeschylean tragedy as to Senecan – “slices from Homer's banquet” in the famous formulation (Aesch. ap. Ath. 8.347e) – let me put it more specifically still: I would argue that, for any formal Roman poet of the mid to late 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, the whole system of Greco-Roman myth has an important and inescapable post-Ovidian dimension. We are used to the idea that the pretension of the *Metamorphoses* to a kind of mythological comprehensiveness actually does lead to its *becoming* the encyclopaedia of myth for the Middle Ages and Renaissance; but I think we have tended to underestimate just how thoroughly the *Metamorphoses* is already being absorbed as the “bible” of myth in the Rome of the first century CE.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> To offer this formulation is of course to bracket out the *Aeneid*, if only temporarily. As much recent work has discovered, it is always a useful heuristic strategy to look beyond the post-Virgilianism of these years for complementary literary historical plots. (I recall an early encapsulation in an Andrew Zissos seminar in which I guest-taught at University of Texas in 1999 titled, in allusion to Hardie 1993, “The Epic Successors of Ovid”.)

“*Intertextual space*”; but also “*intertextual space*”: this section will offer some observations about the shared dramatic location of three of Seneca’s extant plays, in and around the city of Thebes. First, the *Oedipus*. Geopoetically (in Alessandro Barchiesi’s valuable term) the Thebes inhabited by Oedipus in the Senecan play which bears his name is, inevitably, a post-Ovidian Thebes. That might seem counter-intuitive: when Ovid himself had treated Theban mythology in Books 3 and 4 of the *Metamorphoses*, after all, the story of Oedipus had been a very notable omission. However, recent Ovidian critics have argued that the Theban myths which Ovid does there tell (including Actaeon, Narcissus and Pentheus) can be felt to gesture thematically towards Oedipus as their absent centre and reference-point.<sup>10</sup>

Although these critics haven’t overtly made the connection, their approach finds a kind of vindication in one of the choral odes in Seneca’s *Oedipus*, in which the Theban chorus reaches back into the history of the house of Labdacus to find contexts for the eponymous hero’s transgressions and sufferings:

non tu tantis causa periclis,  
non haec Labdacidas petunt  
fata, sed veteres deum  
irae sequuntur.  
(*Oed.* 709-12)

You are not the cause of these great hazards, not such is the fate that attacks the Labdacids: no, the ancient anger of the gods is pursuing us.

What happens in the ode here begun (as elucidated by Jakobi) is that the Senecan chorus sets Oedipus in the context of a markedly Ovidian version of the mythology of the Cadmean Thebes – featuring not just Cadmus himself and the Theban foundation myth (as we might expect) but, front and centre, and with clear verbal allusion to the *Metamorphoses*, Cadmus’ grandson Actaeon, the youth turned into a stag in Ovid’s epic after angering Diana with his inadvertent voyeurism.<sup>11</sup> Here is the start of the ode’s final section, with the main Ovidian

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<sup>10</sup> Hardie 1988, 86 (= Knox 2006, 140): “Behind the Narcissus story there hovers the figure of the Sophoclean Oedipus, the glaring absence from the narrative surface of Ovid’s Theban books, *Metamorphoses* 3 and 4, but a ghostly presence in much of the drama of blindness, sight, and insight, particularly of the third book”; a point further developed by Golden and Zissos 2000.

<sup>11</sup> See Jakobi 1988, 111-25, esp. 121-5.

cues italicized (preeminently *vivacis cornua cervi*, verbally congruent despite the new metrical setting<sup>12</sup>):

quid *Cadmei* fata *nepotis*,  
cum *vivacis cornua cervi*  
frontem ramis texere novis  
dominumque canes egere suum?  
(*Oed.* 751-4)

What of the fate of Cadmus' grandson, when the horns of a long-lived stag covered his forehead with strange branches and his hounds hunted their master?

prima *nepos* inter tot res tibi, *Cadme*, secundas  
causa fuit luctus alienaque *cornua* fronti  
addita vosque, canes, satiatae sanguine erili.

dat sparso capiti *vivacis cornua cervi*.  
(*Ov. Met.* 3.138-40, 194)

Your grandson, Cadmus, amid all your happiness first brought you cause of grief, upon whose brow strange horns appeared, and you, dogs, glutted with your master's blood.

On the head which she had sprinkled she caused to grow the horns of a long-lived stag.

As the Senecan chorus continues to recall the fate of Actaeon, the Ovidian momentum is maintained,<sup>13</sup>

praeceps silvas montesque fugit  
citus Actaeon, agilique magis  
pede per saltus ac saxa vagus  
metuit motas zephyris plumas  
et quae posuit retia vitat —  
(*Oed.* 755-9)

Swift Actaeon headlong fled the woods and mountains; through brush, over rocks he wandered on more agile foot, fearing the feathers moving in the breeze and avoiding the nets he himself had set —

becoming especially strong in the last lines,

donec placidi fontis *in unda*  
*cornua* vidit vultusque feros.  
*ibi virgineos* foverat artus  
nimium saevi *diva pudoris!*  
(*Oed.* 760-3)

until in the water of the placid pool he saw his horns and animal features. There she had bathed her virgin limbs, the goddess of chastity too fierce!

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<sup>12</sup> I.e. in 752 the Senecan anapaestic dimeter falls into a dactylic configuration (cf. dactylic second metra in five consecutive lines at 741-5 just above: Töchterle 1994 on *Oed.* 738ff.). Ovid's *vivacis cornua cervi* is in turn a verbatim (but not cross-metrical) reproduction of Virg. *Ecl.* 7.30.

<sup>13</sup> With *Oed.* 755-7 cf. *Met.* 3.198-9; with 759 cf. *Met.* 3.228: discussion of these and other correspondences at Jakobi 1988, 123.

with their recreation of the *fons ... tenui perlucidus unda* (*Met.* 3.161) in which the “original” Actaeon had come to grief:

*hic dea silvarum venatu fessa solebat  
virgineos artus liquido perfundere rore.*

*ut vero vultus et cornua vidit in unda,  
“me miserum” dicturus erat ...  
(Ov. Met. 3.163-4, 200-1)*

Here the goddess of the woods, when weary with the chase, was wont to bathe her virgin limbs in the crystal spray.

But when in water he saw his features and his horns, “Oh, woe is me!” he tried to say ...

One new emphasis in the ode’s treatment of Actaeon is to be found in the delay and consequent foregrounding of the Ovidian moment of self-recognition, when the newly transformed youth catches sight of himself in the water. In the quotations above, *Oed.* 760-1 maps on to *Met.* 3.200 almost word for word.<sup>14</sup> However, the moment has been moved from the middle of the story to its end (*donec ...*);<sup>15</sup> and where Ovid writes, simply, *cornua vidit in unda*, Seneca writes *placidi fontis in unda / cornua vidit*. What the Senecan adjustment does, I think (though the hint may already be implicit in the Ovidian text), is to cast Actaeon – fleetingly – as an analogue to *Narcissus*, an adjacent character from an adjacent (and emblematically “calm”) pool in Ovid’s Theban cycle; a character in whose story the aquatic self-recognition more obviously forms the moment of climax.<sup>16</sup> Such syncretism (if felt) harmonizes with the spirit of the Senecan ode as a whole, draws a series of Theban myths closer to one another, and allows *both* Actaeon *and* Narcissus to prefigure the plot, most forcefully realised in Oedipus, of delayed self-knowledge.

The habit of reading one mythological episode by exploring systems of linkage and parallelism with other, cognate episodes is of course built into the very structure of myth; but in Seneca’s staging of Oedipus’ Thebes, in the above chorus and elsewhere, it is also a

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<sup>14</sup> See Jakobi 1988, 124: “*in unda / cornua vidit vultusque* stammt wörtlich aus der entsprechenden Szene Ovids: *vultus et cornua vidit in unda* (*Met.* 3.200); allein die Wortfolge ist geändert”. The allusion offers good evidence that Seneca’s text of the *Met.* contained 3.200, excised (after Heinsius) in Tarrant’s 2004 text; further arguments against excision now in Barchiesi 2007 ad loc.

<sup>15</sup> I.e. in Seneca the moment of self-recognition in the pool, rather than preceding the pursuit of Actaeon by his dogs, becomes the climax of the chase.

<sup>16</sup> As more than one listener to my paper has remarked to me, such sharpening of the analogy between Actaeon and Narcissus characterizes the more famous post-Ovidian Actaeon at Apuleius, *Met.* 2.4, a statue group suggestively positioned over a reflecting pool: see (with refs. to earlier discussions) the observations in Freudenburg forthcoming; also (again) Barchiesi 2007 on *Met.* 3.200.

peculiarly post-Ovidian habit. Elsewhere in the play, Seneca superimposes on Oedipus not just the story of Actaeon but also the story of Pentheus; in the first instance quoted below Mount Cithaeron offers Oedipus the fates of Actaeon and Pentheus together:<sup>17</sup>

... ipse tu scelerum capax,  
sacer Cithaeron, vel feras in me tuis  
emitte silvis, mitte vel rabidos canes —  
nunc redde Agaven.  
(*Oed.* 930-3)

You who encompass crimes, accursed Cithaeron, send beasts against me from your woods, send ravening hounds – now send back Agave.

en ecce, rapido saeva prosiluit gradu  
Iocasta vecors, qualis attonita et furens  
Cadmea mater abstulit nato caput  
sensitve raptum.  
(*Oed.* 1004-7)

Look, Jocasta rushes out with urgent steps, in violent turmoil, like the frenzied Cadmean mother when she tore off her son's head, or when she recognized it, severed.

The dynamic in these passages is the same as that which causes Ovid's own Pentheus, in the middle of being torn apart by the Theban women, to beg his aunt to remember the previous tearing-apart of his cousin Actaeon,

saucius ille tamen “fer opem, matertera!” dixit  
“Autonoes moveant animos Actaeonis umbrae”.  
illa quis Actaeon nescit dextramque precantis  
abstulit ...  
(*Ov. Met.* 3.719-22)

Sore wounded, he cries out: “Oh help, my aunt! Let the ghost of Actaeon move Autonoe's heart”. She knows not who Actaeon is, and tears off the suppliant's right arm ...

and so too with other moments of thematic recall and cross-reference which abound (minus Oedipus, except *sous rature*) in the Theban mythology of *Metamorphoses* 3 and 4. In sum, the Theban *mise en scène* of Seneca's *Oedipus* is an *Ovidian Theban mise en scène*, sometimes more obtrusively, sometimes less so.

Seneca's two other plays with Theban locations both start with noticeably Ovidian set-ups.

IUNO  
*soror Tonantis – hoc enim solum mihi  
nomen relictum est – semper alienum Iovem  
ac templa summi vidua deserui aetheris  
locumque caelo pulsa paelicibus dedi.*

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<sup>17</sup> *Oed.* 930-3 are words of Oedipus reported as direct speech by a messenger; 1004-7 are spoken by the chorus.

... una me dira ac fera  
Thebana tellus matribus sparsa impiis  
quotiens novercam fecit! ...  
(*Her. F.* 1-4, 19-21)

Sister of the Thunder God: this is the only title left me. Wife no more, I have abandoned ever-unfaithful Jove and the precincts of high heaven; driven from the skies, I have given up my place to his whores.

How often has this one land, this wild and monstrous land of Thebes, with its crop of impious mothers, made me a stepmother!

Even though the anger of Juno which begins the *Hercules Furens* shows Seneca at his most Virgilian, the goddess's bitter opening quip comes not from the *Aeneid* but from the *Metamorphoses* – see the emphases above and below<sup>18</sup> – and, again, from the specifically Theban part of the *Metamorphoses*, at the point of transition between the episodes of Actaeon and Semele.

sola Iovis coniunx non tam culpetne probetne  
eloquitur, quam clade domus ab Agenore ductae  
gaudet et a Tyria collectum paelice transfert  
in generis socios odium. subit ecce priori  
causa recens, gravidamque dolet de semine magni  
esse Iovis Semelen ...

“... si sum regina Iovisque  
et soror et coniunx – certe soror ...”  
(*Ov. Met.* 3.256-61, 265-6)

Jove's wife alone spoke no word either in blame or praise, but rejoiced in the disaster which had come to Agenor's house; for she had now transferred her anger from her Tyrian rival to those who shared her blood. And lo! a fresh pang was added to her former grievance and she was smarting with the knowledge that Semele was pregnant with the seed of mighty Jove.

“... if I am queen of heaven, the sister and wife of Jove – at least his sister ...”

As for the truncated *Phoenissae* (a play unexpectedly open to recuperation in Ovidian terms, as I shall argue), the opening speech of Oedipus brings another catalogue of Theban myth freighted with reminiscence of Ovid, starting with Actaeon and Pentheus,

ibo, ibo qua praeupta protendit iuga  
meus Cithaeron, qua peragrato celer  
per saxa monte iacuit Actaeon suis  
nova praeda canibus, qua per obscurum nemus  
silvamque opacae vallis instinctas deo  
egit sorores mater et gaudens malo  
vibrante fixum praetulit thyrso caput  
(*Phoen.* 12-18)

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Fitch 1987 on *Her. F.* 1-2, as also on 4-5.

