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Alessandra Zanobi

*Seneca's Tragedies and the Aesthetics of Pantomime*

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A thesis submitted to  
**The Department of Classics and Ancient History**  
**University of Durham**

In accordance with the requirements for the  
*Degree of Doctor of Philosophy*

2008

1 1 2009

## **Declaration**

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## **Abstract**

In this thesis I explore the affinities between Seneca's tragic plays and pantomime, arguably the most popular dramatic genre during the Roman Empire, but relatively neglected by literary critics. The research is thus designed to make not only a significant contribution to our understanding of Seneca's tragic art (especially through the explanation of formal features that depart from the conventions of fifth-century Attic drama and have long puzzled scholars), but also to Imperial performance culture more generally. In particular, I hope to shed light on the interaction between so-called 'high' and 'low' forms of artistic endeavours at the time, which previous scholarship has tended to overlook.

*For Elio*

*Mirari solemus saltandi peritos quod in omnem significationem rerum et  
adfectuum parata illorum est manus et verborum velocitatem gestus adsequitur.*

*Seneca, Epistula 121, 6*

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## Introduction

### The *vexata quaestio* of the dramaturgy of Seneca's tragedies

That Seneca's tragedies exhibit numerous features which set them apart from the theatrical conventions of fifth-century Greek tragedy and do not conform to the classical model, as defined for this genre by Aristotle, developed by Hellenistic critics, and accepted in Rome by Horace, is a fact well observed by most Senecan scholars;<sup>1</sup> among these peculiar characteristics of Seneca's tragic *corpus* the most striking ones are the pronounced structural looseness, the freedom in the handling of the chorus, the showing of death on stage, and the presence of lengthy descriptive narratives. This has made some scholars to consider them unstageable and to argue that Seneca was not interested in composing theatrical scripts to be performed on stage; rather they claimed Seneca wrote them to be recited by one or more voices.<sup>2</sup> The hypothesis of recitation was not only considered apt to solve the staging difficulties the tragedies presented, but also apparently fitted with the lack of positive evidence for full-length performances of tragedies from Imperial times onwards. However, since incontrovertible evidence is missing, the question about the intended destination of Seneca's tragedies is still open and debated by scholars.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Zwielerin (1966) is still the most systematic and detailed study of this issue.

<sup>2</sup> Against representation on stage see: Schlegel (1809-11) 27: "Die Tragödien Senecas sind über alle Beschreibung schwülstig und frostig, ohne Natur in Charakter und Handlung, durch die widersinnigsten Unschicklichkeiten empörend, und so von aller theatralischen Einsicht entblößt, daß ich glaube, sie waren nie dazu bestimmt, aus den Schulen der Rhetoren auf die Bühne hervorzutreten"; Leo (1878-79) 147-59; Zwielerin (1966). For staging see: Herrmann (1924) 195: "toutes les tragédies de Sénèque, sans exception, étaient destinées par lui à la présentation sur un théâtre public ou privé de ces œuvres, avec acteurs, chœurs et musique"; Herington (1966) 422-71; Walker (1969) 183-87; Hadas (1939) 220; Kelly (1979) 96; Dihle (1983) 162-71; Sutton (1986); Littlewood (2004) 3 although not addressing the issue of representation in particular, implicitly endorses the possibility when he claims that "if Ovid's non-dramatic poetry could be danced and applauded in the theatre (*Tristia* 5, 7, 25-8), it seems perverse to argue that Senecan tragedy is a literary not a theatrical art form".

<sup>3</sup> Concerning the question of evidence, it is worth remembering that a line from Seneca's *Agamemnon* (*Idai cernu nemura* 730) appears on a Pompeian graffito and has been interpreted as a proof of a stage-production of the tragedy by Gigante (1979) 150-51. By contrast, Tarrant (1976) 307 states that this line cannot be accounted as a proof of a stage-production, but simply as a proof of the knowledge of the tragedy. In my opinion, even though Tarrant's statement is methodologically correct, the appearance of

A major problem in the interpretation of the controversial features of Seneca's tragedies is due to the total loss of complete tragic play texts between Euripides and Seneca; in fact, since no complete tragedy survives from the Hellenistic, Republican, or Augustan period, the fifth-century Greek plays are necessarily the only extant models available with which Senecan tragedies can be compared. A direct comparison shows that Seneca's tragedy "deviates in many ways from the dramatic technique of fifth-century Greek tragedy and that some Senecan scenes would be difficult or even impossible to stage within classical Greek conventions".<sup>4</sup>

If this is certainly true, it must be also observed that, since theatrical conventions underwent noticeable changes in the long span of time intervening between Euripides and Seneca, the comparison between fifth-century Greek tragedies and those of Seneca lacks a methodological basis and cannot be considered as absolutely reliable to postulate definitive conclusions.

The solution of this methodological problem has been rightly perceived by Senecan scholars as fundamental to the achievement of a better and fuller understanding of his art. Several attempts then have been made, despite the exiguity of the extant evidence, to put his tragic *corpus* in its proper historical and literary context.<sup>5</sup> Tarrant's pivotal article focuses specifically on the antecedents of Senecan drama. He traces several features of Senecan theatre such as the lack of organic coherence, the free handling of the chorus, the large use of entrance monologues and asides back to the post-classical theatrical tradition.<sup>6</sup> Kelly's article, instead, offers a detailed account of the different kinds of theatrical performances attested in Seneca's time such as *tragoedia agenda* or

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this very line, which is spoken by Cassandra in the moment of her spectacular clairvoyant vision, on a wall of the city of Pompeii, whose theatrical life and love of pantomime is well attested, seems strongly suggestive of some kind of performance of the *Agamemnon*.

<sup>4</sup> Tarrant (1976) 7-8.

<sup>5</sup> Tarrant (1978) 213-61; Kelly (1979) 21-44.

<sup>6</sup> Tarrant (1978) 217 defines the term post-classical as a "conveniently brief designation for ancient drama after the end of the fifth century".

*recitanda* (regular tragedies which could be staged or declaimed), *tragoedia saltata* (pantomime), and *citharoedia* or *tragoedia cantata* (concert tragedies). This survey demonstrates how complex and articulate the Roman stage in Seneca's time was and his suggestion that genres such as *tragoedia saltata* and *cantata* may have influenced Seneca when composing his tragic *corpus* seems plausible. It is worth underlining that an interpretation similar to Kelly's had been already suggested by Herrmann early in the twentieth century; he observed that the tragedies had a pronounced "mixed character";<sup>7</sup> by "mixed character" Herrmann meant that Seneca used technical devices which were typical of other genres popular in his time such as tragic singing, mime, and pantomime. A good example is the many solos that seem removable from their context within the play, such as the one at *Medea* (lines 740-848), which is sung by one actor and not strictly connected with the developing action.<sup>8</sup> These lyric monodies are bravura passages similar to the arias of the Opera.

Seneca's adoption of different theatrical genres would be then in keeping with the attested contemporary practise of the Roman stage to combine different types of theatrical shows.<sup>9</sup>

One genre, however, seems to have been of particular interest to Seneca, i.e. pantomime. Pantomime was an extremely popular type of performance in Seneca's time and he was well aware of this popularity; his appreciation for the pantomimic art is attested in his *Epistles* (121, 6): *Mirari solemus saltandi peritos quod in omnem significationem rerum et adfectuum parata illorum est manus et verborum velocitatem gestus adsequitur.*<sup>10</sup> The

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<sup>7</sup> Herrmann (1924) 220-32. Unfortunately, his work was not taken into serious account mostly because Herrmann's edition of the tragedies was not very accurate and his point of view was opposed to the established judgment formulated by Leo (1878-79) in his fundamental and (from a text-critical and philological point of view) reliable, edition of the tragedies.

<sup>8</sup> See also: *Troades* 705-35; *Phaedra* 1201-12; *Oedipus* 223-32; *Agamemnon* 759-74; *Thyestes* 920-69.

<sup>9</sup> Hall (2002) 27 argues that "there is evidence for almost every conceivable combination of performers of tragedy under the Roman empire".

<sup>10</sup> In contrast with this view, some scholars have argued Seneca's disregard for pantomime and theatrical performances, relying on the next passage (*Naturales Quaestiones*, 7, 32, 2-3): *Itaque tot familiae philosophorum sine successore deficiunt. Academici et veteres et minores nullum antistitem reliquerunt.*

strict generic affiliations between tragedy and pantomime may have easily prompted the generic enrichment of tragedy through elements of pantomime.<sup>11</sup> Wagenvoort, who, to my knowledge, was the first scholar to claim the influence of pantomime on Seneca's tragedies, has argued that "it is easily understandable that pantomime, once it became an established genre, must have exercised a strong influence on tragedy. In fact, if tragedy did not want to lose its popularity, it had to compete with pantomime, especially in the hunt for pathos".<sup>12</sup>

The presence of pantomimic elements in his tragedies may in part be due to his attempt to make them suitable to the taste of his audience. Seneca's sensitivity to and awareness of the taste of his contemporaries is consistent with Tacitus' description which portrays him as a man endowed with a brilliant mind well suited to the taste of his age (*Annales* 13, 3: *fuit illi viro ingenium amoenum et temporis eius auribus accomodatum*).

But there are three other reasons, arguably more interesting, for Seneca's interest in the techniques and aesthetics of pantomime. First of all, this theatrical medium, which expressed its art through movements and gestures, was the most suitable one, thanks to its effectiveness in expressing many different *affectus*, to display the effects of passions, whose treatment has a central place both in Seneca's tragic and philosophical works. In Seneca's philosophical view, individual identity is control over instinct and passion. The loss of control turns a person into one of a series of possible stereotyped masks of an archetypal behaviour. Although philosophically and morally unacceptable, the consequence of the loss of control can, however, be spectacular and worthy of artistic

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[...] *At quanta cura laboratur, ne cuius pantomimi nomen intercidat! Stat per successores Pyladis et Bathylli domus; harum artium multi discipuli sunt multique doctores.*

I would interpret these words not so much as proof of his dislike of pantomime in itself, but rather as criticism of certain excesses. The quoted passage also provides evidence of the popularity of pantomime in Seneca's age and the link between pantomime and the representation of emotions.