I shall go, I shall go where my own Cithaeron extends its sheer ridges, where Actaeon swiftly traversed the rocky mountain and fell as strange prey for his own hounds, where through the dark grove, the glen shaded with trees, a mother led her god-ridden sisters, and gleeful in her ruin displayed on her quivering thyrsus a head fixed there

and proceeding (via a Dirce of more open provenance) to an Ino

vel qua alta maria vertice immenso premit  
Inoa rupes, qua scelus fugiens novum  
novumque faciens mater insiluit freto  
mensura natum seque ...

(*Phoen.* 22-5)

Or where Ino's crag looms over the deep seas from its immense height, where, fleeing strange crime and yet strange crime committing, a mother leaped into the strait to drown her child and herself ...

who recalls her counterpart in *Metamorphoses* 4; Jakobi and Frank adduce parallel passages.<sup>19</sup> However, this beginning is also characterized by something more intangibly Ovidian which escapes a commentator's line-by-line approach. Oedipus' words here communicate a strong sense, cued by Mount Cithaeron, of a unified setting in nature for all the mythological action of which he speaks (*Phoen.* 12-25 *ibo qua ... meus Cithaeron, qua ... qua ... vel qua ... qua ... vel qua ... qua ...*);<sup>20</sup> and what throws this into relief is the adjacent transition in which his words mimic the kind of ecphrastic *est locus* formula employed to rhetoricize such settings in narrative writing, and, more particularly, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*:<sup>21</sup>

*est alius istis noster in silvis locus,*  
qui me reposcit: *hunc* petam cursu incito;  
non haesitabit gressus, *huc* omni duci  
spoliatus ibo ...

(*Phoen.* 27-30)

There is another place, my place, in those forests, that calls me back. This I shall make for in urgent haste, my steps will not falter, hither I shall go bereft of any guide.

Antigone's immediate response to the mythologically displaced death wishes of Oedipus' first speech sustains this pattern of quasi-ecphrastic gesture towards a wild natural setting.

perire sine me non potes, mecum potes.  
*hic* alta rupes arduo surgit iugo  
spectatque longe spatia subiecti maris:

<sup>19</sup> With the wording of *Phoen.* 14-15 *suis / nova praeda canibus* cf. not just the Actaeon of *Met.* 3 but esp. the Actaeon vignette at *Ov. Trist.* 2.106 *praeda fuit canibus non minus ille suis* ("none the less he became the prey of his own hounds"), to be cited again in another context in Section 5; see Jakobi 1988, 42. With *Phoen.* 22-5 cf. *Ov. Met.* 4.525-30, with Frank 1995 on *Phoen.* 22-3. Along with most edd. I print Peiper's conjecture *novum* at the end of *Phoen.* 23 (MSS *suum*): see Barchiesi 1988 and Frank 1995 ad loc.

<sup>20</sup> Cithaeron as common setting: cf. *Oed.* 930-3, quoted earlier.

<sup>21</sup> Hinds 2002, esp. 125-7.

vis *hanc* petamus? nudus *hic* pendet silex,  
*hic* scissa tellus faucibus ruptis hiat:  
 vis *hanc* petamus? *hic* rapax torrens cadit  
 partesque lapsi montis exesas rotat:  
 in *hunc* ruamus? dum prior, quo vis eo.  
 (*Phoen.* 66-73)

You cannot perish without me, but with me you can. Here a high crag rises to a lofty peak, looking far out over the reaches of the sea beneath it: do you want us to make for this? Here a bare rock is poised, here the rent earth yawns open in a broken chasm: do you want us to make for this? Here a sweeping torrent falls, and whirls around eroded fragments of a fallen mountain: should we plunge into this? I go wherever you wish – only before you.

The interplay of myth and landscape here (and throughout the early part of the play) is interesting in terms of Senecan dramatic space: but, more particularly, in terms of intertextual space, it represents a notable extension of the scene’s conversation with Ovidian myth, since the interaction of myth and rhetorically constructed nature is one of the trademarks of the *Metamorphoses*, and is nowhere more marked in that epic than in the mountains, woods and crags in which the “Cadmeid” of *Met.* 3 and 4 is set. The recurrent landscapes of Ovid’s Theban books operate as symbolically charged sites in which the threat of violence is always somehow immanent;<sup>22</sup> and this is surely crucial to Seneca’s response too.<sup>23</sup>

To be sure, other texts are inscribed in the landscape of the *Phoenissae* too. The displacement of a Theban crisis from the city to the country owes something to Euripides’ *Bacchae*, itself already a likely inspiration for Ovid’s sense of wild nature in *Met.* 3 and 4; it is symptomatic that, more than once in the *Bacchae*, the fate of Actaeon lurks behind that of Pentheus, with due attention to the matter of shared location.<sup>24</sup> So too, the modern commentaries on the *Phoenissae* make the attractive point that the disgraced Oedipus’ fixation on a return to Cithaeron as the original *locus* of his troubles,

... quid moror sedes meas?  
 mortem, Cithaeron, redde et hospitium mihi  
 illud meum restitue, ut expirem senex

<sup>22</sup> Hinds 2002, esp. 130-6 and (for earlier bibl.) 149.

<sup>23</sup> For context, cf. now the rich treatment of Seneca’s “*loca horrida*” in Schiesaro 2006 (discussion of many plays, but not *Phoen.*): esp. 431 on sensitivity to *est locus* rhetoric, and 449 on responsiveness to elements of anxiety and horror in Virgilian and Ovidian landscapes.

<sup>24</sup> Eur. *Bacch.* 337-42 and esp. 1290-1 ΑΓΑΥΗ ποῦ δ’ ὤλετ’; ἢ κατ’ οἶκον, ἢ ποίοις τόποις; / ΚΑΔΜΟΣ οὔπερ πρὶν Ἀκταίωνα διέλαχον κύνες (“Agave: Where did he perish? At home, or in what place? Cadmus: Right where the dogs tore Actaeon apart before”); cf. *Bacch.* 229-30 and 1227-8, with Segal 1982, 33, 79, and 117n.54. For the earlier versions of the crime which Euripides’ allusions may assume see Segal 1982, 166n.16, with Dodds 1960 on *Bacch.* 337-40; the first clear extant allusion to the eventually canonical version followed by Ovid and Seneca – Artemis surprised bathing – is at Callim. *Hymn* 5.107-18.

ubi debui infans ...  
(*Phoen.* 30-33)

Why keep my own abode waiting? Give me back my death, Cithaeron; restore to me that lodging place of mine, so I may die in old age where I should have died in infancy

as well as resuming a theme from Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, can be read as a kind of morbid transformation of Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, in which the hero is fixated upon that more redemptive *locus* of hospitality which awaits him in Athens.<sup>25</sup>

But, in the end, the foregrounding of natural setting in this drama goes beyond anything to be found in an Attic model.<sup>26</sup> It hardly overstates things to suggest that in the first half of Seneca's *Phoenissae*, as we have it, there are two protagonists, Oedipus and the wild sylvan landscape around Thebes. Whatever may be contributed by other elements to this *mise en scène*, it seems to me that the most immediate imaginative stimulus comes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Significantly, when Oedipus makes what is (or at least looks like) his final exit from the play, at its midpoint,<sup>27</sup>

... nemo me ex his eruat  
*silvis*: latebo rupis exesae cavo  
aut saepe densa corpus abstrusum tegam.  
hinc aucupabor verba rumoris vagi  
et saeva fratrum bella, quod possum, audiam.  
(*Phoen.* 358-62)

Let no one root me out of these woods: I shall lurk in the cave of a hollowed cliff, or cover my body hidden deep in dense brush. From here I shall catch at the words of straying rumours, and hear – the limit of my capability – of the brothers' savage warfare

he does so by plunging irrevocably into the forests (*silvis*) and caves which have been given such emphasis, to be seen no more (*latebo*), a reduced and disembodied version of himself (360 *corpus abstrusum*; cf. 362 ... *quod possum, audiam*); and at this final moment there is a fleeting and wholly unexpected intertextual conjunction with another Ovidian character who is quite literally effaced (again, *latet silvis*; compare emphases above and twice below) in the corresponding landscape of the *Metamorphoses*:

spreta *latet silvis* pudibundaque frondibus ora  
protegit et solis ex illo vivit in antris.  
sed tamen haeret amor crescitque dolore repulsae;  
attenuant vigiles corpus miserabile curae

<sup>25</sup> Fixation on Cithaeron: cf. Soph. *O.T.* 1391-3 and 1451-4; Eur. *Phoen.* 1604ff. Transformation of Soph. *O.C.* 88-98: Barchiesi 1988 on Sen. *Phoen.* 29-30, Frank 1995 on *Phoen.* 27, 29-30.

<sup>26</sup> Cf., again, Schiesaro 2006, 427, on "topographic luxury" as a key feature of Senecan drama at large.

<sup>27</sup> On the issues of framing, structure and transition in this apparently incomplete and chorus-less play, as they relate to its bipartite structure, see Frank 1995, 3-8 and 12.

adducitque cutem macies et in aera succus  
 corporis omnis abit. vox tantum atque ossa supersunt:  
 vox manet; ossa ferunt lapidis traxisse figuram.  
 inde *latet silvis* nulloque in monte videtur,  
 omnibus auditur ...

(Ov. *Met.* 3.393-401)

Thus spurned, she lurks in the woods, covers her shamed face among the foliage, and lives from that time on in lonely caves. But still her love remains and grows with the pain of rejection; her sleepless cares waste away her wretched body; she becomes gaunt and shrivelled up, and all moisture fades from her body into the air. Only her voice and her bones remain: then, only voice; for they say that her bones were turned to stone. She lurks in the woods and is seen no more on the mountain-sides; but all may hear her ...

Not Ovid's Narcissus, elsewhere an Oedipus-*sous-rature*, but the collateral victim of Narcissus' drama: the figure of Echo. When apprehended with an Ovidian sense of myth, this moment of punctuation in Seneca's play seems weirdly metamorphic. Oedipus' aspiration at *Phoen.* 27-8 has been fulfilled: the hero is at one with "his" Cithaeron: in a moment no less Ovidian than Senecan, the landscape of his story has literally (well, almost literally) reclaimed him.

Both as context for the preceding discussion and as preparation for later sections, it is worth laying emphasis on the inherent hospitality of Ovid's epic to intertextual dialogue with tragic poetry. The *Metamorphoses* itself engages with many tragic models for its myths, Greek and (more conjecturally) Roman; and, more than that, like the *Aeneid*, it includes many meta-tragic touches which display self-awareness of the generic electricity capable of being generated between tragedy and epic. In the Theban section of the *Metamorphoses* in particular, as Philip Hardie pointed out in an influential article, part of the point of the famous simile for the birth of the "Sown Men" from the dragon's teeth

sic, ubi tolluntur festis auleaea theatris,  
 surgere signa solent primumque ostendere vultus,  
 cetera paulatim, placidoque educta tenore  
 tota patent imoque pedes in margine ponunt  
 (Ov. *Met.* 3.111-14)

So when on festal days the curtain in the theatre is raised, figures of men rise up, showing first their faces, then little by little all the rest; until at last, drawn up with steady motion, the entire forms stand revealed, and plant their feet upon the curtain's edge

is to cast a moment of metamorphic magic as a specifically theatrical illusion, and perhaps to signal from the outset the implication of Ovid's Theban genealogy in a "stagey, tragic

world”.<sup>28</sup> Elsewhere in that discussion, Hardie, applying the approach of a classic essay by Froma Zeitlin, suggests that in *Met.* 3 and 4 Ovid may mobilize Thebes both as an *inherently* tragic space and as a privileged *locus* for the discovery of mythic truths closer to home/Rome – under the influence of the Attic dramatists’ sense of Thebes as the location of an admonitory “theatre of the Other”.<sup>29</sup> We should be on the lookout in case this last idea has some traction for Seneca too.

### 3. Ovid’s *Medea* in intertextual repertory

Seneca’s tragedies generate a great deal of energy between and among one another: with issues of dating set aside, every protagonist in the *oeuvre* can be felt by the reader to gather momentum from every other protagonist in the *oeuvre*. Crucial to Seneca’s genius in creating a space for “extreme tragedy” is that the hero of any given play always seems to be positioned at the dead centre of the dramatic universe – indeed of the universe *tout court*. However, for Seneca in his post-Ovidian mode there *is* something about Medea.

In the course of his career Ovid had returned to Medea again and again. In the *Heroides*, she writes her own letter to Jason (12), dominates the letter written by Hypsipyle to Jason (6), and is a felt presence throughout the collection.<sup>30</sup> In the *Metamorphoses*, her entire story *except* the action at Corinth is narrated in great detail in Book 7, and her energy is also displaced on to and distributed among a number of other Medea-like heroines grouped in the central books of the *Metamorphoses*: Procne, Scylla, Procris and others.<sup>31</sup> Above all, and at an earlier date than either *Heroides* 12 or *Metamorphoses* 7, Ovid treats the notorious infanticide in what must have been the Augustan period’s most significant contribution to the tragic genre: his own lost *Medea*.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Hardie 1990, 224-6 and n.14. On meta-tragedy in the *Met.* at large see Gildenhard and Zissos 2000 and esp. 1999; Keith 2002, 258-69; and Dan Curley’s anticipated full-length study (seen by me in MS) *Theater and Metatheater: Transforming Tragedy in Ovid*; cf. already Curley 1999.

<sup>29</sup> Hardie 1990, 229; cf. Zeitlin 1986. As Alessandro Schiesaro remarks to me, such a Roman mobilization of “Thebes as other” will involve a sort of double shift: Thebes offers otherness in the context of Attic tragedy, but Greece at large (i.e. not just Thebes) already offers otherness in the context of Roman tragedy. In a discussion just coming out as this paper goes to press, Braund 2006 applies the idea of an admonitory Thebes to the *Thebaid* of Statius.

<sup>30</sup> Medea throughout *Her.*: distinctive approach in Fulkerson 2005, index s.v. “model, Medea as”.

<sup>31</sup> See esp. Newlands 1997; cf. Larmour 1990.

<sup>32</sup> Fragments of Ovid’s *Medea*: edition with commentary in Heinze 1997, 223-52.

Recent critics (including myself) have argued that the end of Medea’s epistle to Jason, *Heroides* 12, operates as a self-conscious metapoetic trailer, not just to the bloody Corinthian revenge immediately beyond the end of that epistle, but to the specific tragic text immediately beyond the end of that epistle; in other words, *Heroides* 12 is cast by Ovid as a “prequel” to his own *Medea*-tragedy.<sup>33</sup> Here is the elegy’s very last pentameter:

nescioquid certe mens mea maius agit!  
(Ov. *Her.* 12.212)

Something greater, for sure, is playing in my mind!

Some greater thing awaits Medea (her *mens* is planning it); but also, as the theatrical resonance available in the verb *agere* can help to suggest, a *greater role* awaits Medea – a role on the tragic stage.<sup>34</sup>

This metapoetic reading arises from the much longer-standing idea that *Heroides* 12 (as also *Metamorphoses* 7) is likely to be loaded with actual verbal allusion to key moments in Ovid’s lost *Medea*,<sup>35</sup> and again *Her.* 12.212 is suggestive. The final verse of Ovid’s elegy constitutes an iconic gesture of tragic escalation, and is imaginable as a reworking of any of a number of junctures in the classic *Medea* plot. The line offers an etymological and emblematic affirmation of the name of the heroine (Medea the mental contriver, in Greek Μηδεια / μήδομαι),<sup>36</sup> such as a verbally adept dramatist might employ as a play-punctuating Leitmotiv. The cluster of M-words (*mens mea maius*) both underlines this implied etymology and calls to mind the trademark triple alliteration of Roman tragedy.<sup>37</sup> Conjecturally, then, this metaliterary allusion to Ovid’s lost play embodies something of the play’s own linguistic and thematic “signature”; and the same conjecture can be applied more broadly to the whole peroration of *Heroides* 12.

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<sup>33</sup> See Spoth 1992, 202-5, Hinds 1993, 39-43, and Barchiesi 1993, 343-5, all conceived independently of one another; many discussions since.

<sup>34</sup> The metapoetic suggestiveness is compounded by the line’s apparent allusion to the most famous poetic trailer in Augustan poetry, Propertius’ notice of the forthcoming *Aeneid*: 2.34.66 *nescioquid maius nascitur Iliade* (“something greater than the *Iliad* is coming to birth”): see again the discussions cited in the previous note.

<sup>35</sup> A dissident view reads *Her.* 12 as a post-Ovidian pastiche partly based on the lost play: so Knox 1986. While I am not myself persuaded that there are any strong grounds to doubt Ovidian authorship (Hinds 1993 *passim*), the larger point at issue here would not be vitiated by a non-Ovidian *Her.* 12 bearing the strong verbal imprint of the lost *Medea*.

<sup>36</sup> Bessone 1997 and Heinze 1997 ad loc.

<sup>37</sup> Triple alliteration (often of M) as a trademark of Roman tragedy: Jocelyn 1967, 170-1, 392.

As an immediate prelude to the reintroduction of Seneca into the discussion, then, let me re-quote *Her.* 12.212 along with the verses which immediately precede it:

quod vivis, quod habes nuptam socerumque potentes,  
 hoc ipsum, ingratus quod potes esse, meum est.  
 quos equidem actutum — sed quid praedicere poenam  
 attinet? *ingentes parturit ira minas.*  
*quo feret ira, sequar!* facti fortasse pigebit —  
 et piget infido consuluisse viro.  
 viderit iste deus, qui nunc mea pectora versat.  
*nescio quid certe mens mea maius agit!*  
 (Ov. *Her.* 12.205-12)

That you are alive, that you have a bride and father-in-law of high station, that you have the very power of being ungrateful, you owe to me. Whom, indeed, I will straightway – but what is the point of foretelling a penalty? My anger is coming to birth with mighty threats. Whither my anger leads, will I follow. Perhaps I shall repent me of what I do – but I repent me, too, of regard for a faithless husband's good. Be that the concern of the god who now embroils my heart. Something greater, for sure, is playing in my mind!

What emerges from some comparative quotation is that these last lines of *Heroides* 12 do appear markedly to haunt the later author's tragedies, whether directly (since Seneca was nothing if not attentive to the *Heroides*) or as indirect witnesses to key words and themes in the lost Ovidian play. The allusive link between Seneca and the highly charged sign-off of Ovid's *Medea* is most obvious in the *Medea* itself.<sup>38</sup>

... efferata ignota horrida,  
 tremenda caelo pariter ac terris mala  
*mens intus agitat:* vulnera et caedem et vagum  
 funus per artus. levia memoravi nimis;  
 haec virgo feci. gravior exurgat dolor:  
*maiora iam me scelera post partus* decent.  
 (Sen. *Med.* 45-50)

Savage, unheard-of, horrible things, evils fearful to heaven and earth alike, my mind stirs up within me: wounds and slaughter and death creeping from limb to limb. But these things I talk of are too slight: I did all this as a girl. My bitterness must grow more weighty: greater crimes become me now, after giving birth.

non facile secum versat aut medium scelus:  
 se vincet. *irae* novimus veteris notas.  
*magnum aliquid* instat, efferum immane impium.  
 (*Med.* 393-5)

It is no simple or moderate crime she is contemplating: she will outdo herself. I know the hallmarks of her old anger. Something great is looming, savage, monstrous, unnatural.

... *maius* his, *maius* parat  
*Medea* monstrum.

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<sup>38</sup> For these patterns of correspondence (key elements italicized), and for further pertinent parallels with Seneca's *Medea*, cf. Bessone 1997 on *Her.* 12.212, and on the preceding verses too.

(*Med.* 674-5)

Greater than that, greater still is the monstrosity Medea is planning.

*quo te igitur, ira, mittis, aut quae perfido  
intendis hosti tela? nescio quid ferox  
decevit animus intus et nondum sibi  
audet fateri.*

(*Med.* 916-19)

So where are you driving, my anger, what weapons are you aiming at your faithless enemy? The spirit within me has determined on something brutal, but dare not yet acknowledge it to itself.

But also, the same patterns of verbal coincidence are discernible in other Senecan plays too, yielding a sense of allusion to Ovid shading into a sort of Ovidian *super-topos*. Alongside *Her.* 12.212 (to restrict the comparison thus) consider the following:

... genitor, invideo tibi:  
Colchide noverca *maius* hoc, *maius* malum est.  
(*Phaed.* 696-7)

Father, I envy you: this is an evil greater, even greater, than your Colchian stepmother.

secum ipse saevus *grande nescio quid parat*  
suisque fatis simile.  
(*Oed.* 925-6)

In his mind he fiercely plans something mighty to match his destiny.

SATELLES

facere *quid tandem paras?*

ATREUS

*nescio quid animus maius* et solito amplius  
supraque fines moris humani tumet  
instatque pigris manibus. *haud quid sit scio,*  
*sed grande quiddam est.*  
(*Thy.* 266-70)

SERVANT. What, then, are you planning to do? ATREUS. Something greater, larger than usual, beyond normal human limits, is swelling in my spirit and pressing on my sluggish hands. What it is I do not know, but it is something mighty.

In the first of these three non-Medea passages (*Phaed.* 696-7), the link to the Medea tradition is overt (*Colchide noverca ...*), and that is one reason to see it as operative in the other two passages too. Seneca's tragic heroes and heroines (from Medea herself to Phaedra, Oedipus and Atreus) are famously obsessed with realizing their full tragic potential, becoming themselves (*Med.* 910 *Medea nunc sum*; cf. the characterization of Oedipus at *Oed.* 926, just quoted, *suisque fatis simile*);<sup>39</sup> but in intertextual terms they are in a sense *all* becoming

<sup>39</sup> See esp. Fitch and McElduff 2002, 18-40, and now Bartsch 2006, 255-81.

Medeas. More precisely, they are replicating two classic Ovidian moves: one whereby Medea herself “becomes Medea” (as so clearly at the end of *Heroides* 12, which reads as a kind of *sphragis*); and the other whereby, in the *Heroides* and in the midsection of the *Metamorphoses* (as also noted above), Ovid’s other intertextual heroines “become Medeas” too.

In all this traffic, Ovid’s Procne in *Metamorphoses* 6 is positioned at an especially busy intersection. She, not Medea, is more usually cited as the allusive “target” of Seneca’s Atreus in the third passage quoted above, *Thy.* 266-70. But Procne is already herself in Ovid a “Medea” who speaks the language of the *Heroides* 12 *sphragis* –

“... magnum quodcumque paravi;  
quid sit, adhuc dubito”. peragit dum talia Procne ...  
(Ov. *Met.* 6.618-19)

“... I have planned some great deed; but what it is I am still in doubt”. While Procne was going over such things ...

– and this is an important part of her legacy to the Atreus of the *Thyestes*.<sup>40</sup>

In formulating the idea of a “Medea code” of tragic rhetoric in Greek and Roman literature, Dan Curley writes of an Ovidian “redefinition” of the younger, Colchian Medea in *Metamorphoses* 7 “as the source of her own *topoi*”, and as a heroine who “set[s] the standard for others who will come after her”.<sup>41</sup> In the *Metamorphoses*, in *Heroides* 12 and back in the lost tragedy, it is arguable that the cumulative effect of Ovid’s interventions in the already-crowded Medea tradition is to program all subsequent Medeas in Latin, and perhaps the majority of subsequent tragic (and quasi-tragic) protagonists in Latin, as post- and propter-Ovidian. Seneca, for one, can be felt to have embraced and responded to the literary historical role thus bequeathed to him.

I close this section with a return from the anatomy of “*toposness*” to a more evidently specific moment of allusion. The set-up of the Greco-Roman *Medea* revenge tragedy, from Euripides on, involves appeals by the heroine to the memory of all the services rendered to Jason during the adventure of the Golden Fleece:

... ingratum caput,  
revolvat animus igneos tauri halitus  
interque saevos gentis indomitae metus  
armifero in arvo flammeum Aeetae pecus,  
hostisque subiti tela, cum iussu meo

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Tarrant 1985 on *Thy.* 269-70; Schiesaro 2003, 81.

<sup>41</sup> Quotation, with permission, from the not-yet-published study cited in n.28.

*terrigena miles mutua caede occidit.*  
(*Med.* 465-70)

Ungrateful creature! Let your mind recall the fiery exhalations of the bull, and – among the savage terrors of that untamed race – the flaming beasts of Aetes in the field that sprouted armed men, and the spears of the sudden foe, when at my bidding the earth-born soldiers fell in mutual slaughter.

For a latecomer to the tradition like Seneca, the memories in question are of course in large part poetic ones (how could they not be?),<sup>42</sup> including, *inter alia*, verbal memories of (re)tellings by Ovid:

... subit ille *nec ignes*  
*sentit anhelatos* ...  
  
*terrigenae pereunt per mutua vulnera fratres*  
*civilique cadunt acie* ...  
(*Ov. Met.* 7.115-16, 141-2)

He went up to the bulls, not feeling the fires exhaled ... The earth-born brethren perished through mutual wounds and fell fighting in civil strife ...

These memories can be as self-aware as anything in Senecan intertextuality (as self-aware, say, as the sign of Theseus' sword); and so it is when this latest Medea taxes the just-departed (and just-duped) Jason with a question about forgetfulness which “she” had asked in her Ovidian epistolary incarnation:

sunt in eo – fuerant certe – delubra Dianae;  
aurea barbarica stat dea facta manu.  
noscis? *an exciderunt mecum loca?* ...  
(*Ov. Her.* 12.69-71)

There is in it – there was, at least – a shrine to Diana, wherein stands the goddess, a golden image fashioned by barbaric hand. Do you know the place? or have places fallen from your memory along with me?