<sup>11</sup> See Lucian, *De Saltatione*, 31.

<sup>12</sup> Wagenvoort (1920) 112: "Es versteht sich daß der Pantomimus, als er sich einmal eingebürgert hatte, starken Einfluß übte auf die Tragödie. Denn, wollte die letztere ihre Popularität nicht völlig einbüßen, so mußte sie mit dem Pantomimus wetteifern, zu-erst in der Jagd nach Pathos".

representation. Pantomime with its instances of stylisation is the art most suited for representing extreme mental states associated with the tragic loss of control.

Secondly, experimental attitude and freedom in the handling of the models, which are, more generally, typical features of post-classical Roman writers, are two important and well-recognised Senecan characteristics. In this regard Boyle's statement about Seneca's interest in "dramatic experimentation even perhaps innovation" as well as his definition of Senecan tragedy as "formally diverse tragedy" are particularly relevant.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, the pronounced hybrid form of Seneca's tragedies produced by a blend of dramatic and narrative elements, which do not traditionally belong together, may be a sign that Seneca has implanted formal features typical of the pantomimic genre in the tragic frame. To use Harrison's terminology, tragedy would stand as the "host" genre while pantomime is the "guest" one.<sup>14</sup> That the nature of the phenomenon of generic enrichment may have been suitable to Seneca's literary experimental attitude is suggested by a passage in one of his epistles in which Seneca claims that his dialogue with tradition accommodates original and personal invention (80, 1 *Non ergo sequor priores? facio, sed permitto mihi et invenire aliquid et mutare et relinquere; non servio illis, sed assentior*). Furthermore, Seneca's claim that many of Publilius' mimic verses are suitable to be included in tragedy may suggestively hint at Seneca's own keenness on appropriating elements from the sub-literary genres.<sup>15</sup>

It is important to mention here that, among the generic affiliations of pantomime, rhetoric constitutes a major generic strand as attested by Lucian (35; 65). Rhetoric and pantomime share a common ground since both deal with impersonation, which is

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<sup>13</sup> Boyle (1987b) 86-7.

<sup>14</sup> Harrison (2007) 16.

<sup>15</sup> *Epistle 8, 8: quam multi poetae dicunt quae philosophis aut dicta sunt aut dicenda! Non attingam tragicos nec togatas nostras (habent enim hae quoque aliquid severitatis et sunt inter comoedias ac tragoedias mediae): quantum disertissimorum versuum inter mimos iacet! Quam multa Publilii non exalceatis sed coturnatis dicenda sunt!; De Tranquillitate animi 11, 8: Publilius, tragicis comicisque vehementior ingeniis quotiens mimicas ineptias et verba ad summam caveam spectantia reliquit, inter multa alia cothurno, non tantum sipario fortiora et hoc ait: Cuivis potest accidere quod cuiquam potest.*

especially cultivated by rhetoricians in declamations, and the display of *êthos* and *pathos*. In considering the relationship between pantomime and rhetoric, Leo's analysis of Seneca's plays can be appreciated in a new light. He defined them as rhetorical tragedies (*tragoedia rhetorica*), namely dramatised rhetorical declamations, and claimed that Seneca created a new genre: "A new genre has been created: rhetorical tragedy, whose nature can be briefly described as follows: there is no *ethos* in it, only *pathos*" and later on: "These are not tragedies at all, but declamations composed in the form of tragedies and divided into acts; and if in them something were expressed beautifully or brilliantly, or described in a flowery and figurative manner, or narrated learnedly, the audience would have clapped and the art would have been fulfilled."<sup>16</sup> Therefore, such features which Leo attributed to the influence of rhetoric can also be ascribed to that of pantomime; such plausibility resides indeed in the above mentioned generic contiguity in matter of themes and moods between tragedy and pantomime.

The original nature of Seneca's work can be seen as the result of generic enrichment, which was sought after by most of writers belonging to Nero's literary circle, such as Petronius and Lucan. Seneca's embracing of such a literary attitude may have been thus prompted by his being part of the same Imperial literary *entourage*. In relation to this, it is relevant to quote Tacitus's testimony relating that Seneca began to write his poetic compositions since Nero developed a passion for poetry;<sup>17</sup> if this is the case, it is highly plausible that the inclusion of pantomimic elements may have particularly pleased the emperor whose passion for these theatrical performance was such that he himself became

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<sup>16</sup> Leo (1879) 148 "Novum autem genus tragoedia rhetorica inventa est, cuius indoles breviter sic describi potest ut ἦθος in ea nullum, πάθος omnia esse dicatur"; p. 158 "Istae vero non sunt tragoediae, sed declamationes ad tragoediae amussim compositae et in actus deductae; in quibus siquid venuste vel acute, floride et figurate descriptum, copiose narratum esset, plaudebant auditores, arti satisfactum erat".

<sup>17</sup> Tacitus, *Annales* 14, 52: *obiciebant etiam eloquentiae laudem uni sibi adsciscere et carmina crebrius facitare, postquam Neroni amor eorum venisset*. Tacitus' account has not been unanimously accepted by scholars as evidence that the *carmina* mentioned by the historian are to be identified with the tragedies.

a performer and would have danced Virgil's Turnus if he had survived the military overthrow which made an end to his reign.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, that the literary activity in the age of Nero was probably inspired by the emperor's own interest in dramatic forms, pantomime and mime, and that such genres must have been conspicuously in the forefront of contemporary literary productions is also suggested by the pervasive mimic spirit of Petronius' *Satyricon* as well as by the notice found in Vacca's life that Lucan composed fourteen *salticae fabulae*; thus, Seneca, Petronius, and Lucan, the three leading figures of Nero's literary circle, all seem to have been attuned to the dominant interest of Nero the *artifex*.<sup>19</sup>

In a cultural climate craving for novelty, pantomime offered a fertile ground for brilliant writers to display their abilities in adapting well-known literary materials (attesting their familiarity and knowledge of the literary tradition) to a new and fashionable performative medium. In a sense, pantomime can be seen as an additional rhetorical exercise, in which the writer was challenged to cleverly find metaphors, metonyms, and similes meant to function as verbal analogues to the movements of the dancer.

The aim of the present work is to focus on the relationship between Seneca's dramas and pantomime. A close scrutiny of Seneca's tragic *corpus* with pantomime in mind is worth undertaking, especially because the hypothesis of this influence has been suggested by several scholars but never investigated on a systematic basis; in fact, Wagenvoort's contribution did not open the way to further investigations of the possible influence of pantomime on Seneca's tragedies and only more recently Zimmermann and Erasmo have recast the point at issue.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Suetonius, *Nero* 54: *sub exitu quidem vitae palam voverat, si sibi incolumis status permansisset, proditurum se partae victoriae ludis etiam hydraulam et choraulam et utricularium ac novissimo die histrionem saltaturumque Vergili Turnum.*

<sup>19</sup> Sandy (1974) 341-42.

<sup>20</sup> Zimmermann (1999) 161-7; Erasmo (2004) 134.

Even more importantly, the investigation of the possible influence of pantomime addresses the compelling issue of Senecan modern criticism aiming at providing a more adequate historical framework of the dramatic conventions for a more appropriate evaluation of Seneca's tragic work. If we take into account the most common features of pantomimic performances when reading Seneca's tragedies, some of the controversial features of the plays, which do not have a parallel in fifth-century Greek tragic conventions, can possibly be explained and better understood.

The thesis consists of five chapters. In the first chapter, after a preliminary outline of the general features of pantomime as a genre, I will show that the influence of sub-literary-genres such as pantomime and mime, the sister art of pantomime, can be traced in several Roman writers whose literary production was antecedent or contemporary with Seneca's; this chapter is thus meant to provide the general background for the more specific exploration of the influence of the aesthetics of pantomime on Seneca's tragedies.

The thesis will then continue with the systematic attempt at signalling out and analysing specific features of Seneca's tragedies whose peculiar shape and handling can be attributed to the influence of the aesthetics of pantomime. These features are the peculiar loose dramatic structure, the presence of "running commentaries" (minute descriptions of characters undergoing emotional strains or performing specific actions), of monologues of self-analysis, and of narrative set-pieces. The general features contributing to the loose dramatic structure of Seneca's tragedies will be discussed in Chapter two; the occurrence and nature of "running commentaries" will be discussed in Chapter three, that of monologues of self-analysis in Chapter four, and that of narrative set-pieces will be discussed in Chapter five.