Now the Senecan recapitulation:

discessit. itane est? vadis oblitus mei  
et tot meorum facinorum? *excidimus tibi?*  
*numquam excidemus* ...  
(*Med.* 560-2)

He has left. Is it true? You go oblivious of me, and all my deeds? Have I fallen from your memory? I shall never fall from it.

“Can you *still* not remember (as a husband, as a reader ...) all that I am to you, how the *topoi* of our story are shaped? Well then, let me repeat the lesson, and perhaps this time it will stick.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. Costa 1973 and Hine 2000 on Sen. *Med.* 466-76; Jakobi 1988, 54.

#### 4. The curse of exile: Seneca, Medea, Ovid

A pendant to the previous section will take things in a new direction. There is a verbal pattern running through Roman tragedy from the Republican dramatists down to Seneca (and going back in a Greek form to Euripides), which seems to be associated especially (but not exclusively) with Medea, and which acquires a circumstantial association in particular with Ovid's Medea:<sup>44</sup> it involves the juxtaposition or accumulation of epithets descriptive of exile, usually in asyndeton, either in a context of lamenting one's own exile or of wishing exile upon one's enemy. Thus Accius' Medea (presumably cursing Jason),

exul inter hostis, exspes expers desertus vagus  
(TRF 415 Ribbeck)

An exile among enemies, hopeless, helpless, abandoned, a wanderer

after a pattern used of herself by Euripides' Medea,

ἐγὼ δ' ἔρημος ἄπολις οὐσ' ὑβρίζομαι  
πρὸς ἀνδρός ...  
(Eur. *Med.* 255-6)

But I, abandoned, stateless, am insulted by my husband

by Euripides' Hecuba

... νῦν δὲ γραῦς ἄπαις θ' ἄμα,  
ἄπολις ἔρημος ἀθλιωτάτη βροτῶν  
(Eur. *Hec.* 810-11)

But now I am both old and childless, stateless, abandoned, the most wretched of mortals

and elsewhere too:<sup>45</sup>

ἄπολις ἄοικος πατρίδος ἐστηρημένος,  
πτωχὸς πλανήτης, βίον ἔχων τούφ' ἡμέραν.  
(tr. fr. adesp. 284)

Stateless, homeless, robbed of his native land, a wandering beggar, living day to day.

Compare, in Seneca, Medea on Jason,

... per urbes erret ignotas egens

<sup>43</sup> This paragraph, of course, mobilizes the Conteian idea of poetic memory: Conte 1986, esp. 57-69; associated bibliography at Hinds 1998, 4n.8.

<sup>44</sup> Documentation of this pattern: Heinze 1997 on Ov. *Her.* 12.0a-0b; cf. Bömer 1969-86 on *Met.* 14.217.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. also Eur. *Hipp.* 1028-9, where, however, 1029 is bracketed by modern editors as a "manifest interpolation" (Barrett 1964), "bathetic in the context" (Halleran 1995): further discussion in these commentaries ad loc.

exul pavens invisus incerti laris,  
iam notus hospes limen alienum expetat  
(Sen. *Med.* 20-2)

May he wander through unknown cities in want, in exile, in fear, hated and homeless; may he seek out the doors of others, by this time a notorious guest

### Medea on herself

expulsa supplex sola deserta, undique  
afflicta ...  
(*Med.* 208-9)

Expelled, a suppliant, alone, abandoned, afflicted on every side

and (outside the *Medea*) Aegisthus on Electra:<sup>46</sup>

inops egens inclusa, paedore obruta,  
vidua ante thalamos, exul, invisus omnibus  
aethere negato sero succumbet malis.  
(*Ag.* 991-3)

Destitute, in want, imprisoned, overwhelmed with filth, bereft before being married, an exile, hated by all, denied the daylight, she will succumb at long last to her sufferings.

It seems a reasonable guess that some version of this “exile pattern” appeared in Ovid’s lost *Medea*-tragedy as well. At any rate, when the pattern does occur early in Ovid’s extant work, in the *Heroides*, the reference is indeed to Medea. The speaker is Hypsipyle; but the target of the curse which brings Hypsipyle’s epistle to its climax is her famous Colchian rival:

cum mare, cum terras consumpserit, aera temptet;  
erret inops exspes, caede cruenta sua.  
(*Ov. Her.* 6.161-2)

When she shall have exhausted the sea and the land, let her have recourse to the air; let her wander destitute, hopeless, stained by the blood she has shed.

Compare (if only as evidence that for readers of a later era too this was Medea’s *topos*) the couplet preserved in some 15<sup>th</sup> century sources as the *incipit* of *Heroides* 12, Medea’s own epistle:<sup>47</sup>

exul inops contempta novo Medea marito  
dicit: an a regnis tempora nulla vacant?  
(*Ov. Her.* 12.0a-0b)

<sup>46</sup> Tarrant 1976 on *Ag.* 992 is interesting in the present connection: “the similarity to *Med.* 21 ... is striking, and the words are indeed less appropriate to the imprisoned Electra than to Medea’s imaginary picture of Jason”.

<sup>47</sup> See Heinze 1997 ad loc. For the pattern in the MS tradition of the *Heroides* whereby poems with abrupt openings attract couplets (of uncertain provenance and date) which “regularize” their epistolary format, see (with bibl.) Knox 1995, 36 and n.99.

In exile, destitute, despised by her new husband, Medea speaks: or can no leisure be spared from your kingly duties?

I draw attention to this history because of one small detour taken by the “exile pattern” as it passes through Ovid’s hands.<sup>48</sup> Writing from the Black Sea, the poet applies the *topos* to his own, *autobiographical* situation, using it to execrate and, implicitly, to wish his own fate upon his persecutor and *alter ego* Ibis, in the late curse-poem of that name:<sup>49</sup>

*exul inops erres alienaque limina lustres,  
exiguumque petas ore tremente cibum.  
(Ov. Ib. 113-14)*

In exile, destitute may you wander, and haunt the doors of others, and seek meagre food with trembling mouth.

When Seneca in turn picks up the pattern to have Medea curse Jason in the opening speech of his *Medea*,

... per urbes *erret* ignotas *egens*  
*exul* pavens invisus incerti laris,  
(Sen. *Med.* 20-1)

a second look at this passage reveals, alongside the more generic resemblances (italicized), the acquisition of a particular detail specific to that late Ovidian non-mythological use.<sup>50</sup>

With Ovid’s *alienaque limina lustres*, directed in *Ib.* 113 at Ibis, compare Seneca’s *Medea* to Jason in the continuation of the words just quoted:

iam notus hospes *limen alienum expetat.*  
(Sen. *Med.* 22)

And now the *Ibis* couplet once more, with italics newly adjusted:

*exul inops erres alienaque limina lustres,  
exiguumque petas ore tremente cibum  
(Ov. Ib. 113-14)*

One way or another, then, a personal curse penned by Ovid in his years of exile turns out to be a script both by and for *Medea*.

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<sup>48</sup> “Exile pattern” in Ovid: besides *Her.* 6.162 *erret inops exspes*, (*Her.* 12.[0a-0b] *exul inops*,) and *Ib.* 113-14 *exul inops erres*, all discussed here, see also *Met.* 13.510 *nunc trahor exul inops* (Hecuba) and *Met.* 14.217 *solus inops exspes, leto poenaeque relictus* (Achaemenides).

<sup>49</sup> Ibis as “evil twin” of the exiled Ovid: cf. Hinds 1999, 65 “Ovid often in this elegy makes of Ibis a kind of double of himself by wishing on his persecutor the same sufferings – and the same mythological analogies – which he himself suffers in the *Tristia*”.

<sup>50</sup> So Jakobi 1988, 48; minor embroidery added here.

My observation is a minute and pedantic one. I offer it partly to indulge an inveterate interest (already on display in Section 3) in parsing and picking apart this kind of *topos*,<sup>51</sup> but also because it may be compatible with a more general proposition – as follows. In a completely unprovable way, the status of Medea as a famous exile, and her especial association with Ovid among Roman poets, can lead to a situation in the world of Ovid-reception whereby the exile of Medea and the exile of Ovid himself become imaginatively symbiotic with one another – all the more so in that the poet’s relegation takes him to a location in the same geographical zone as Medea’s birthplace in the Black Sea, and indeed to a town, *Tomis*, which (as Ovid himself explains at full aetiological length in *Tristia* 3.9) is etymologized in Greek from the slicing up (into *tomoi*, “pieces”) of Medea’s brother Absyrtus.<sup>52</sup>

The bid above to write Ovid’s exile into the *topos*-traditions of Senecan tragedy remains an insubstantial thing, both in itself and in terms of any incidental pay-off for a reading of Seneca. However, it may gain oblique encouragement from what now follows.

##### 5. The curse of exile: Seneca, Oedipus, Ovid

It is time for a further look at Seneca’s truncated *Phoenissae* (in some MSS called his *Thebaid*),<sup>53</sup> a play about exile, alienation, and definitions of wrong-doing; a fragment whose intertextuality with Ovid yields, in this paper’s view, some of its clearest intimations of grand design. In the first half, an alienated and guilt-ridden Oedipus wanders about in the wild landscape outside the city of Thebes – a distinctly post-Ovidian landscape, as argued in Section 2 – trying to realise his death-wish.<sup>54</sup> In the second half Jocasta, still alive and still living in the city (as in the *Phoenissae* of Euripides, from this point on a significant model<sup>55</sup>), tries to stop her sons Eteocles and Polynices from engaging in fratricidal strife. She makes her case by arguing that, if they go to war, this will be the *first real crime* committed in their

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Hinds 1998, 17-51, esp. 34-47.

<sup>52</sup> Ovid’s exile and the Medea myth in the context of *Trist.* 3.9 and the adjacent *Trist.* 3.8: see Oliensis 1997, 186-90; Hinds 2007b, esp. 196-8; also Nisbet 1982, 51n.22. In more general terms see Huskey 2004, 284-5 (adding an accent to Rosenmeyer 1997, 29-30 and 36-7), on “Medea as an emblem of Ovid’s exilic life”.

<sup>53</sup> Problematic title of an incomplete play: see Frank 1995, 1.

<sup>54</sup> On the larger thematic affinities of this space outside the city within Seneca’s tragic *oeuvre*, see now Michael Paschalis’ essay in the present volume.

<sup>55</sup> On Senecan affinities with and divergences from Euripides’ *Phoenissae* (whose Oedipus has remained in Thebes, hidden behind the palace’s locked doors), see Barchiesi 1988, 17-35 *passim*, esp. 23-5.

family; all the other negativity in the royal house of Laius (the son killing the father, the mother marrying the son) can be discounted because it was *inadvertent*. But look at the language which comes into play as she interprets her own history for her sons:

... *error invitos adhuc*  
*fecit nocentes, omne Fortunae fuit*  
*peccantis in nos crimen; hoc primum nefas*  
inter scientes geritur. in vestra manu est,  
utrum velitis: sancta si pietas placet,  
donate matri bella; si placuit *scelus*,  
maius paratum est: media se opponit parens.  
(Sen. *Phoen.* 451-7)

Previously it was an error that made us guilty without our intent, the fault was entirely that of Fortune transgressing against us; this present outrage is the first committed amongst us knowingly. Your choice is in your hands: if you decide on sacrosanct loyalty, give up the war for your mother; but if you decide on crime, a greater one is to hand: your parent sets herself between you.

It was an *error* that got Oedipus and herself into trouble, Jocasta says, not a *scelus*. Later in the scene the point is reinforced:

... et per irati sibi  
genas parentis, *scelere* quas nullo nocens,  
*erroris* a se dura supplicia exigens,  
hausit ...  
(*Phoen.* 537-40)

And [I pray you] by the eyes of your self-castigating father – eyes which, guilty of no crime, but exacting harsh self-punishment for an error, he gouged out.

Oedipus acted as if he had been guilty of a *scelus*; but (at least on Jocasta's reckoning) he was guilty only of an *error*.

Now, mainstream scholarship on Seneca would simply label this a recurrent moral *topos* in the tragedies. It can be noted that Amphitryon and Hercules debate the same distinction in the same terms in the earlier *Hercules Furens*,

AMPH. quis nomen usquam *sceleris errori* addidit?  
HER. saepe *error* ingens *sceleris* obtinuit locum.  
(*Her. F.* 1237-8)

AMPH. What man anywhere has laid on error the name of crime? HER. A great error often has the standing of a crime.

and it crops up again in the (probably non-Senecan) *Hercules Oetaeus*.<sup>56</sup> But, as any habitual reader of the *Tristia* will already have registered, the distinction between knowing *scelus* and

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<sup>56</sup> The “earlier” *Hercules Furens*: a rare instance of near-certainty in the vexed chronology of Senecan tragedy, given the probable allusion to *Her. F.* in the *Apocolocyntosis* (Fitch 1987, 51-3; mild *caveats* at Hine 2000, 4),

unknowing *error* is a distinction owned in Latin by one poet above all others: not Seneca but *the exiled Ovid*. For a representative instance we need look no farther than the autobiographical *Tristia* 4.10 (the relegated poet addresses his dead parents):

scite, precor, causam (nec vos mihi fallere fas est)  
*errorem* iussae, non *scelus*, esse fugae.  
 (Ov. *Trist.* 4.10.89-90)

Know, I beg you (and you it is impious for me to deceive), that the cause of my sentence of exile is an error, not a crime.

The fact is that pointed combinations of *scelus* and *error* occur more often in Ovid than in the rest of extant Roman literature put together. “The cause of my exile was an *error*, not a *scelus*”; “even if all the charges against me were true, they would still amount to an *error*, not a *scelus*”; “ask the emperor to commute my sentence of exile, on the grounds that I perpetrated an *error*, not a *scelus*”. These are the terms, expressive of a mixture of self-abasement and partial self-exculpation, in which Ovid again and again stakes out his moral position in the exile poetry;<sup>57</sup> some of the relevant passages are cited by the commentators on Seneca, but without any apparent interest beyond lexical clarification.<sup>58</sup>

And also, before Ovid’s exile, and no less relevantly to the matter at hand, the distinction between knowing *scelus* and unknowing *error* defines the single most overt episode of debate about human guilt and responsibility in all of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, an episode already shown in Section 2 to be of some interest in the ambience of this Theban play: the misadventure of Actaeon.<sup>59</sup>

prima nepos inter tot res tibi, Cadme, secundas  
 causa fuit luctus alienaque cornua fronti  
 addita vosque, canes, satiatae sanguine erili.  
*at bene si quaeras, Fortunae crimen in illo,*  
*non scelus invenies; quod enim scelus error habebat?*  
 mons erat infectus variarum caede ferarum.  
 (Ov. *Met.* 3.138-43)

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and the likelihood (on various counts) of a late date for the unfinished *Phoen.* On *Her. O.* 939-40 (Deinaira on her *error*) see Zwierlein 1984, 30n.69, characterizing the passage as a “freie Imitation” of *Her. F.* 1237-8.

<sup>57</sup> Besides the passages quoted in my text above and below, cf. esp. *Trist.* 1.2.97-100, 1.3.37-8, 3.6.21-6, 3.11.33-4, 4.1.23-4.

<sup>58</sup> On Senecan vocabulary of guilt and error see Frank 1995 on *Phoen.* 203-15 and 451-4, citing the extended discussion of Zwierlein 1984, 35-42 (with 21n.44 and 30n.69). Briefer but more alert to the Ovidian imprint on the vocabulary is Fitch 1987 on *Her. F.* 1237-8 (“The use of *scelus/error* to make the distinction is Ovidian”); so too Jakobi 1988, 44.

<sup>59</sup> The programmatic flagging of issues of “tragic” guilt and responsibility at the start of Ovid’s Actaeon episode continues no less emphatically at the episode’s close (*Met.* 3.253-7), with the (arch) difference that the narrator turns over the discussion to the actors in the story themselves (*aliis ... alii ... pars utraque*).

Your grandson, Cadmus, amid all your happiness first brought you cause of grief, upon whose brow strange horns appeared, and you, dogs, glutted with your master's blood. But if you diligently seek, you will find the fault of Fortune in this, and not any crime of his. For what crime was there in an error? There was a mountain stained with the slaughter of many kinds of beast (...).

It is to *this* moment, in fact, that the language of Jocasta's first speech quoted above (*Phoen.* 451-7) most specifically alludes. *scelus* versus *error*, a distinction between Fortune's criminality (*Fortunae crimen*) and one's own: Jocasta's terms, but also the terms associated with a figure who haunts Seneca's Cithaeron and Seneca's Theban tragedies as a kind of Ovidian intertextual ghost: Actaeon.

In other words, the moral terms used by Jocasta of herself and of the exiled Oedipus resonate in the *Phoenissae* with the moral terms used once by the *pre*-exiled Ovid of another ill-starred Theban, Actaeon, and repeatedly by the exiled Ovid of himself. And what brings all these associations together is the fact that the exiled Ovid had already himself in his famous *apologia* of *Tristia* 2 used the unwitting *error* of Actaeon as the key mythological analogy for his own mix of guilt and innocence in 8 CE:<sup>60</sup>

cur aliquid vidi? cur noxia lumina feci?  
 cur imprudenti cognita culpa mihi?  
 inscius Actaeon vidit sine veste Dianam:  
 praeda fuit canibus non minus ille suis.  
*scilicet in superis etiam fortuna luenda est,*  
 nec veniam laeso numine casus habet.  
 illa nostra die, qua me malus abstulit error,  
 parva quidem periit, sed sine labe domus.  
 (Ov. *Trist.* 2.103-10)

Why did I see anything? Why did I make my eyes guilty? Why did I thoughtlessly take cognizance of a fault? Unwitting was Actaeon when he beheld Diana unclothed; none the less he became the prey of his own hounds. Clearly, among the gods, even ill-fortune must be atoned for; chance gets no pardon when a deity is offended. On that day when my ruinous error undid me, my house, humble but stainless, was destroyed.

Seneca brings the Ovidian vocabulary of *scelus* and *error* to Mount Cithaeron; but, even before Seneca's intervention, Ovid had already "Thebanized" his own life story.

Arguably, then, Ovid's Theban "theatre of the Other" bequeathes to the *Phoenissae* an autobiographically personalized element of mythic moralizing which may just hit home for a dramatist like Seneca, perhaps the earliest inheritor of a kind of *Ovide moralisé*, and another author – and sometime exile – whose career hangs upon an imperial whim. In this

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<sup>60</sup> Indeed (as already noted in Section 2, n.19), a particular echo of this passage can be heard at the very start of the *Phoenissae*, back in Oedipus' opening speech. With *Trist.* 2.106 *praeda fuit canibus non minus ille suis* cf. *Phoen.* 14-15 *iacuit Actaeon suis / nova praeda canibus*; a 'novel prey', then, but a story familiar from (Ovidian) literary tradition.

play's post-Ovidian imagining of actions and consequences at tragic Thebes, might there even be an allusion behind the allusion, a whispered hint that Seneca Tragicus too, like the poet of the *Metamorphoses*, is himself vulnerable to the reversals of fortune, and to the vicissitudes of *error*, that afflict his mythological *dramatis personae*?

### 6. *Troades* and *Tristia*

The sorrows of Hecuba in Seneca's *Troades* yield a pattern of very direct engagement with one of the most "tragic" parts of the *Metamorphoses*, which merits some extended exploration. And here too (although this will not be the first concern in the present section) it may become possible to overhear the sorrows of the exiled Ovid within the topology of mythological lament.

The *Troades* as a whole offers one of the most sustained demonstrations of the power of Augustan non-dramatic poetry to shape Seneca's sense of the tragic tradition. In terms of the inescapable Virgilian dimension in Senecan drama, the epic account of the fall of Troy in *Aeneid* 2 is a felt presence throughout the play. And so it is (to single out an especially striking instance) at the midpoint of the climactic messenger-scene:

NUNTIUS

quos enim praeceps locus  
reliquit artus? ossa disiecta et gravi  
elisa casu; signa clari corporis,  
et ora et illas nobiles patris notas,  
confudit imam pondus ad terram datum;  
soluta cervix silicis impulsu, caput  
ruptum cerebro penitus expresso: *iacet*  
*deforme corpus.*

ANDROMACHA

*sic quoque est similis patri.*  
(Sen. *Tro.* 1110-17)

MESSENGER What body did that steep place leave? His bones are fragmented and crushed by the heavy fall; his weight, cast down to the earth below, has confounded his bright form's features, that face, those noble traces of his father. The neck is broken by the impact of the flint, the head split open and the entire brain forced out. He lies a corpse disfigured. AND. Even in this he is like his father.

Sentenced by the Greeks to secure a safe departure, Hector's son Astyanax has just fallen to a violent death from the walls of Troy; the shattering of his body (and in particular of his head and face) attracts from the messenger the kind of lingering description that we expect in Seneca. Consider (with my emphases) the climax of the messenger's words above, along with Andromache's half-line interruption: "He lies a corpse disfigured". "Even in this he is

like his father”. Like Hector, in other words, mutilated in death from the *Iliad* onwards; the comparison of the dead son to his father at this point takes an intertextual cue from a comparison in Euripides’ *Troades*.<sup>61</sup> But for the reader or listener steeped in the Virgilian fall of Troy, the evocation is of *another* disfigured corpse, which haunts this play at other points too: viz the trunk of Priam in *Aeneid 2*, lying broken on a Trojan shore:

... *iacet ingens litore truncus*  
*avulsumque umeris caput et sine nomine corpus.*  
 (Virg. *Aen.* 2.557-8)

He lies a mighty trunk upon the shore, the head torn from the shoulders, a nameless corpse.

“Like his father”, then; but, on an intertextual reading, like his grandfather too.<sup>62</sup>

Virgil’s poetry is omnipresent in the *Troades*; but hardly less sustained are the play’s engagements with Ovid. My first case-study here is a miniature, in its own way an iconic distillation of the post-Ovidian mythic imagination. Andromache declares that ever since the mutilation of Hector’s corpse, she has been numbed and senseless in the face of each new evil:

tunc obruta atque eversa quodcumque accidit  
 torpens *malis rigensque* sine sensu fero.  
 (*Tro.* 416-17)

That day I was overwhelmed and overturned: whatever happens now I endure without feeling, numb and rigid from my woes.

Any reader coming to this description from the *Metamorphoses* will immediately pick up a hint of the language of traumatic transformation; and the specifics add further interest. As we shall see, Andromache’s numbness here anticipates elements of the portrayal of her mother-in-law Hecuba later in Seneca’s play; but the more marked verbal trace (see italics above and below) is of another stricken – and imminently metamorphic – mother, the Niobe of Ovid:

... “unam minimamque relinque;  
 de multis minimam posco” clamavit “et unam”.  
 dumque rogat, pro qua rogat occidit. orba resedit  
exanimis inter natos natasque virumque

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<sup>61</sup> The comparison of the son’s mutilated corpse to the father’s mutilated corpse is a perverse twist upon an equivalent moment in Eur. *Tro.* 1178-9, in which the dead boy’s hands, envisaged as they were *when alive*, are compared to those of his father *when alive*.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. *Tro.* 54-6 and 140-1, with Boyle 1994 on 140-1 and 1117. Seneca’s nephew Lucan stages his own “recognition” of *Aen.* 2.557-8 (an instance of familial competition in intertextual virtuosity?): *BC* 1.685-6 (of Pompey) *hunc ego, flumine deformis truncus harena / qui iacet, agnosco* (“Him I recognize, that disfigured trunk lying upon the river sands”), with Hinds 1998, 8-10.

*deriguitque malis ...*  
(Ov. *Met.* 6.299-303)

[The mother] cried out: “Oh, leave me one, the littlest! Of all my many children, the littlest I beg you spare – just one!” And even while she prayed, she for whom she prayed fell dead. Childless she sank back among her lifeless sons, daughters and husband, and grew rigid from her woes.

And what makes the allusion even tighter is that Niobe, surrounded in *Met.* 6.301-2 by the dead bodies of all the family members who have predeceased her (see now my underlining), seems herself to have been implicitly patterned by Ovid at this moment after the type of Hecuba;<sup>63</sup> the intertextual relationship between the two myths is almost one of reciprocity.

The grief of Andromache and the grief of Hecuba do tend to coalesce at key moments in Seneca’s play; and a notable pendant to the speech just considered occurs later, when the older woman’s traumatized reaction to the news of the impending and marriage-perverting sacrifice of her youngest daughter at the tomb of Achilles is first mediated through a description in the mouth of Andromache:

at misera luctu *mater* audito stupet;  
labefacta mens succubuit. assurge, alleva  
animum et cadentem, misera, firma spiritum.  
(*Tro.* 949-51)

But the unhappy mother is stunned at hearing this grievous news; her weakened mind has given way. Rise up, ease your heart and strengthen your failing courage, unhappy woman.

My reason for citing the passage here is that, just as in *Tro.* 416-17, Andromache’s words are haunted by words previously descriptive of an archetypal Ovidian mother outside the Trojan cycle. Line 949 *at ... stupet* contains a memory of an earlier Hecuba’s fainting collapse when Polyxena is led away in the *Hecuba* of Euripides.<sup>64</sup> But in purely verbal terms (italics above and below) the stronger coincidence is with an Ovidian moment involving *another* mythological mother who grieves for her daughter: not Hecuba for Polyxena, but Ceres for Proserpina:<sup>65</sup>

*mater ad auditas stupuit* ceu saxea voces  
attonitaeque diu similis fuit ...