## Chapter 1

### Pantomime in the ancient world

#### 1 Introduction

This chapter consists of two parts. The first one offers a preliminary outline of the general features of pantomime as a genre. The second shows that the influence of sub-literary genres such as pantomime and mime, the two most popular forms of drama in the late Republic and Imperial times, can be traced in several Roman writers whose literary production was antecedent or contemporary with Seneca's; this section of the chapter is thus meant to provide the general background for the more specific exploration of the influence of the aesthetics of pantomime on Seneca's tragedies. I deal here with both the influence of mime and pantomime since these two theatrical genres were closely related and the ancient writers make no sharp distinction between the two of them.<sup>1</sup> Such affinity was due to the fact that both mime and pantomime relied on gestures and body movements as a preferred means to portray characters or narrate the story. The major difference between these two otherwise very akin genres was thematic. Mime tended to deal with comic, realistic, and low-life themes, pantomime, instead, with tragic and mythological ones; however, these are generalisations, since mime could present mythological themes (burlesques) and a comic type of pantomime also existed. Moreover, it is attested that some themes, as, for instance, that of adultery,

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<sup>1</sup> Wiseman (2008b) 146-53 argues that a considerable overlap between mime and pantomime existed and warns against setting mutually exclusive categories for genres as heterogeneous as mime and pantomime. Wiseman offers as example of this a notice reported by a scholiast on Lucan about a mimetic enacting of the story of Thyestes and Atreus. The scholiast uses the term "mime", but, since the subject in question is tragic, we should admit either the existence in mime of tragic themes or that the scholiast is actually referring to pantomime.



featured in both genres. Finally, the section is also meant to show that, as Fantham has argued, mime and pantomime constitute the “missing link in Roman literary history” and that an assessment of their influence on higher literary genres would contribute to a better understanding of the various facets of Roman culture.<sup>2</sup>

## 1.1 Pantomime as a genre

### 1.1.1 Origins and development of pantomime

The origins and development of pantomime are shrouded in obscurity and hence debated. Pantomime had its roots in the tradition of mimetic dancing which was practiced and most probably independently developed by geographically and culturally separated peoples such as the Etruscans, the Greeks, and the Egyptians. Scholars have alternatively assigned the origins of this genre to Egypt, Greece, or Italy.<sup>3</sup> Jory has maintained that the different scholarly theories about the origins of pantomime are not “mutually exclusive”.<sup>4</sup> Greek forerunners of pantomime are to be found in the sort of performance described by Xenophon in his *Symposium* (9, 43), in an epigram by Dioscorides (about 250 BC) about the victory of a certain Aristagoras who danced a Gallos, and in an inscription from Priene (80 BC) recording the activity of a pantomime named Plutogenes.<sup>5</sup> Italian antecedents of

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<sup>2</sup> Fantham (1988-89).

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the problems of the origins see Rotolo (1957) 18-48; Bier (1917) 48-54, relying on Aelius Aristides (in Libanius 64, 80), claimed that pantomime has its origins in Egypt in connection with the sacred rites of the goddess Isis in which it had a cultic function. Despite the fact that Bier's theory has been dismissed by scholars, his idea of a cultic origin of the genre deserves consideration.

<sup>4</sup> Jory (1981) 147.

<sup>5</sup> Lawler (1943b) 60-71 has argued that Ionian dances were most probably forerunners of pantomime; in the Roman world, the Ionian dancers were equated with *cinaedi*, as is attested by Plautus (*Stich.* 769-70 *qui Ionicus aut cinaedicus, qui hoc tale facere/possiet*); Scipio Aemilianus disparagingly attests that *cinaedi* run dancing schools in Rome (fr. 30 Malcovati: *eunt, inquam, in ludum saltatorium inter cinaedos virgines puerique ingenui*); see also Horace, *Odes* 3, 6, 21-24 (*motus doceri gaudet Ionicos/matura virgo et fingitur artibus/iam nunc et incestos amores/de tenero meditatur ungui*) and Lucian (*De mercede conductis* 27) who says that *cinaedi* were part of

pantomime are to be found in the *Ludus talarius* and in the mime, of which dancing constituted an integral element.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, as Garton has stressed, mime was the type of performance with which pantomime was most closely associated; this association is attested by the undifferentiated terminology with which the ancient writers refer to mime and pantomime, confirming that these theatrical genres were perceived as sister arts closely related to each other and that no sharp distinction between the two of them actually existed.<sup>7</sup>

The pivotal role of dance in the mime is then attested already in the first recorded presence of a mimic actor on the Roman stage (211 BC). The story preserved by Festus (436-38 L) and Servius (*ad Aen.* VIII, 110) says that the mimic actor Pomponius kept dancing to the flute in order to preserve the ritual despite the fact that his fellow citizens were compelled to leave the theatre at the news of Hannibal's approach to the city. The episode originated the well-known anecdote *salva res est, saltat senex*. Movement, gesticulation, and facial expressions constituted the quintessential feature of mime and this is the reason why it was considered the most mimetic among the performative genres.<sup>8</sup> The practice of barefoot performance, which originated the epithet *planipedes* that was often applied to mimic performers, indicates their necessity to be able to move freely.<sup>9</sup>

An inscription from Rome dated to the Imperial period in praise of an actor seems to attest the existence of a type of mime in which dancing featured so prominently that it was named "dancing mime": *Lau]datus populo, solitus mandata*

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the household as trainers of Ionic songs and dances.

<sup>6</sup> Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 1, 20d-e defines pantomime as the "Italian dance" thus attesting the perceived Italian ancestry of the genre in the Greek world; for the connections between pantomime and the *ludus talarius* see Jory (1995) 139-52 and Garelli (2000a) 101-2 who argues against Jory's suggestion; see Garton (1972) 232 for the connections between pantomime and mime.

<sup>7</sup> See Garelli (2001) 234-35.

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed discussion of mime and its development at Rome see Nicoll (1931) 80-131; Duckworth (1952) 13-15; Giancotti (1967) focuses on the literary mime of Laberius and Publilius Syrus.

<sup>9</sup> Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* I, XI, 12 speaks of a *planipes saltans*; a fragment (Ribbeck, 188) of a comedy by a certain Atta (first century BC) has *exultat planipes*.

*referre,/Ad]jectus scaenae, Parasitus Apollinis idem,/Quar]tarum in mimis saltantibus utilis actor.*<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the thematic repertoire of mime and pantomime apparently dealt with the same subjects as, for instance, that of adultery which constituted one of the most preferred motifs in both mimic and pantomimic performances. Furthermore, mime reached the apex of its popularity in the first century BC in connection with the productions of the mimographers Laberius and Publilius Syrus, who added a literary dimension and thus transformed the rather crude genre which mime once must have been.

Tracing the development of pantomime in Rome is a difficult task because of the lack of evidence found in the ancient writers; still, they provide accounts of when pantomime was introduced at Rome, and of the names of the two pantomime dancers to whom the creation of the genre is ascribed, i.e. Pylades from Cilicia or Bathyllus of Alexandria.<sup>11</sup> Athenaeus records that Bathyllus introduced the pantomimic dance in Rome and, relying on the authority of the Alexandrian grammarian Aristonicus, that he and Pylades developed the “Italian style of dancing” which was a combination of the dances found in tragedy (*emmeleia*), in comedy (*cordax*) and in the satyr play (*sicinnis*).<sup>12</sup> Suetonius’ account names only Pylades, to whom he ascribes not the introduction or invention of the genre, but its transformation consisting in the introduction of the accompaniment by a chorus and a pipe player;<sup>13</sup> that Pylades transformed a genre already in existence seems to be confirmed by a passage in Macrobius where Pylades is said to have brought

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<sup>10</sup> *ILS* 5201 = *CIL* 6.10118 = *CLE* 411 = Courtney (1995) 121. Slater (2002) 319-20 objects to Courtney’s translation of *mimi saltantes* as pantomimes since the performer in question danced as well as acted, while the dancers did not speak. Festus (438, 22, L) reports that a mime of secondary parts had also the role of dancing to the music of the flute: “Volumnius who danced to the flute, was an actor of secundarum, who is introduced in nearly all mimes as a parasite”.

<sup>11</sup> See Jory (1981) 147-61 for a detailed discussion of the origins and development of pantomime.

<sup>12</sup> Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, I, 20 D.

<sup>13</sup> Suetonius, *De Poetis*, frag. 3 (Rostagni p. 65): *Pylades Cilex pantomimus, cum veteres ipsi canerent atque saltarent, primus Romae chorum et fistulam sibi praecinere fecit.*

revolutionary changes by adding “the sound of the flutes and pipes and the murmur of men”.<sup>14</sup>

Concerning the time at which the pantomimic dance made its first appearance in Rome, Macrobius provides the information that Pylades flourished in the age of Augustus;<sup>15</sup> this dating is confirmed also by Lucian and the Byzantine historian Zosimus.<sup>16</sup> The year 22 BC was the date at which Jerome asserted that pantomime was introduced to Rome, but it is most likely that the year 23 BC was actually the one in which pantomime made its official entry in Rome, being included in the games of Marcellus, Augustus’s nephew.<sup>17</sup> As has been well argued by Jory, if pantomime was included in the games, it must have arrived in Rome before the date reported by Jerome; the year 22 BC was most probably fixed by ancient writers out of the concern they felt with origins and founding dates in order to provide a date for the beginning of pantomime.<sup>18</sup> The new genre was actually perfected under the emperor Augustus, but its introduction in Rome must have

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<sup>14</sup> Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, 2, 7, 18: *hic quia ferebatur mutasse rudis illius saltationis ritum, quae apud maiores viguit, et venustam induxisse novitatem, interrogatus ab Augusto quae saltationi contulisset, respondit: Ἀϋλῶν συρίγγων τ' ἔνοσπην, ὀμαδὸν τ' ἀνθρώπων* (the line quoted by Pylades is from Homer’s *Iliad* 10, 13).