<sup>63</sup> Cf. esp. Ovid’s own Hecuba at *Met.* 13.508-9 *modo maxima rerum, / tot generis natisque potens nuribusque viroque* (“once the greatest woman of all, mighty in my many children, sons- and daughters-in-law, and husband”), with 489 *... natisque viroque*. Indeed, Ovid’s Hecuba may also play more directly into the words of Seneca’s Andromache under consideration: Fantham 1982 on *Tro.* 417 (with an eye on *torpens*) adduces not just *Met.* 6.303 (Niobe, as above) but also *Met.* 13.540-1 *duroque simillima saxo / torpet* “... just like a hard rock, numb ...”, (Hecuba, traumatized by the sight of the mutilated body of Polydorus, a prelude to her metamorphic loss of human utterance).

<sup>64</sup> Eur. *Hec.* 438-40; for the Euripidean characterization of Hecuba see Fantham 1982 on *Tro.* 945ff.

<sup>65</sup> Jakobi 1988, 35, notes the verbal echo (without pursuing thematic implications).

(Ov. *Met.* 5.509-10)

The mother was stunned at hearing these words, as if turned to stone, and for a long time she was like one thunderstruck.

More than a coincidence, I think: in the *Metamorphoses* passage the mother has just learned that the daughter, Proserpina, is facing the archetypal version of a marriage with Death – like Polyxena here (in the perverse rite which will “marry” her to the dead Achilles), only differently.

To summarize this pair of vignettes: as in Andromache’s words about herself back in *Tro.* 416-17, so in her words about Hecuba at *Tro.* 949-51, Seneca enriches his tragic *mise en scène* through the allusive invocation of other heroines from the *Metamorphoses* who have themselves suffered in ways comparable to Andromache and Hecuba. The *topoi* of traumatic maternal grief are tragic, universal ...and measurably post-Ovidian.

In her latter speech excerpted above (*Tro.* 949-51), Andromache has set the stage for Hecuba’s first utterance since the play’s opening act, in which the queen reacts in her own voice to the news that her daughter Polyxena is intended, not for marriage with Achilles’ son Pyrrhus, but for sacrifice to the dead Achilles himself.

adhuc Achilles vivit in poenas Phrygum?  
adhuc rebellat? o manum Paridis levem!  
*cinis ipse* nostrum sanguinem *ac tumulus sitit*.  
modo turba felix latera cingebat mea,  
lassabar in tot oscula et tantum gregem  
dividere matrem. *sola nunc haec* est super,  
votum, comes, *levamen* afflictæ, quies;  
haec totus Hecubæ fetus, hac sola vocor  
iam voce mater. dura et infelix age  
elabere anima, denique hoc unum mihi  
remitte funus. irrigat fletus genas  
imberque victo subitus e vultu cadit.

(*Tro.* 955-66)

Does Achilles still live to scourge the Phrygians? Does he still renew war? Oh hand of Paris, too light! His very ashes and tomb thirst for our blood. Just now a thriving family thronged around me; it was wearying just to share out my mother love among so many kisses and so large a flock. Now this one alone is left, my hope, companion, relief in distress, and source of peace. She is Hecuba’s whole brood, her voice alone now calls me mother. Harsh and barren life-breath, come slip away, and at last spare me this one bereavement. Weeping drenches my cheeks, and from my conquered visage a sudden rain descends.

This is the most markedly and sustainedly Ovidian speech in the *Troades*: “Seneca is competing with a very famous treatment of this episode by Ovid [,] Hecuba’s speech over the dead Polyxena at *Met.* 13.494ff.” (Fantham):<sup>66</sup>

at postquam cecidit Paridis Phoebique sagittis,  
 “nunc certe” dixi “non est metuendus Achilles”;  
 nunc quoque mi metuendus erat. *cinis ipse* sepulti  
 in genus hoc *saevit, tumulo quoque* sensimus hostem.  
 Aeacidiae fecunda fui! iacet Ilion ingens,  
 eventuque gravi finita est publica clades,  
 sed finita tamen; soli mihi Pergama restant,  
 in cursuque meus dolor est ...  
 postque tot amissos *tu nunc, quae sola levabas*  
 maternos luctus, hostilia busta piasti.  
 inferias hosti peperisti! quo ferrea resto?  
 (Ov. *Met.* 13.501-8, 514-16)

But after he fell to the arrows of Paris and of Phoebus, “Now for sure”, I said, “Achilles is not to be feared”; but even now he was to be feared by me. His very ashes, though he is buried, rage against this family; even in the tomb we have felt him for our enemy. For Achilles have I been fruitful! Great Troy lies low, and the public disaster has been ended by a grim outcome; yet it has been ended. For me alone Pergama still survives; my woes still run their course ... And now after so many have been lost, you, who alone were left to relieve your mother’s sorrow, you have been sacrificed upon the enemy’s tomb. I have but borne a victim for the enemy! Why do I stubbornly live on?

Hecuba’s c.40-line performance in the *Metamorphoses* is an undoubted *tour de force*; the excerpts above, with italics, show some of the key verbal cues picked up by Seneca in his shorter intertextual response. More than that, Seneca can be felt to have fixated here upon an Augustan predecessor-passage which itself exemplifies the kind of rhetorical excess characteristic (elsewhere at least) of Seneca’s own dramatic verse. We have a near-contemporary attestation that this particular Ovidian speech was indeed regarded as both famous and excessive: it comes from none other than Seneca’s own father, in the *Controversiae*, bringing a familiar charge against Ovid during a treatment of overkill in the work of the orator Montanus:

... solebat Scaurus Montanum inter oratores Ovidium vocare; nam et Ovidius nescit quod bene cessit relinquere. ne multa referam quae Montaniana Scaurus vocabat, uno hoc contentus ero: cum Polyxene esset abducta ut ad tumulum Achillis immolaretur, Hecuba dicit “*cinis ipse sepulti / in genus hoc pugnat*”. poterat hoc contentus esse; adiecit “*tumulo quoque sensimus hostem*”. nec hoc contentus est; adiecit “*Aeacidiae fecunda fui*”. aiebat autem Scaurus rem veram: non minus magnam virtutem esse scire dicere quam scire desinere.  
 (Sen. *Contr.* 9.5.17)

... Scaurus used to call Montanus the Ovid among orators; for Ovid too is incapable of leaving well alone. Not to give many examples of what Scaurus called “Montanisms”, I will content myself with

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<sup>66</sup> Fantham 1982 on *Tro.* 955-6, drawing particular attention to the allusive compression of thought in Seneca’s version, and adducing the Sen. *Contr.* passage discussed below; cf. also Jakobi 1988, 35-6.

one. When Polyxena had been led away to be sacrificed at the tomb of Achilles, Hecuba says “His very ashes, though he is buried, fight against this family”. That might have sufficed him. He added “Even in the tomb we have felt him for our enemy”. He wasn’t satisfied even with this, but went on “For Achilles have I been fruitful”. Scourus was quite right in saying that to know how to stop is as important a quality as to know how to speak.

It is an open question whether Hecuba’s twelve lines of Ovidian rhetoric at *Tro.* 955-66 should be read as a celebration by Seneca *fiils* (in defiance of paternal strictures) of Ovidian excess, or, in their relative brevity, and with one-time-only filial deference to *Contr.* 9.5.17, as a kind of correction of that excess.<sup>67</sup> What is not in doubt is the closeness of the tracking: *cinis ipse ... sitit ~ cinis ipse ... saevit; ac tumulus ~ tumulo quoque; sola nunc haec ... levamen ~ tu, nunc, quae sola levabas ...* My own discussion will focus on two allusions to passages beyond the model speech itself which bracket the Senecan version at each end, underscoring but also complicating the relationship with Ovid.

First, as is noted by Jakobi, Hecuba’s opening complaint

*adhuc Achilles vivit in poenas Phrygum?*  
(*Tro.* 955)

derives not just from a corresponding moment in her speech in the *Metamorphoses* (13.501-3, already quoted) but more closely from a passage at an earlier point in Ovid’s Trojan cycle, in which the speaker is Neptune, addressing Apollo:<sup>68</sup>

cum tamen ille ferox belloque cruentior ipso  
*vivit adhuc*, operis nostri populator, *Achilles*.  
det mihi se ...  
(*Ov. Met.* 12.592-4)

And yet that fierce man, bloodier than war itself, still lives, the despoiler of our handiwork, Achilles. Let him but come within my reach ...

At this point Achilles *is* still alive, but only just: this is the speech which sets in motion the hero’s death at the hands of Paris. “But Achilles still lives!”, complains Ovid’s Neptune. “Does Achilles *still* live?”, echoes Seneca’s Hecuba, at a point when Achilles is in literal terms dead, but still causing torment to her family; and the fact that she can reaffirm the earlier complaint, long after the divinely engineered “hit” has been carried out, underscores at the intertextual level just how ineffectual the hand of Paris (*Tro.* 956) has been.

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<sup>67</sup> If this particular speech of Hecuba’s is shorter than its Ovidian counterpart, in the opening and closing sections of the play at large the Trojan queen is given ample room for the kind of rhetorical display and elaboration more usually associated with Senecan tragic style.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Jakobi 1988, 35.

The allusion which interests me at the other end of Hecuba's post-Ovidian speech involves the rain of tears at *Tro.* 965-6; this is the only motif in the Senecan speech for which the commentators have proposed no Ovidian intertext. Here (in repeat-quotation) is Hecuba's self-description:<sup>69</sup>

... irrigat fletus genas  
imberque victo subitus e vultu cadit.  
(*Tro.* 965-6)

The phrasing here, though suggestive of a *topos*, does in fact map with especial verbal closeness (via *fletus*, *genas*, *imber*, *cadit*) on to a particular passage in Ovid – but one which at first sight has nothing to do with the *Troades* tradition:

non aliter stupui, quam qui Iovis ignibus ictus  
vivit et est vitae nescius ipse suae ...  
adloquor extremum maestos abiturus amicos,  
qui modo de multis unus et alter erant.  
uxor amans *flentem flens* acrius ipsa tenebat,  
*imbre per indignas usque cadente genas.*  
nata procul Libycis aberat diversa sub oris,  
nec poterat fati certior esse mei.  
(*Ov. Trist.* 1.3.11-20)

I was just as stunned as one who, smitten by the fire of Jove, still lives and knows not that he lives ...  
About to depart, I addressed for the last time my sorrowing friends of whom, just now so many, but  
one or two remained. My loving wife held me as I wept, herself weeping more bitterly, a ceaseless  
rain descending down her blameless cheeks. My daughter was far away, on the distant shores of  
Libya, and could not be informed of my fate.

The tears which fall as rain in *Tristia* 1.3.17-18 (italics above) are not for the tragic victims of a sacked city, but for a poet faced by a more recent and personal loss of homeland; the weeper is not a woman of Troy but the wife of Ovid, in the early and quasi-funereal exile poem which describes, in flashback, the poet's final night in Rome. However, for an attentive reader of Senecan dialogue with Ovid, what makes these *Tristia*-tears capable of registering in the context of a speech in the *Troades* is that, just six lines farther on in his elegy, Ovid himself *mythologizes* them by comparing them, as something small to something great, to those tears of grief and mourning shed by the victims of the fall of Troy:

quocumque aspiceres, luctus gemitusque sonabant,

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<sup>69</sup> "Hecuba's self-description": Zwierlein (as part of an argument against the usually accepted transposition of 967-8: see n.70 below) interprets the tears of 965-6 not as a self-description but as a description by Hecuba of the mute Polyxena (to whom 967-8 refer); Boyle 1994 ad loc. concurs. But this seems contextually improbable: Polyxena's *animus* has just been described as *laetus* at 945. Discussion and references in Fantham 1982 on 945-54 and on 967-8 (but the facing translation of 965-6 in her edition seems not to reflect her position). Fitch 2002-2004 ad loc. assigns 965b-6 to Andromache (i.e. to the speaker of 969-71): on this reattribution the tears of 965-6 are still Hecuba's, not now in a self-description but in a description by her daughter-in-law.

formaque non taciti funeris intus erat.  
 femina virque meo, pueri quoque funere maerent,  
 inque domo lacrimas angulus omnis habet.  
*si licet exemplis in parvo grandibus uti,*  
*haec facies Troiae, cum caperetur, erat.*  
 (Ov. *Trist.* 1.3.21-6)

Look where you might, mourning and lamentation were sounding, and within the house was the semblance of a loud funeral. Men and women, children too, grieved at this funeral of mine; in my home every corner had its tears. If in a lowly matter one may use a lofty example, such was the appearance of Troy in the hour of her capture.

What the above analogy claims is that the exiled poet's experience does actually amount, in its own small way, to the archetypal myth of collective bereavement and city-loss; the pattern of allusion associating the poet's loss of Rome with the ordinary suffering at and after Troy is a recurrent one as the *Tristia* get under way. So, on this closer reading, the tears which rain for Seneca's Hecuba in contemplation of her daughter's fate turn out after all to sustain the pattern of engagement with Ovid's Troy established from the opening words of her speech onwards – but now filtered through the exiled poet's autobiographical redirection of Trojan grief. (Does Ovid quietly mark the limits of his own Trojan and Hecuban analogy at *Trist.* 1.3.19, at least in post-Senecan hindsight: no dead daughter in *this* tragedy: *nata procul ...?*)<sup>70</sup>

It is a fragile pattern, to be sure, and perhaps it is no more than a random trick of the *topos*.<sup>71</sup> Why should we think Seneca (or Seneca's readers) susceptible to an association, whether conscious or unconscious, between Ovid's great Hecuba-speech and a fleetingly *Troades*-like moment of late Ovidian self-representation occasioned by the trauma of exile? Well, if we are looking for a reason, here is one: it so happens that the last words of Ovid's ever published find the poet, after almost a decade of elegiac complaint, in another moment of allusive identification with Hecuba. In the final lines of the final poem of the final book from exile, *Epistulae ex Ponto* 4.16, comes a declaration of despair headed up by a half-line

<sup>70</sup> No dead daughter: cf. also *Trist.* 1.3.97-8 (O.'s wife laments his departure *no less than if she had been mourning her daughter or her husband on a pyre*). In the transmitted text of *Troades* the raining tears at *Tro.* 965-6 are in fact directly followed by an address by Hecuba to her (present but silent) *nata* (*Tro.* 965-8): ... *irrigat fletus genas / imberque victo subitus e vultu cadit. / laetare, gaude, nata. quam vellet tuos / Cassandra thalamos, vellet Andromache tuos!* ("... Rejoice, be glad, my daughter! How Cassandra or Andromache would wish for your marriage!"). In most editions, Hecuba's address to her *nata* will be found a dozen lines farther on, before 979, transposed there in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Richter (followed by Leo and most recently by Fantham and Fitch); Zwierlein (followed by Boyle) reinstates them in the transmitted position. Cf. n.69 above; and see Fantham 1982 on 967-8 (even-handed, but against reinstatement) for full discussion.

<sup>71</sup> "A random trick" ... so to speak: on the complex dynamics of a *topos* when read up close, see again (as in n.51) Hinds 1998, 34-47.

self-quoted from that same famous speech of Hecuba in *Metamorphoses* 13, at the point where the Trojan queen turns from lament for the dead Polyxena to a vain hope for her last remaining son (the sight of whose murdered body is about to render her speechless):

*omnia perdidimus*: tantummodo vita relicta est,  
 praebeat ut sensum materiamque mali.  
 quid iuvat extinctos ferrum demittere in artus?  
 non habet in nobis iam nova plaga locum.  
 (Ov. *Pont.* 4.16.49-52)

I have lost everything: only bare life remains, to afford matter for my woes and the power of feeling them. What pleasure is there to plunge the steel into limbs already dead? There is no space in me now for a new wound.

*omnia perdidimus*: superest, cur vivere tempus  
 in breve sustineam, proles gratissima matri,  
 nunc solus, quondam minimus de stirpe virili ...”  
 aspicit eiectum Polydori in litore corpus  
 factaque Threiciis ingentia vulnera telis.  
 Troades exclamant, *obmutuit* illa dolore.  
 (Ov. *Met.* 13.527-9, 536-8)

I have lost everything: but there does remain a reason to endure living for a brief time, his mother’s dearest offspring, once youngest of my sons, now the only one ...” She saw the body of Polydorus, cast up upon the shore, and the huge wounds made by Thracian weapons. The Trojan women cried out; Hecuba was struck dumb by grief.

*omnia perdidimus*.<sup>72</sup> Whether the markedly sphragistic *Ex Ponto* 4.16 was intended by the exiled poet himself to end a book of elegies or whether, after his death, a literary executor put it in that position,<sup>73</sup> as far as posterity is concerned – including, we may assume, later first-century posterity – Ovid’s last words on earth before the onset of silence sound an allusive analogy between Hecuban and Ovidian *Tristia*. So here is one context in which to think about the tears of *Trist.* 1.3.17-18 and their possible Senecan afterlife at *Tro.* 965-6. Once the accidents of death and posthumous publication have given to Hecuba in *Ex Ponto* 4.16 a final sign-off role within the image-repertoire of Ovidian exile, perhaps it becomes easier thereby for a passage like *Trist.* 1.3.17-18 (coloured by the exile poetry’s *first* fall-of-Troy analogy) to become audible in a later poet’s tragic remix of Trojan moments in Ovid.

## 7. “Seneca’s *Ibis*”

<sup>72</sup> For this allusion cf. Helzle 1989 on *Pont.* 4.16.49; Hinds 1985, 27 and n.40 (= Knox 2006, 438 and n.28).

<sup>73</sup> Arguments for *post mortem* publication of *Pont.* 4, the majority modern view: Helzle 1989, 31-6. Caveats: Holzberg 2002, 193-4.

Seneca's *Thyestes* begins with a bad day in Tartarus. The ghost of the dead Tantalus, already suffering hellish torment, rhetorically asks if something worse has now been devised for him: has he been summoned to carry the stone of Sisyphus, be stretched on the wheel of Ixion, have his liver gnawed by the carrion birds of Tityos? If some new and terrifying punishment is in store for him, he is ready. Hit me with what you've got, he says to the Underworld's mythic judge; and, if you think that your full inventory of *supplicia* will not be required, wait and see how my descendants are going to keep you busy:

quis inferorum sede ab infausta extrahit  
 avido fugaces ore captantem cibos?  
 quis male deorum Tantalo visas domos  
 ostendit iterum? peius inventum est siti  
 arente in undis aliquid et peius fame  
 hiante semper? Sisyphi numquid lapis  
 gestandus umeris lubricus nostris venit  
 aut membra celeri differens cursu rota,  
 aut poena Tityi, qui specu vasto patens  
 vulneribus atras pascit effossis aves  
 et nocte reparans quidquid amisit die  
 plenum recenti pabulum monstro iacet?  
*in quod malum transcribor?* o quisquis nova  
 supplicia functis durus umbrarum arbiter  
 disponis, addi si quid ad poenas potest  
 quod ipse custos carceris diri horreat,  
 quod maestus Acheron paveat, ad cuius metum  
 nos quoque tremamus, quaere; iam nostra subit  
 e stirpe turba quae suum vincat genus  
 ac me innocentem faciat et inausa audeat.  
 regione quidquid impia cessat loci  
 complebo; numquam stante Pelopea domo  
 Minos vacabit.

(Sen. *Thy.* 1-23)

From the accursed abode of the underworld, who drags forth the one that catches at vanishing food with his avid mouth? Who shows Tantalus a second time the homes of the gods he saw to his ruin? Has something worse been devised than thirst parched amidst water, worse than hunger that gapes forever? Can it be that Sisyphus' slippery stone comes to be carried on my shoulders, or the wheel that racks limbs in its swift rotation? Or the punishment of Tityos, who with his cavernous vast opening feeds dark birds from his quarried wounds – who regrows by night what he lost by day, and lies there an undiminished meal for a fresh monster? To what suffering am I being reassigned? Whoever you are that allot new penalties to the dead, harsh judge of the shades: if anything can be added to my punishment that would make the very guardian of that dire prison shudder, make gloomy Acheron afraid, make even me tremble in fear of it, seek it out! Now from my stock there is rising a brood that will outdo its own family, make me innocent and dare the undared. Any space unused in the realm of the damned I shall fill up; while the House of Pelops stands, Minos will never lack employment!

This readiness in Tantalus to pull down upon himself and his family a whole world of mythological torment is characteristically Senecan: the same Tartarean topology is unleashed in analogous contexts in the *Medea* (740ff.), the *Phaedra* (1229ff.), and especially

the *Agamemnon* (12ff.).<sup>74</sup> But the impulse is also a thoroughly Ovidian one: first, in the broad sense that Seneca thus embraces the encyclopaedic sweep of Ovid's mythic-epic system (while perverting it into an instrument of negative energy, punishment and execration); but also in the more specific sense that this negative transformation of the power of the *Metamorphoses* is itself already something Ovidian, with a direct precedent in the prior perversion of Ovidian mythic encyclopaedism in the exiled poet's own *Ibis*:

in loca ab Elysiis diversa fugabere campis,  
 quasque tenet sedes noxia turba, coles.  
 Sisyphus est illic saxum volvensque petensque,  
 quique agitur rapidae vinculus ab orbe rotae,  
 iugeribusque novem summus qui distat ab imo  
 visceraque assiduae debita praebet avi,  
 quaeque gerunt umeris perituras Belides undas,  
 exulis Aegypti, turba cruenta, nurus.  
 poma pater Pelopis praesentia quaerit, et idem  
 semper eget liquidis semper abundat aquis.  
 hic tibi de Furiis scindet latus una flagello,  
 ut sceleris numeros confiteare tui:  
 altera Tartareis sectos dabit anguibus artus:  
 tertia fumantes incoquet igne genas.  
 noxia mille modis lacerabitur umbra, tuasque  
 Aeacus in poenas ingeniosus erit.  
*in te transcribet veterum tormenta virorum:*  
 omnibus antiquis causa quietis eris.  
 Sisyphus, cui tradas revolubile pondus, habebis:  
 versabunt celeres nunc nova membra rotae:  
 hic et erit, ramos frustra qui captet et undas:  
 hic inconsumpto viscere pascet aves.  
 (Ov. *Ib.* 173-94)

To places far removed from the Elysian fields shall you be hounded, and where the guilty have their dwelling shall you abide. Sisyphus is there, rolling his stone and seeking it again, and he who is whirled, fast bound, by the circle of the flying wheel, and he whose extremities are nine acres apart, who yields his forfeited entrails to the assiduous bird, and the daughters of Belus who bear on their shoulders the water that runs away, the daughters-in-law of exiled Aegyptus, a blood-stained company. Here shall one of the Furies tear your side with a scourge, that you may confess the full measure of your wickedness; another shall cut up your limbs for the snakes of Tartarus; a third shall roast your smoking face with fire. In a thousand ways shall your guilty shade be mangled, and Aeacus shall use all his creativity to find you punishments. To you shall he reassign the torments of men of old; to all those ancients shall you be a cause of rest. Sisyphus, you shall have one to whom you may give your burden that ever rolls back again; the swift wheels shall now whirl new limbs; this man shall it be who will catch in vain at boughs and waves; this man will feed the birds with entrails unconsumed.

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<sup>74</sup> Cf. Tarrant 1976 on *Ag.* 15ff.; the *topos* is no less operative in the probably non-Senecan *Hecules Oetaeus* (938ff.) and in the certainly non-Senecan *Octavia* (619ff.).

Few readers of Ovid nowadays pay attention to the *Ibis*,<sup>75</sup> an elegiac poem (with a distinctly iambic attitude) apparently written some three or four years after the sentence of relegation; a poem in which Ovid himself harnesses the mythological encyclopaedism of the *Metamorphoses* into several hundred lines of vitriolic mythological curses directed against an unknown and possibly apocryphal persecutor, the eponymous Ibis. But it may be worth considering the possibility that the *Ibis* bulked rather larger within the Ovidian canon for Seneca, as for other mid first century readers attuned to the Senecan tragic aesthetic. Not only is this late-Ovidian tirade the most “proto-Senecan” piece of mythological poetry written in the Augustan Age, but – compare now the italicized verses in the two quotations – one of its key programmatic moments finds a clear echo here in the prologue of the *Thyestes*. Ovid’s Underworld judge will “reassign” to Ibis (189 *transcribet*) the torments of Sisyphus, Ixion, Tityos and Tantalus; Seneca’s Tantalus imagines all those same torments being “reassigned” to himself (13 *transcribor*); in the process the curse-poetry of the *Ibis* is “transcribed” – in metapoetic terms, and with a slightly bolder metaphor in Latin than in English – into the *Thyestes*.<sup>76</sup>

The force of the allusion should not be underestimated.<sup>77</sup> Readers of this paper may have had the thought that, despite the shared interest in mythological system, the playful and ever-shifting sensibility of the *Metamorphoses*-poet makes for an odd intertextual match with the monomaniacal and relentless drive of Seneca Tragicus. But remember that the Ovid of the years in exile became (in effect) a different poet, no less inventive than before but narrower, darker, more relentless, ... more Senecan. What we can see happening almost explicitly in the *Thyestes* prologue, as more unobtrusively in other indirect invocations of the poetry of Ovid’s exile, is that Seneca is finding a vital point of access to Ovidian mythological space via the bleakness and bite of Ovid’s Tomitan sensibility.

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<sup>75</sup> A changing situation thanks to Williams 1992 and 1996, foundational for new-wave *Ibis*-criticism. I adopt Housman’s generally accepted transposition of *Ib.* 181-2 (*iugeribusque ... avi*) to follow 175-6: see La Penna 1957, lxxxii.

<sup>76</sup> In terms of *OLD* s.v. *transcribo*, sense 2 or 3 unlocks sense 1.