<sup>15</sup> Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, 2, 7, 12: *Sed quia semel ingressus sum scaenam loquendo, nec Pylades histrio nobis omittendus est, qui clarus in opere suo fuit temporibus Augusti.*

<sup>16</sup> Lucian, *De Saltatione*, 34: *ἀλλὰ τό γε ἐν τῷ παρόντι μοι κεφάλαιον τοῦ λόγου τοῦτό ἐστιν, τὴν νῦν ὄρχησιν καθεστῶσαν ἐπαινέσαι καὶ δεῖξαι ὅσα ἐν αὐτῇ τερπνὰ καὶ χρήσιμα περιλαβοῦσα ἔχει, οὐ πάλαι ἀρξαμένη ἐς τοσοῦτο κάλλος ἐπιδιδόναί, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὸν Σεβαστὸν μάλιστα; Zosimus, *Historia Nova*, I, 6: *αὐτῆ σαφῶς ἔδειξε τῶν ἐκβεβηκότων ἡ πείρα καὶ τὰ εὐθύς συμπεσόντα κατὰ τὴν Ὀκταβιανοῦ βασιλείαν· ἢ τε γὰρ παντόμιμος ὄρχησις ἐν ἐκείνοις εἰσήχθη τοῖς χρόνοις, οὐπω πρότερον οὔσα, Πυλάδου καὶ Βαθύλλου πρώτων αὐτὴν μετελθόντων, καὶ προσέτι γε ἕτερα πολλῶν αἰτία γεγονότα μέχρι τοῦδε κακῶν.**

<sup>17</sup> Jerome, *Annotations to Eusebius’ Chronicon*, *Ol. 180, 3: Anno XXII Pylades Cilex pantomimus cum veteres ipsi canerent atque saltarent, primus Romae chorum et fistulam sibi praecinere fecit.*

<sup>18</sup> Jory (1981) 147 and 157 and Hall (2002) 25-6 have convincingly claimed that Livy’s famous account of the development of Roman drama can be better understood as an “aetiological narrative” illustrating the invention of pantomime. Now, since Livy’s account has been shown to have Varro’s *Antiquitates divinae* as its source, which was published around 47 BC, we can be sure that “a solo mimetic dance form” was in existence well before 22BC. Wiseman (2008) 146-47 has argued that a passage in Cicero’s *Pro Rabirio Postumo* (35) could possibly attest that pantomime had already been introduced in Rome in 54 BC, the year of composition of Cicero’s speech: *audiebamus Alexandream, nunc cognoscimus. illinc omnes praestigiae, illinc, inquam, omnes fallaciae, omnia denique ab eis mimorum argumenta nata sunt.* Wiseman (2008b) 147 observes that “the combination of mime, novelty, and Alexandria” would point to the introduction of a new style of performance, since Cicero can hardly refer to mime as something new.

taken place before that date as it is possibly attested by two passages in Horace (*Satires*, I, 5, 63 dated to 37 BC: *Pastorem saltaret uti Cyclopa rogabat; Epistulae*, II, 2, 124-25: *ludentis speciem dabit et torquebitur, ut qui/nunc Satyrum, nunc agrestem Cyclopa movetur*).<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, a Varronian fragment written around 60 BC, which most probably refers to a pantomimic performance of the story of Actaeon, would attest the presence of pantomime already in the first half of the first century BC (fr. 513 from the *Synephebus* in Nonius 5, 355): *crede mihi, plures dominos servi comederunt quam canes. quod si Actaeon occupasset et ipse prius suos canes comedisset, non nugas saltatoribus in theatro fieret*; that Varro is referring to pantomime is corroborated by Lucian's statement (41) that the story of Actaeon featured as a theme in pantomimic performances.<sup>20</sup>

Augustus was the first patron of pantomime and Pylades, the original innovator of the pantomimic genre, is said to have been on terms of familiarity with him as is attested by Macrobius;<sup>21</sup> Dio Cassius and Macrobius also report that Pylades could afford to reply fearlessly to Augustus' rebuke about the quarrels between him and his rivals (either Bathyllus or Hylas) with the claim that such disputes were advantageous for the emperor, thus implying that people's minds were kept off politics by them.<sup>22</sup>

As Beacham has argued, Augustus supported pantomime because he saw in it "a useful medium both for mass entertainment and for embodying and popularising the classical mythology and traditional beliefs so central to the ideology of the

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<sup>19</sup> See Weinreich (1941) 96-100.

<sup>20</sup> See Wiseman (2008a) 213-14.

<sup>21</sup> Macrobius reports that Pylades performed during a dinner offered by Augustus in the imperial palace, *Saturnalia*, 2, 7, 16-18: *cum in Herculem furentem prodisset et non nullis incessum histrioni convenientem non servare videretur, deposita persona ridentes increpuit: μωροί, μαινόμενον ὀρχοῦμαι. hac fabula et sagittas iecit in populum. eandem personam cum iussu Augusti in triclinio ageret, et intendit arcum et spicula immisit. nec indignatus est Caesar eodem se loco Pyladi quo populum Romanum fuisse.*

<sup>22</sup> Dio Cassius, *Historia Romana*, 54, 17, 5; Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, 2, 7.

principate”.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Garelli has claimed that since pantomime was an “ecumenical” type of performance, which could cross the linguistic boundaries and ethnic divisions of the Empire, it was well suited to embody Augustus’ ideology of a world unified and pacified under his reign.<sup>24</sup> It is not coincidence then that pantomime was at first introduced at festivals celebrating the Imperial cult such as the *Augustalia* in Rome and the Sebasta games in Naples, instituted in honour of Augustus in 2 AD (Dio 55, 10, 9; Strabo 5, 246), in which pantomime was introduced in 18 AD.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, archeological findings at Aphrodisias, which under Augustus received a number of privileges among which was direct imperial patronage, have shown that the frieze of the propylon of the Sebasteion was decorated with masks which can be attributed to pantomime, since they present the typical closed-mouth of the pantomimic masks.<sup>26</sup> Jory has remarked that the presence of pantomimic masks on the frieze at Aphrodisias could be a form of homage paid by the Aphrodisian funders of the Sebasteion to “Augustus’ own tastes” in matter of theatrical performances.<sup>27</sup>

The “pantomania” grew enormously during Augustus’ reign to the point that his successor, Tiberius had to face the riots which broke out among the factions supporting rival pantomimic dancers. At the beginning, because of the popularity

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<sup>23</sup> Beacham (1999) 146.

<sup>24</sup> Garelli (2004b) 362-7. The perceived “universal” nature of pantomimic language is attested by a passage in Lucian (64) in which this type of performance is shown to enable cross-cultural communication.

<sup>25</sup> Tacitus, *Annales*, 1, 54, 77: *Ludos Augustalis tunc primum coeptos turbavit discordia ex certamine histrionum. Indulserat ei ludicro Augustus, dum Maecenati obtemperat effuso in amorem Bathylli.* Lucian, 32: ἐὼ λέγειν ὅτι πόλις ἐν Ἰταλία, τοῦ Χαλκιδικοῦ γένους ἡ ἀρίστη, καὶ τοῦτο ὡσπερ τι κόσμημα τῷ παρ’ αὐτοῖς ἀγῶνι προστέθεικεν; see Geer (1935) 208-11 for the Greek games held at Sebasta. See Slater (1995) and (1996a) for a discussion of pantomime’s introduction into the regular Greek agonistic festivals, which did not take place until the early 170s AD.

<sup>26</sup> For a description of the frieze of the propylon of the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias see Chaisemartin (1987) 135-54 and (2006) 33-82. Other pantomimic masks have been found at Aspendos: see Moretti (1993) 212-13; at Jerash in Trans-Jordan see Iliffe (1945) 4-5 and plate V; pantomimic masks are possibly represented on ash-chests found in Ostia: the material is published by Bianchi-Aravantinos (1991) 1-32.

<sup>27</sup> Jory (2002) 244.

the dancers had attained in all the strands of the populace and unwilling to change Augustus' decision in matter of the treatment of misbehaving performers, Tiberius chose to act against such disturbances with restrictive measures applied to the pay of the pantomimic dancers, by permitting their performances only inside the theatre, and by forbidding performers to receive senators in their homes or to be accompanied in public by members of the equestrian order.<sup>28</sup> However, in 23 AD he was compelled to ban pantomimic dancers from Rome.<sup>29</sup>

Caligula (37-41 AD) recalled the artists as soon as he became emperor and indulged openly in the company of one of them, Mnester, whom he shamelessly treated as his favourite.<sup>30</sup> Claudius (41-54 AD) kept protecting pantomime dancers because of Messalina, his wife, who is said to have had a love affair with the dancer Mnester; he was then put to death by Claudius right after Messalina's disgrace.<sup>31</sup>

It is well known that Nero (54-68 AD) enjoyed theatrical and dancing performances and was also a performer himself;<sup>32</sup> it seems that he was primarily interested in singing, but the ancient writers hint also at the artistic attempts he made as a pantomimic performer. Suetonius reports his intention to dance Virgil's Turnus and that the artistic rivalry he felt for the famous and initially favourite

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<sup>28</sup> Tacitus, *Annales*, 1, 77.

<sup>29</sup> Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 37, 2; Tacitus, *Annales*, 1, 77; Dio, *Historia Romana*, 59, 2, 5.

<sup>30</sup> Suetonius, *Caligula*, 11, 54 and 55.

<sup>31</sup> Seneca, *Apocolocyntosis* 13, 15.

<sup>32</sup> Suetonius (*Nero*, 6, 3) disparagingly claims that Nero had as tutors a dancer and a barber: *apud amitam Lepidam nutritus est sub duobus paedagogis saltatore atque tonsore*. Nero's most favoured roles were, according to Suetonius (*Nero*, 21, 3), "*Canacem parturientem, Orestem matricidam, Oedipodem excaecatam, Herculem insanum*"; Dio (*Historia Romana*, 61, 20, 2) reports that Nero sang an "Attis or Bacchants" and similarly, Persius (*Sat.*, 1, 105) says that he sang the same roles (*in udo est Maenas et Attis*). The preferred singing roles played by Nero are interestingly some of the most popular in pantomimic performances. For instance, "Canace in labour" matches the Lucianic claim that "Ledo's labour" was a subject of danced performances; similarly, Attis and the Bacchic thiasos, the maddened Hercules, and Oedipus' self-blinding were very popular subjects in pantomimic performances. It is thus possible to suggest that the arias sang by Nero may well have been those which accompanied the pantomimic dancer enacting through his movements the stories told by the libretto.

dancer Paris caused the latter's execution,<sup>33</sup> Dio (63, 18, 1), referring to the same event, says, instead, that Paris was condemned because Nero "had wished to learn dancing from him, but lacked the talent" (τί γὰρ δεῖ λέγειν ὅτι καὶ τὸν Πάριν τὸν ὄρχηστὴν ἀποθανεῖν ἐκέλευσεν, ὅτι ὄρχεῖσθαι παρ' αὐτῷ μαθεῖν ἐθελήσας οὐκ ἠδυνήθη).<sup>34</sup>

### 1.1.2 Founders of the genre

According to Plutarch and Athenaeus, Pylades of Cilicia and Bathyllus of Alexandria were the founders of the pantomimic genre in its two diverse forms: the tragic pantomime and the comic pantomime.<sup>35</sup> Athenaeus attributes to Pylades the invention of tragic pantomime, while to Bathyllus the invention of the more comic and light-hearted type. In fact, while Pylades' dancing was "solemn, expressing passion and variety of character" (ἦν δὲ ἡ Πυλάδου ὄρχησις ὀγκώδης παθητικὴ τε καὶ πολυπρόσωπος), Bathyllus' one was more "jolly" (ἰλαρωτέρα).<sup>36</sup>

Both artists had a relationship with the Imperial house and the cultural elite around it; in fact we know that Pylades was a freedman of Augustus, while

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<sup>33</sup> Suetonius, *Nero*, 54: *Et sunt qui tradant Paridem histrionem occisum ab eo quasi gravem adversarium*. Servius (ad *Aen.* V, 370) reports that Nero's poem entitled *Troica* had Paris as its hero: *sane hic Paris secundum Troica Neronis fortissimus fuit, adeo ut in Troiae agonali certamine superaret omnes, ipsum etiam Hectorem*. It seems then no coincidence that Nero's favourite dancer took the stage name Paris, which is attested to have been adopted by several pantomimic dancers thereafter. see Bonaria (1959) 226-7; the dancer Paris in question here most probably adopted such stage name because his fame was attached to his outstanding impersonation of the Phrygian hero. For a discussion of Nero's poetic compositions, see Bardon (1936) 337-49 and Charlesworth (1950) 69-76.

<sup>34</sup> Garelli (2004b) 353-68 has claimed that Nero did not actually ever perform as a dancer and that his interest in pantomime was just politically motivated following, in this respect, Augustus' instrumentalisation of public entertainments to enhance personal popularity and celebration of Imperial ideology.

<sup>35</sup> For a portrait of the dancer Pylades see Lawler (1946a) 241-47 and Jory (2004) 147-56.

<sup>36</sup> Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, I 20-21; ancient writers report that Pylades excelled in the roles of Dionysus (*Anth. Plan.* 209) and the maddened Hercules (*Anth. Pal.* 9. 248; Macrobius, *Sat.* 2, 7, 16); Bathyllus in those of Echo, Pan, an Eros and Satyr (*CIL* 9, 344; Persius *Sat.* 5, 122-23: *cum sis cetera fossor, tris tantum ad numeros Satyrum moveare Bathylli*).

Bathyllus was a freedman of Maecenas.<sup>37</sup>

That Pylades and Bathyllus were felt to be the founders of the pantomimic genre in antiquity is attested by the fact that their names were assumed by successive generations of dancers as professional names; we know of at least five dancers named Pylades and two named Bathyllus.<sup>38</sup> Seneca reports that both Pylades and Bathyllus opened their own schools in Rome.<sup>39</sup> One of Pylades' most famous pupils, Hylas, is remembered by many ancient writers, who stress the public disorder caused by the rivalry of the two clagues supporting the pupil and the former teacher respectively, to the point that Augustus was compelled to banish both of them from the city of Rome in 18 BC.<sup>40</sup>

Macrobius relates two episodes of Pylades' dissatisfaction and hypercritical attitude towards Hylas' performances.<sup>41</sup> In the first case, Pylades criticised Hylas for his dancing of the words "great Agamemnon"; Pylades claimed that Hylas was making the king of the Greeks just tall instead of great; in another occasion he reproached his pupil because in portraying the blind Oedipus he was badly pretending not to use his eyes, whereas he clearly was.

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<sup>37</sup> For Pylades see Dio Cassius 54, 17, 4; for Bathyllus see Tacitus, *Ann.* 1, 54, 2; schol. Ad Pers: 5, 123: *Bathylli: pantomimus fuit libertus Maecenatis.*

<sup>38</sup> See Bonaria (1959) 224-42.

<sup>39</sup> Seneca, *Naturales Quaestiones*, 7, 32, 3: *At quanta cura laboratur, ne cuius pantomimi nomen intercidat! Stat per successores Pyladis et Bathylli domus; harum artium multi discipuli sunt multique doctores. Privatum urbe tota sonat pulpitem.*

<sup>40</sup> Suetonius, *Augustus*, 45, 4: *Nam histrionum licentiam adeo compescuit, ut Stephanionem togatarium, cui in puerilem habitum circumtonsam matronam ministrasse compererat, per trina theatra virgis caesum relegaverit, Hylan pantomimum querente praetore in atrio domus suae nemine excluso flagellis verberavit et Pyladen urbe atque Italia summovertit, quod spectatorem, a quo exhibebatur, demonstrasset digito conspicuumque fecisset.*

<sup>41</sup> Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, 2, 7, 13-16: *populus deinde inter utriusque suffragia divisus est, et cum canticum quoddam saltaret Hylas cuius clausula erat τὸν μέγαν Ἀγαμέμνονα, sublimem ingentemque Hylas velut metiebatur. non tulit Pylades et exclamavit e cavea: σὺ μακρὸν οὐ μέγαν ποιεῖς. tunc eum populus coegit idem saltare canticum, cumque ad locum venisset quem reprehenderat, expressit cogitantem, nihil magis ratus magno duci convenire quam pro omnibus cogitare. saltabat Hylas Oedipodem, et Pylades hac voce securitatem saltantis castigavit: σὺ βλέπεις.*

### 1.1.3 The pantomimic show

In its most traditional and widespread form, pantomime was a solo mute dance performance based on a tragic libretto sang by a chorus or a soloist. The dancer neither spoke nor sang, but interpreted by means of his dancing a story usually based on a mythological theme. Lucian (66) reports that the dancer danced all the roles in succession and the fact that the performer could use up to five masks within a performance seems to suggest that with the changing of the mask a change of character or scene took place as well. A typical constituent of pantomime performances was the representation of a character in an altered state of mind: anger, sorrow, grief, pain, or frenzy. The ‘tragic’ dancer aimed precisely at portraying characters as they undergone emotional strain, such as being in love, being mad, or being consumed with grief; Lucian (67), speaking in more general terms, states that:

Τὸ δὲ ὅλον ἦθη καὶ πάθη δείξειν καὶ ὑποκρινεῖσθαι ἢ ὄρχησις ἐπαγγέλλεται, νῦν μὲν ἐρῶντα, νῦν δὲ ὀργιζόμενόν τινα εἰσάγουσα, καὶ ἄλλον μεμνηνότεν καὶ ἄλλον λελυπημένον, καὶ ἅπαντα ταῦτα μεμετρημένως. τὸ γοῦν παραδοξότατον, τῆς αὐτῆς ἡμέρας ἄρτι μὲν Ἀθάμας μεμνηνός, ἄρτι δὲ Ἰνώ φοβουμένη δείκνυται, καὶ ἄλλοτε Ἀτρεὺς ὁ αὐτός, καὶ μετὰ μικρὸν Θυέστης, εἶτα Αἴγισθος ἢ Ἀερόπη· καὶ πάντα ταῦτα εἰς ἄνθρωπός ἐστιν.

Cassiodorus gives a similar account:<sup>42</sup>

Idem corpus Herculem designat et Venerem, feminam praesentat in

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<sup>42</sup> Cassiodorus, *Variae*, 4, 51, 9.

mare, regem facit et militem, senem reddit et iuvenem: ut in uno credas esse multos tam varia imitatione discretos.

Thus, one of the main appeals of the genre was the virtuoso ability of the pantomime actor to become a vast range of different characters in rapid succession.<sup>43</sup> The shift from one character to the other did not always strictly require a change of mask and the dancer could suggest persons who supposedly stood by, but were in fact absent as it seems to be implied in a passage in Libanius (113):

καὶ τὸ μὲν Ἀθηνᾶς δεικνυμένης Ἀθηνῶν ἐννοεῖν καὶ Ποσειδῶνος Ποσειδῶ καὶ Ἥφαιστου γε Ἥφαιστον οὐπω πάμμεγα, τὸ δὲ δι' Ἀθηνᾶς μὲν τὸν Ποσειδῶ, διὰ δὲ Ἥφαιστου τὴν Ἀθηνᾶν, διὰ δὲ Ἄρεος Ἥφαιστον, διὰ δὲ Γανυμήδους Δία, διὰ δὲ Ἀχιλλέως Πάριν, ταῦτα ποίωιν οὐ γρίφων ἰκανώτερα ψυχὴν ἀκονᾶν.

Similarly, the dancer was able to suggest physical surroundings which did not feature on the stage (Libanius 116; Plutarch *Quaest. Conv.* B IX, 15, 2) and he could portray inanimate objects such as flames, trees, rivers, and body of waters at large (Lucian 19).<sup>44</sup> Lucian (19) claims that the dancer could imitate even “the liquidity of water, the sharpness of fire in the liveliness of its movements, the

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<sup>43</sup> The protean nature of the pantomimic dancer is a feature emphasised by the ancient writers; Lucian (19) states that the myth about the Egyptian Proteus who could mould himself in any shape he wanted to meant that he was nothing else than a dancer; actually, transformations were a major topic of the pantomimic repertoire as attested by Lucian (57) who generally states that the dancer should know all the mythical plots involving transformation such as Cadmus' metamorphosis into a snake (Lucian 41) or human beings changed into stones (Lucian 39 the Deucalion myth; the petrified Niobe) or Callisto's transformations into a bear (48).