<sup>77</sup> This paragraph stands in friendly defiance of that astute guide to the *Thyestes*, the commentary of Tarrant: “Many isolated verbal echoes were probably not meant to be noticed by an audience, and indeed Seneca himself may not have been aware of them as borrowings. An example of this sort of fleeting echo is Tantalus’ question *in quod malum transcribor?* (13), which resembles a line of Ovid’s *Ibis* [189] where *transcribere* is used of ‘re-assigning’ the punishments of notorious underworld figures” (Tarrant 1985, 18). Schiesaro 2003, 28n.4, registers the metadramatic potential of the reference to writing in Tantalus’ *transcribor*, but does not press its meta-Ovidian dimension.

So, in conclusion, not only do the myths and mythic landscapes of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (and at times his *Heroides*) haunt the dramatic locations and rhetorical *loci* of Senecan tragedy, but the exiled Ovid's mythologization of his own altered world seems to find its less obvious space too: the obsessive *Tristia* lend occasional colour to the concerns with suffering, guilt, and self-exculpation which beset the later poet's alienated heroes; and the hellish curses directed by Ovid at his evil twin in the *Ibis* give an edge to some of the sharpest execrations to inhabit the Senecan stage.<sup>78</sup>

Most obviously and programmatically here in the *Thyestes*-prologue (in which, as in the *Ibis* passage, the impulse to execration arises within an environment already defined by the rigours of punishment), but perhaps elsewhere too. Back in Section 4, I plotted a moment of *ad hominem Ibis*-language within the intertextually dense curse-*topos* directed at Jason in the prologue of Seneca's post-Ovidian *Medea*:

iam notus hospes *limen alienum expetat*  
(Sen. *Med.* 22)

exul, inops erres, *alienaque limina lustras*  
(Ov. *Ib.* 113)

How many other Senecan imprecations are tinged with *Ibis*-rhetoric? The matter may bear some investigation. Here are three versions of a curse: the speakers are the ghost of Laius (as reported by Creon) in Seneca's *Oedipus*, Tiresias in Sophocles' *Oedipus* (the passage's Greek tragic model) ... and, between them, Ovid in the *Ibis*:

et ipse rapidis gressibus sedes volet  
effugere nostras, sed graves pedibus moras  
addam et tenebo: reptet incertus viae,  
*baculo senili triste praetemptans iter.*  
eripite terras, auferam caelum pater.  
(Sen. *Oed.* 654-8)

And he himself with hastening steps will long to flee our kingdom, but I shall put cumbersome delays before his feet and hold him back: let him creep unsure of his way, testing the sorrowful path before him with an old man's stick. You must rob him of the earth; I his father will deprive him of the sky.

id quod Amyntorides videas, *trepidumque* ministro  
*praetemptes baculo* luminis orbus *iter.*  
nec plus aspicias quam quem sua filia rexit,  
expertus scelus est cuius uterque parens;  
qualis erat, postquam est iudex de lite iocosa  
sumptus, Apollinea clarus in arte senex.  
(Ov. *Ib.* 259-64)

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibis* as Ovid's "evil twin": n.49 above.

May you see what Amyntor's son saw, and, deprived of light, test the timorous path before you with an assisting stick. Nor may you behold more than he whom his daughter guided, whose crime both his parents experienced; but be as was the old man famous for Apollo's craft, after he was chosen to arbitrate the playful dispute.

... τυφλὸς γὰρ ἐκ δεδορκότος  
καὶ πτωχὸς ἀντὶ πλουσίου ξένην ἔπι  
σκήπτρω προδεικνύς γαῖαν ἐμπορεύσεται.  
(Soph. *O.T.* 454-6)

Blind instead of seeing, poor instead of rich, he shall make his way over a strange land, feeling the ground before him with a stick.

As the emphases suggest, Seneca's *baculo ... praetemptans iter* reaches back to the Sophoclean counterpart-passage via *Ibis* 259-60 (*praetemptes baculo ... iter*) as verbal intermediary.<sup>79</sup> To press the point, Seneca's *triste ... iter* modifies Ovid's *trepidum ... iter*, but may also subliminally ovidianize Sophocles' *ξένην ἔπι ... γαῖαν*:<sup>80</sup> after Ovid, the problematic path over a "strange land" is measured in (what else?) *Tristia*.<sup>81</sup> Note that the two-tier allusion (if such it is) incorporates a mythological deflection, since the verbal cues in the *Ibis* passage come not from the Oedipus-curse itself but from the adjacent couplet in Ovid's blind-man sequence, descriptive of Phoenix.<sup>82</sup> The prompt to press this particular correspondence comes from Jakobi: but it may be that traces of *Ibis*-vocabulary are more pervasively immanent in the Senecan topology of tragic cursing.

## 8. Epilogue

One last question, a version of the question always (and now more especially) raised by Senecan tragedy. Seneca wears many masks: it is interesting, indeed, that disjunctions of theme, tone and authorial self-construction between the middle and the late Ovid should find a measure of imaginative reconciliation in an author whose own diverse output raises such

<sup>79</sup> The remaining words in the *Ibis* pentameter are gathered into a resumption of Sen. *Oed.* 656-7 later in the play: *Ib.* 259-60 *trepidumque ministro / praetemptes baculo luminis orbus iter*; Sen. *Oed.* 995-7 *ipse suum / duce non ullo molitur iter / luminis orbus* ("with none to guide him he labours at his own path, deprived of light"). For these verbal details see Jakobi 1988, 136-7; the embroidery in the next sentence above is my own.

<sup>80</sup> The Greek phrasing is explained by the commentators thus: with *ξένην ἔπι* we should understand *γῆν*; *γαῖαν* in the next line, though intuitively related, is syntactically separate, and is the object of *προδεικνύς*.

<sup>81</sup> All the more so if the blighted landscape of Oedipus' Thebes in this Senecan play can itself be associated with Ovid's Pontic dystopia: Degl'Innocenti Pierini 1990, 111, on Sen. *Oed.* 154-9.

<sup>82</sup> *Ib.* 259-64 describe in successive couplets Phoenix, Oedipus and Tiresias; the curse-sequence based upon famous cases of blindness continues through 272 with Phineus, Polymestor, Polyphemus, the sons of Phineus, and the bards Thamyras and Demodocus.

considerable issues of imaginative – and moral – consistency.<sup>83</sup> So ... if as a constructor of dramas Seneca finds the exiled Ovid to be a fertile source of negative energy for his heroes, what does he seem to make of the exiled Ovid from an ethical-philosophical standpoint? Well, like the plays' own mythological heroes, the suffering Ovid of the late works is perhaps for Seneca Tragicus another allusive figure in his laboratory of the passions, another cautionary tale of turmoil which puts on display an absence or perversion of Stoic wisdom: that is at least a starting point for discussion.<sup>84</sup>

Seneca and Ovid make an interesting pair, in this connection, because Seneca himself (as parenthetically noted earlier) spent eight or nine years in exile on the island of Corsica, while out of favour during the principate of Claudius (41-49 CE); and indeed there have come down under his name two short epigrams on that Mediterranean island which are unmistakably, if implicitly, in the exiled Ovid's manner. Here is one of them:<sup>85</sup>

barbara praeuptis inclusa est Corsica saxis,  
 horrida, desertis undique vasta locis.  
 non poma autumnus, segetes non educat aestas  
 canaque Palladio munere bruma caret.  
 imbriferum nullo ver est laetabile fetu  
 nullaque in infausto nascitur herba solo.  
 non panis, non haustus aquae, non ultimus ignis;  
 hic sola haec duo sunt: exul et exilium.  
 (Sen. *Anth. Lat.* 237 = 3 Prato)

Barbarous Corsica is bound about by looming cliffs, rugged, and everywhere barren with lonely places. The autumn nurtures no fruit and the summer no corn, and the hoary winter lacks the bounty of Pallas. The rainy spring brings no joy of fertility; no plant is born in the ill-favoured soil. There is no bread, no water to draw, no fire for last rites. Here live these two things alone: an exile, and a state of exile.

More to the present point, the Corsican years yield two prose treatises more or less substantially concerned with the issue of exile – neither of which appears, on the face of it, to make any mention of Ovid.<sup>86</sup> The likeliest reason for this reticence – conspiracy theories aside – is that the Seneca of the philosophical dialogues, who espoused a stiff upper lip

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<sup>83</sup> I owe this formulation to a conversation with Alex Dressler. On the issues involved in “seeing Seneca whole”, see now Volk and Williams 2006, esp. 1-17 and 19-41 (essays by Richard Tarrant and James Ker).

<sup>84</sup> For new exploration and interrogation of “Stoic” approaches of Senecan drama see Schiesaro 2003, 228-51, esp. 243-5; and now Bartsch 2006, 255-81.

<sup>85</sup> The other is *Anth. Lat.* 236 (= 2 Prato); and further epigrams much less securely attributed to Seneca have been adduced too. See variously Dewar 2002, 388-90 (on *Anth. Lat.* 236); Claassen 1999, 241-4; Prato 1964 *passim*.

<sup>86</sup> On Virgil and Ovid as by far the most often-quoted poets (i.e. in contexts of overt citation) in Seneca's prose writings at large see Mazzoli 1970, esp. 231 and 240; cf. Tarrant 2006, 1-5. Mazzoli counts 33 citations of Ovid, mainly (30) of the *Met.*; none anywhere of the exile poetry.

policy in the face of exile, simply found himself out of sympathy with the *Tristia* and other late poems of Ovid, which are nothing if not full of complaint. But is Seneca's silence in these prose works concerning the exile of his famous literary forebear really so complete? Perhaps not: recent critics, led by Rita Degl'Innocenti Pierini, now find an unacknowledged undertone of allusion to Black-Sea alienation in the *envoi* of the *Consolatio ad Polybium*,<sup>87</sup> and the same line of enquiry conjectures Ovidian influence upon the *topoi* of geographical adversity set up for demolition in the *Consolatio ad Helviam*,<sup>88</sup> the work in which Seneca offers his most sustained meditation on exile.<sup>89</sup>

Let me end, then, with the *ad Helviam* (datable to the early years on Corsica), and with something more subliminal than has yet been considered in relation to that work. In the opening pages, Seneca describes what the associations of "exile" are for those who lack *sapientia*:

verbum quidem ipsum [i.e. exilium] persuasione quadam et consensu iam asperius ad aures venit et audientes *tamquam triste et execrabile* ferit. ita enim populus iussit; sed populi scita ex magna parte sapientes abrogant.

(Sen. *Helv.* 5.6)

The very name of exile, by reason of a sort of persuasion and general consent, falls by now upon the ear rather harshly, and strikes the hearer as something sorrowful and accursed. For so the people have decreed; but decrees of the people wise men in large measure annul.

"The very word *exilium* strikes people's ears as something *triste et execrabile*". Maybe, just maybe there is a specific dig here at what must already have become the most canonical body of exile literature in Latin (even if Seneca nowhere overtly adduces it): for those who lack wisdom, exile is not just "something *triste*" but a certain author's *Tristia*;<sup>90</sup> not just "something *execrabile*" but one particular exile curse-poem, the *Ibis*. The Senecan tragic stage has room for the *topoi* of Black-Sea sorrow and execration; but in Seneca's moral

<sup>87</sup> At *Polyb.* 18.9 (*Dial.* 11.18.9) Corsica is described in terms more obviously appropriate to Tomis, and verbally reminiscent of Ovidian characterizations of life in Tomis: *cogita ... quam non facile latina ei homini verba succurrant, quem barbarorum inconditus et barbaris quoque humanioribus gravis fremitus circumsonat* ("consider ... with what difficulty Latin words will come to a man around whose ears there sounds the disordered jabbering of barbarians, at which even the more civilized barbarians flinch"). Cf. *Ov. Trist.* 3.1.17-18 and 3.14.45-50, with Degl'Innocenti Pierini 1990, 112-22 (and 115-16 on *Polyb.* 8.2 and *Trist.* 3.14.1); Dewar 2002, 390-3. I expect to return to *Polyb.* 18.9 in another paper on the reception of Ovid's exile, so I do not dwell on it now.

<sup>88</sup> Ovid and the *ad Helviam* (*Dial.* 12): Degl'Innocenti Pierini 1990, 122-34.

<sup>89</sup> Sustained, and in many respects innovative: see now Williams 2006 and Fantham 2007.

<sup>90</sup> Titular play with *tristis*: cf. *Stat. Silv.* 1.2.254-5 (in a catalogue of elegists who would have vied to praise Stella's wedding day) ... *nec tristis in ipsis / Naso Tomis* "... and Naso, not *tristis* even though in Tomis", usually cited as one of only two unequivocal references in extant Roman literature to Ovid's exile (the other being *Plin. Nat.* 32.152) before late antiquity (Williams 2002, 341n.26).

dialogues exile is to be a “no whining” zone, and accordingly, it seems, Ovid must be written out of the script.