<sup>44</sup> Nonnus, *Dionysiaca*, 19, 288-95 describes the pantomimic performance of the dancer Silenus who imitates the flowing of a river. See also Velleius Paterculus, *Historia Romana* (2, 83, 2) who describes the performance of Munatius Plancus who danced the sea-god Glaucus at a banquet: *cum caeruleatus et nudus caputque redimitus arundine et caudam trahens, genibus innixus Glaucum saltasset in convivio, refrigeratus ab Antonio ob manifestarum rapinarum indicia transfugit ad Caesarem.*

fierceness of a lion, the rage of a leopard, and the quivering of a tree”.<sup>45</sup>

To convey the idea of inanimate objects such as fire, flora and water, the dancer, we can infer, embodied an intrinsic quality of the object represented; for instance, in the case of water, liquidity may have been the quality represented through a wave-like movement; if the object represented was fire, the shivering and mobile quality or the variety of colours of the flame could have been used to convey the idea of fire through, in the first case, shivering and trembling movements, in the second, through a change in the intensity of the movements themselves; if this was the case, the dancer must have heavily relied on visual analogues to convey the inanimate objects represented. Because of this, we can reasonably suppose that the portrayal of such elements was of a more allusive than strictly denotative nature and thus imagistic in essence.

Because of this ability to portray imaginary objects via allusive gestures, the scenic space in pantomimic performances was more open than in more conventional theatrical performances and was less bound to the physical and material constraints of the actual setting. For instance, imaginary landscapes and unreal creatures could be suggested by the allusive art of the dancer. Thus, the phantasmagorical landscape of the Underworld with its infernal creatures is attested to have been one of the favourite subjects in pantomimic performances.<sup>46</sup>

#### 1.1.4 The pantomimic cast

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<sup>45</sup> Lucian (19): *ὡς καὶ ὕδατος ὑγρότητα μιμείσθαι καὶ πυρὸς ὀξύτητα ἐν τῇ τῆς κινήσεως σφοδρότητι καὶ λέοντος ἀγριότητα καὶ παρδάλεως θυμὸν καὶ δένδρου δόνημα, καὶ ὅλως ὅτι καὶ θελήσειεν.*

<sup>46</sup> Lucian (60): *καὶ τὴν ἐν Ἄιδου ἅπασαν τραγωδίαν καὶ τὰς κολάσεις καὶ τὰς ἐφ’ ἐκάστη αἰτίας καὶ τὴν Πειρίθου καὶ Θησέως ἄχρι τοῦ Ἄιδου ἐταιρείαν.*

The pantomimic cast seems normally to have consisted of a solo dancer accompanied by singers and musicians; nonetheless, there are two passages in Lucian that mention the presence of an actor in a pantomimic troupe. In the first passage (68), Lucian provides an account of the equipment of the dancer in which he includes the presence of the actor:

ὁ δὲ ὀρχηστῆς τὰ πάντα ἔχει συλλαβῶν, καὶ ἔνεστιν ποικίλην καὶ παμμιγῆ τὴν παρασκευὴν αὐτοῦ ἰδεῖν, αὐλόν, σύριγγα, ποδῶν κτύπον, κυμβάλου ψόφον, ὑποκριτοῦ εὐφωνίαν, ἀδόντων ὀμοφωνίαν.

What was exactly the role of the actor? There are two possible explanations of the role of the actor according to the evidence provided by ancient writers. The first one is that the actor had the function of the prologue speaker (*praeco*). The presence of the prologue speaker seems to be confirmed by two passages, one in Augustine and the other in Isidore of Seville. Augustine affirms that in the earliest period there was a *praeco* telling the story the dancer was going to dance:

histriones quosdam in theatro fabulas sine verbis saltando plerumque aperiunt et exponunt. primis temporibus saltante pantomimo praeco pronuntiabat populis Carthaginiis quod saltator vellet intelligi. Quod adhuc multi meminerunt senes, quorum relatu haec solemus audire.<sup>47</sup>

Similarly, Isidore speaks in more general terms of the presence of an actor who would speak the prologue: *mimi sunt dicti Graeca appellatione quod rerum humanarum sint imitatores; nam habebant suum auctorem, qui antequam mimum*

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<sup>47</sup> Augustine, *De Magistro*, 3, 5.

*agerent, fabulam pronuntiare[n]t.*<sup>48</sup> Another possibility is that the actor supported the pantomime dancer by playing the secondary roles. This would find support in a passage in Quintilian in which he reports that a dancer (*saltator*) and an interrupter (*interpellator*) mimed a dialogue with gestures: *Nam et finitione usus est Augustus de pantomimis duobus qui alternis gestibus contendebant, cum eorum alterum saltatorem dixit, alterum interpellatorem.*<sup>49</sup>

Lucian (83) provides strong evidence in confirming that the role of the actor was essentially that of playing secondary roles; in fact, in a discussion of a pantomimic performance that dramatised the madness of Ajax, Lucian mentions the presence of an actor playing the secondary role of Odysseus together with the dancer impersonating Ajax.<sup>50</sup> Further support for the possibility that in some cases an actor could be present and support the dancer comes from a passage in Plutarch (*Quaestiones Conviviales* 711e), which attests that the Pyladic type of pantomime at times required a large cast, which was the main reason why it was not a performance suitable for private parties.<sup>51</sup>

### 1.1.5 The pantomimic instruments

The pantomimic action performed either by the dancer alone or with an actor, was accompanied by an orchestra as well as a chorus or a soloist who sang the words of the libretto. According to one source, the orchestra was made up of a variety of musical instruments including flutes, pipes, lyres, castanets, cymbals, tympana,

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<sup>48</sup> Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, 18, 49.

<sup>49</sup> Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 6, 3, 65. Weinreich (1948) 144 n. 1 has interpreted the performance of the two pantomimes (*saltator* and *interpellator*) as a “Zeichendisput”. See Slater (1990) 215-20.

<sup>50</sup> This is the interpretation of Harmon (1936) 271; Jory (1998) 220-21 thinks, instead, that the actor impersonating Odysseus “was in fact the rival pantomime dancer who had just left the stage after playing his Odyssean role”.

<sup>51</sup> Additional evidence is provided by the large cast involved in the pantomimic performance of the Judgment of Paris described by Apuleius (*Met.* 10, 30-34).

and even a water-organ could be present (Lucian 26, 68, 72). The rhythm was maintained by the *scabellum*, a wooden clapper attached to the foot of one of the musicians.

### 1.1.6 The pantomimic mask and costume

The pantomimic dancer wore a mask which differed from that of the tragic actor. Perhaps, because the dancer did not speak, he wore a mask with a closed mouth (Lucian, 29). As is shown by the archaeological findings, the pantomimic masks have, besides a closed mouth, elaborate hair, and large holes for the eyes.<sup>52</sup>

The fact that the eyeholes of the masks are large strongly suggests that through them it was possible to see the expression of the dancer's eyes. That the eyes of an actor could remain visible through the mask is attested by a passage in Cicero, who states that the eyes of the actor seemed to gleam from behind a mask (*Saepe ipse vidi, ut ex persona mihi ardere oculi hominis histrionis viderentur*).<sup>53</sup> Cicero is probably referring to the performance of a tragic actor, but if the eyes were indeed visible through a tragic mask, this would have been even more the case for the pantomimic mask.

It is not a coincidence then, that the ancient writers repeatedly praise the expressiveness of the dancers' eyes. For example, Apuleius claims that the dancer "would dance with her eyes alone" (*nonnunquam saltare solis oculis*) and similarly Augustine affirms that the dancers "almost talk with their eyes" (*cum oculis quasi fabulantur*).<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> See Jory (2001) 1-20 and (2002) 238-53. The decorative frieze of the Propylon of the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias displays a series of fifteen masks representing Dionysus, his thiasos, and Heracles which can be with certainty designated as pantomimic since they present the closed mouth typical of this theatrical genre.

<sup>53</sup> Cicero, *De Orat.* 2, 193.

<sup>54</sup> Apuleius, *Met.* X, 32: *nunc mite coniventibus, nunc acre comminantibus gestire pupulis, et nonnunquam saltare solis oculis*; Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, 2, 4, 5. Nonnus, *Dionysiaca*

The costume commonly worn by the pantomimic dancer was a light silk tunic (Lucian, 63) reaching down to the ankles; the light and silky fabric of the tunic was designed to follow and emphasise the movements of the dancer's body. The dancer wore also a *pallium* which, according to Fronto, was used as an expressive and versatile prop to represent successively the tail of a swan, the long hair of the goddess Venus, and the scourge of the Fury.<sup>55</sup>

### 1.1.7 The pantomimic training

Ancient writers repeatedly insist on the existence of an almost standard physical type required to become a dancer. According to Libanius (103), the aspiring dancer needed to undergo a test made by trainers who would establish whether he possessed the right physique for the profession. This scrutiny was meant to establish whether the body of the young pupil was going to conform to the requirements needed: a moderate height and weight, a straight neck, and well-formed fingers. Lucian (75) similarly affirms that the dancer must be well proportioned and thus neither too tall nor too short, too fat or too thin. Ideally, Lucian claims, the body of the dancer should conform to the canon of Polyclitus. Libanius' account mentioned above also points out that the physical training was demanding and began at an early age. This is confirmed by two inscriptions dedicated to two young dancers who died young.<sup>56</sup> According to Libanius, the training was characterised by progressive steps meant to achieve first bodily qualities and control of the body in general and then technical skills and

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5, 104-07: *καὶ παλάμας ἐλέλιζε Πολύμνια, μαῖα χορείης, μιμητὴν δ' ἐχάραξεν ἀναυδέος εἰκόνα φωνῆς, / φθειρομένη παλάμησι σοφὸν τύπον ἔμφρονι σιγῇ, ὄμματα δινεύουσα; 19, 201-2: ὀφθαλμοὺς δ' ἐλέλιζεν ἀλήμονας, εἰκόνα μύθων, / νεύματι τεχνήεντι νοήμονα ρυθμὸν ὑφαίνων.*

<sup>55</sup> Fronto, *On Orations* 4: *Ut histriones, quom palliolatim saltant, caudam cycni, capillum Veneris, Furiae flagellum eodem pallio demonstrant: ita isti unam eandemque sententiam multimodis faciunt.*

<sup>56</sup> Webb (2008) 53-54.

knowledge of the various routines required. Concerning the bodily qualities, the dancer needed to achieve strength, suppleness, and elasticity of limbs; after this was accomplished, the capability to move the limbs in isolation (Libanius 104) was the next step of the training; finally the dancers had to learn and memorise the schemes of the dance (105). The process described by Libanius seems to imply that as soon as the training was accomplished, the movements and the schemes were basically ingrained and rooted in the body of the dancer thus becoming a sort of language the dancers were able to use without the need to think consciously about each movement.

From a more technical point of view, the dancer relied on gesture and on hand language (cheironomy), through which he described the story sung by the chorus; the artist used the movement of the fingers to express the words of the libretto or to convey the emotions experienced by the characters portrayed. In fact, ancient writers do not only put a lot of emphasis on the speaking hands of pantomime dancers (Lucian, 63; 69; Libanius 103; Sen. *Epist.* 121.6); but Libanius (103) also states that well-formed fingers were an essential bodily requirement to become a professional.

In addition to the movement of the hands, the dancer also performed acrobatic figures such as turns, leaps, circles and backward bends (Lucian 71; Libanius 68-69). A typical technical feature of the dance was the rapid alternation between swift movements and static poses as described by Libanius (118):

πότερον δὲ ἂν τις ἀγασθείη μειζρόνως τὴν τῆς περιφορᾶς ἐν  
πλήθει συνέχειαν ἢ τὴν ἐξαίφνης ἐπὶ τούτῳ πάγιον στάσιν ἢ τὸν  
ἐν τῇ στάσει τηρούμενον τύπον; ὡς μὲν γὰρ ὑπόπτεροι  
περιάγονται, τελευτῶσι δὲ εἰς ἀκίνητον στάσιν ὥσπερ  
κεκολλημένοι, μετὰ δὲ τῆς στάσεως ἢ εἰκῶν ἀπαντᾶ. πόνος δὲ

μείζων ἕτερος συγκαταλῦσαι τῷ ᾄσματι. τοσοῦτος τοῦ μέτρου  
λόγος ἐν ὀρχησταίς.

Libanius' account is worth comparing with the description of the art of the dancer found in a Latin epigram (lines 5-7): *Nam cum grata chorus diffundit cantica dulcis, / Quae resonat cantor, motibus ipse probat. / Pugnat ludit amat bacchatur vertitur adstat.*<sup>57</sup>

As Ruth Webb has argued, the epigram describes an “increasing pitch of intensity in the movements enacted until the final dramatic stop (*pugnat, ludit, amat, bacchatur, vertitur, adstat*)”.<sup>58</sup>

The dance also required a good rhythmical coordination and synchronisation of the movements of hands and feet. Thus the elder Seneca complains about the dancer Nomio whose hands move slower than his feet.<sup>59</sup> The ability of moving all the limbs harmoniously was such a distinctive and charming characteristic of the pantomime dancer that it even enchanted the severe Augustine who recommended it to his Christian fellows as an inspiring model to attain harmony of behaviour: *facite vos congruentia morum quod faciunt saltatores motu membrorum. Intus hoc agite; mores consonant.*<sup>60</sup>

### 1.1.8 Dance vocabulary

The long training undergone by the aspiring dancer was needed both to acquire the necessary bodily requirements and to learn the *schemata*, the standard repertoire of dance steps and sequences.

As Habinek has suggested, Lucian's claim that the dancer's knowledge must span

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<sup>57</sup> *Anthologia Latina* n. 100 = Weinreich n. 20 (Epigramm und Pantomimus).

<sup>58</sup> Webb (2008) 50.

<sup>59</sup> Seneca the Elder, *Controv.* 3 *praef.* 10: *Nomio, cum velocitas pedum non concedatur tantum, sed obiciatur, lentiores manus sunt.*

<sup>60</sup> Augustine, *Sermones*, 311, VII, 7.

from Chaos to contemporary history implies that the dancer “must know all the *schemes* from Chaos to knowledge”.<sup>61</sup> That such routines were somehow fixed and established in relation to the story told and that a “very significant amount of stylization in the bodily enactment of particular motifs or types or stories” featured in pantomime can be inferred from a passage in Lucian (80), in which he says that a dancer depicting the tecnophagy of Cronus turned it into that of Thyestes;<sup>62</sup> the mistake made by the dancer was probably due to the fact that “tecnophagy was conveyed by a set choreographic pattern, making it quite easy for a pantomime to confuse the stories of Cronus and Thyestes”.<sup>63</sup> As Beacham has suggested, the most prominent roles enacted in pantomimic performances had a conventional nature.<sup>64</sup>

### **1.1.9 The pantomimic thematic repertoire**

The main source for our knowledge of the thematic repertoire of pantomime is Lucian, who provides a long catalogue of themes arranged along geographical lines in his treatise (37-61).<sup>65</sup> He prefaces his list with the general statement that the dancer needs to have knowledge of everything that happened from the creation of the world to the times of Cleopatra (36). He then rounds off the section by stating that the pantomimic reservoir adapts the stories told by the best epic writers, dramatists, and poets of the past at large (61). Libanius also provides information about pantomimic themes and some others are recorded by Greek and Latin writers.

Generally speaking, pantomime tended to prefer emotionally charged themes.

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<sup>61</sup> Habinek (2002) 52-53 and (2005) 176.

<sup>62</sup> Lada-Richards (2004) 31 and n. 59 p. 44.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>64</sup> Beacham (1999) 144.

<sup>65</sup> For a list of pantomimic themes see Wüst (1949) complemented by Kokolakis (1959).

Lucian for instance states (67) that pantomimic performances dealt primarily with the portrayal of characters undergoing emotional strain, being in love, being mad, or being consumed with grief.<sup>66</sup>

Such emphasis on emotionality was directly linked with a preference for stories dealing with intense and extreme situations producing excessive passions. The *furor* of love in all its different aspects actually constituted the bread and butter of pantomimic performances; Lucian (9) states that a natural interconnectedness exists between dance and love since dance came into being and made its first appearance together with the cosmogonic Love (Eros) and Ovid compares the enervating effects produced by pantomimic performances portraying lovers (*ficti amantes*) to those caused by love poetry (*Remedia*, 751-58):<sup>67</sup>

At tanti tibi sit non indulgere theatris,  
Dum bene de vacuo pectore cedat amor.  
Enervant animos citharae lotosque lyraeque  
Et vox et numeris bracchia mota suis.  
Illic adsidue ficti saltantur amantes:                   755  
Quod caveas actor, quam iuuet, arte docet.  
Eloquar invitus: teneros ne tange poetas!  
Summoveo dotes impius ipse meas.

The prominent erotic component of pantomimic performances also underwrites a passage in the *Amores* (2, 4, 29-32), where Ovid humorously claims that the sensuality of a dancing girl would be able even to bend the misogynist Hippolytus and transform him into a Priapus:

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<sup>66</sup> See this chapter p. 11.

<sup>67</sup> See also Lucian (11) and (38) where he explicitly affirms that the power of the two Loves is a very suitable theme for pantomimic performances. See Brunelle (2000) 123-40 for a discussion of the Ovidian passage.

illa placet gestu numerosaque brachia ducit  
et tenerum molli torquet ab arte latus  
ut taceam de me, qui causa tangor ab omni,  
illic Hippolytum pone, Priapus erit!<sup>68</sup>

The *furor* of love was possibly the passion which, with its intoxicating effects, featured most prominently as the focus of pantomime; together with this, the *furor* produced by grief, divine inspiration, madness, thirst of revenge and the like were favoured subjects in this type of performance.

Indeed, the ancient writers attest that violence and death were a central focus of pantomimic performances, listing violent actions such as dismemberment, tecnophagy, killings, and both self-mutilation and mutilation of others as recurring topics of pantomimic performances. For instance, Lucian attests the wide popularity of the theme of dismemberment listing that of Iacchus (39), Orpheus (51), Apsyrtus (53); Pentheus and Actaeon (41);<sup>69</sup> and the fate of Hippolytus (40). Closely related to dismemberment, the theme of tecnophagy such as that of Cronus, Procne, and especially Thyestes, is frequently mentioned by ancient writers as preferred subjects of pantomimic performances (Lucian 80; Sidonius Apollinaris, *Carmina* 23, 277-99). Similar to dismemberment and tecnophagy, self-mutilation was also a major attraction; for instance Attis' self-castration perpetrated in an attack of divine madness and Oedipus' self blinding in retribution of his incestuous guilt fulfilled the pantomimic need for spectacular

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<sup>68</sup> Ovid's poem is echoed in one of the *Carmina Priapea*, 19: *Hic quando Telethusa circulatrix, quae clunem tunica tegente nulla/exstans altius altiusque movit, / crisabit tibi fluctuante lumbo: / haec sic non modo te, Priape, possit, / privignum quoque sed movere Phaedrae;* and in Martial, 14, 203: *(puella Gaditana) tam tremulum crisat, tam blandum prurit, ut ipsum masturbatorem fecerit Hippolytum.* See Fear (1991) 75-9 about the fame of Gaditane dancing girls.

<sup>69</sup> See also Varro fr. 513 from the *Synephebus*: *crede mihi, plures dominos servi comederunt quam canes. quod si Actaeon occupasset et ipse prius suos canes comedisset, non nugas saltatoribus in theatro fieret.*

and emotionally charged effects. Very popular were also those plots including attacks of madness leading to killings of kindred as in the case of Hercules' and Athamas' killings of their family (Lucian 41). Apuleius and Lucian attest to the popularity of plots dealing with angered women cruelly punishing their husbands such as Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon (Lucian 43), Medea's killing of her sons, and Deianira's murder of Hercules through the poisonous robe (Lucian 50). In general, the visual representation of death, violence, grief, and *furor* at large constituted the core of the pantomimic spectacle. Lada-Richards has remarked that the pantomimic trend towards violence brought to the front stage the violent and intense actions which in tragedy were usually relegated to off-stage scenes.<sup>70</sup> Such a tendency is attested, for instance, by Lucian's description of a pantomimic performance adapting the tragic plot of Ajax' madness (83-84); in Sophocles' *Ajax* the slaughter of the army's cattle takes place off-stage and is then reported through narration, in the case of the pantomimic enactment of the same story, Ajax's madness is the very action around which the performance revolves. A similar case is to be found in a passage from Macrobius' *Saturnalia* (2, 7, 16), in which the pantomimic performance described enacts the dramatisation of Hercules' madness and killing of his family.<sup>71</sup>

To sum up, the classical and timeless "*eros* and *thanatos*" motif well summarises the two most favoured themes of the pantomimic repertoire.

#### **1.1.10 the pantomimic libretto**

It is not easy to understand what a pantomimic libretto looked like since, as is

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<sup>70</sup> Lada-Richards (2007) 35.

<sup>71</sup> See this chapter n. 21 p. 6.

generally assumed, none has survived.<sup>72</sup> We know that these scripts usually had mythological themes and that they presented the most sensational moments of the given myth. The libretti could be both adapted from epic and tragic poets or could be original compositions. Ancient writers attest that pantomimic libretti were adapted from Virgil, and Ovid reports such appropriations for his own works (*Tristia* 2. 519-520 *et mea sunt populo saltata poemata saepe*).<sup>73</sup> In the case of original compositions, we know that authors such as Silo, Statius, and Lucan composed pantomimic libretti.<sup>74</sup> A passage in Juvenal, for example, attests that Statius composed a libretto entitled *Agave* for the famous dancer Paris.

To try to grasp what a libretto may have looked like, it is important to point out firstly that pantomime was a very “hybrid mode” of representation which made use of two strands of performance, that of the chorus/soloist singing the libretto and that of the dancer embodying the text.<sup>75</sup> In this framework, pantomime needed various modes of presentation, one more dramatic and another more narrative, since the dancer dramatically enacted the story which, in turn, was descriptively mirrored by the singing voice of the chorus or the soloist. We may describe pantomimic libretti as compositions in between epic and tragedy; that this was the case is possibly suggested by Lucian’s statement (61) that pantomimic libretti “were adapted from the best epic and tragic poets of the past”. (συνελόντι δὲ εἰπεῖν, οὐδὲν τῶν ὑπὸ τοῦ Ὀμήρου καὶ Ἡσιόδου καὶ τῶν ἀρίστων ποιητῶν καὶ μάλιστα τῆς τραγωδίας λεγομένων ἀγνοήσει).

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<sup>72</sup> Hall (2008) 258-82 has recently proposed that the Barcelona *Alcestis* (a Latin hexameter poem perhaps composed in the fourth century AD) might be a pantomimic libretto. See Marcovich (1988) for an edition with commentary of the *Alcestis Barcinonensis*.

<sup>73</sup> Suetonius, *Nero*, 54, 1: *Sub exitu quidem vitae palam voverat, si sibi incolumis status permansisset, proditurum se partae victoriae ludis etiam hydraulam et choraulam et utricularium ac novissimo die histrionem saltaturumque Vergili Turnum*; Lucian 46 (the wandering of Aeneas and the love of Dido); Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 5, 17, 5: *quod ita elegantius auctore digessit, ut fabula lascivientis Didonis, quam falsam novit universitas, per tot tamen saecula speciem veritatis obtineat et ita pro vero per ora omnium volitet, ut pictores fictoresque et qui figmentis liciorum contextas imitantur effigies, hac materia vel maxime in effigiandis simulacris tamquam unico argumento decoris utantur, nec minus histrionum perpetuis et gestibus et cantibus celebretur*; Augustine, *Sermones* 241.5 =PL 38, 1135-6;

<sup>74</sup> Seneca the Elder, *Suasoriae* 2, 19 about Silo: *qui pantomimis fabulas scripsit*; Juvenal, *Satire* 7, 86-87 about Statius: *sed cum fregit subsellia versu/esurit, intactam Paridi nisi vendit Agaven*; about Lucan, see *Vita Lucani de commentario Vacca sublata*: “extant eius salticae fabulae XIV”.

<sup>75</sup> Lada-Richards (2007) 13 claims that pantomime was a “hybrid mode of performance, ... a spectacle of excess, a lavish multi-media extravaganza”.

Lucian links pantomime directly to tragedy, which, as a performative genre, provided pantomime not only with themes and situations but also a *corpus* of dramatic conventions amenable to be adapted, modified and bent according to the specific structural and stylistic necessities of the pantomimic genre. In addition to tragedy, epic is the other genre which Lucian explicitly mentions in connection with the thematic reservoir of pantomime. I would suggest that epic must have provided, in addition to themes, a descriptive mode of narration.

Thus, it is likely that pantomimic libretti featured a hybrid mixture of narrative and dramatic technique of presentation. The singing voice in charge of delivering the narrative possibly performed the function of a sort of external narrator rather than a character involved in the action, with the advantage of avoiding the difficulty of portraying complicated interaction between several characters and the consequent need for the story to be told in the first person. Moreover, the vehicle of narration was better suited to interpret more articulately and explicitly the motifs or actions of a character than a strictly dramatic narration in which the same elements were meant to emerge somehow implicitly from the words of the characters themselves as in tragedy or comedy. The very displacement of the verbal action from the wordless actor/dancer to the singer indeed allowed the possibility for the story to be told explicitly.

Furthermore, it is likely that pantomimic libretti contained descriptive sections devoted to set and evoke the scenario and atmosphere in which the movements of the dancer took place or act as a commentary to his gestures.<sup>76</sup> This interpretation is corroborated by a passage in Libanius (64, 116) in which he praises the art of the dancer who, by means of his gestures, can even portray a landscape:

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<sup>76</sup> The *ecphrasis topou* which opens the description of the pantomimic performance of the Judgment of Paris in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* (10, 30-34) seems to have the function of setting the scene in which the action takes place.

ποία γὰρ γραφή, τίς λειμῶν ἥδιον ὀρχήσεως καὶ ὀρχηστοῦ θέαμα περιάγοντος εἰς ἄλση τὸν θεατὴν καὶ κατακοιμίζοντος ὑπὸ τοῖς δένδρεσιν ἀγέλας βοῶν, αἰπόλια, ποιμνία καὶ τοὺς νομέας ἰστῶντος ἐπὶ φρουρᾷ τῶν θερμμάτων τοὺς μὲν σύριγγι χρωμένους, τοὺς δὲ ἀυλοῦντας ἄλλον ἐν ἄλλοις ἔργοις.

Now, we can infer that the text accompanying such a performance must have contained a descriptive presentation of the landscape of herds and trees, actually an *ecphrasis topou* mirroring the mute gestures of the dancer.

That the libretto entailed a “pictorial dramaturgy” seems confirmed by several comparisons made between the figurative arts at large and pantomime (Lucian 35 and Libanius 64, 116);<sup>77</sup> for instance, in the epitaph to the dancer Panarete, Aristaenetus compares the dancing girl to a painter (Aristaenetus 26, 9). More generally, in a passage from Nonnus the language of the figurative arts is metaphorically employed to describe the art of the dancer (*Dionysiaca* 5, 107):

καὶ παλάμας ἐλέλιξε Πολύμνια, μαῖα χορείης,  
μιμηλὴν δ' ἐχάραξεν ἀναυδέος εἰκόνα φωνῆς,  
φθεγγομένη παλάμησι σοφὸν τύπον ἔμφρονι σιγῇ,  
ὄμματα διενέουσα.

Now, if the dancer’s movements in the space of the stage (*schemata*) were comparable to the drawings of the painter in that of a canvas, then the words of the libretto must have provided the impressionistic colors and the more minute details of the picture as a whole.

In contrast to painting and sculpture, pantomime had a dynamic dimension. The figures, which in painting and sculpture were presented as frozen in a fixed

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<sup>77</sup> The term “pictorial dramaturgy” is Lada-Richards’ (2004) 18 and (2007) 47-48 and 55.

position, appeared in movement in pantomime.<sup>78</sup> Thus, pantomime dancing could be defined as a transient pictorial dramaturgy.

Lucian (63-64) hints at an additional feature of the libretto, namely that pantomime relied on a codified repertoire of “bodily attitudes and configurations”, which constituted a sort of “formulaic dance vocabulary”;<sup>79</sup> possibly such stylization was matched in the libretto through the adoption of a mirroring “formulaic” vocabulary. This feature of the libretti may have been one of the reasons why they have not come down to us; at least in most of the cases, they were probably not works of high literary value since they were conceived in order to perform a technical function. In any case the role of the libretti was secondary to the skillful danced enactment of a preferably well known and famous story which constituted the real attraction of the genre.

As to the structure of the tragic libretto, Lucian’s (67) and Libanius’ accounts (67) suggest that it did not present the whole development of the myth but only its most emotionally climactic and spectacular moments. That the solo dancer could change up to five masks within a performance seems to indicate that with the changing of the mask a change of character or scene took place as well with each scene being dramaturgically only loosely connected to the others. Each scene was a sort of single tableau representing a relevant part of the mythological whole. Lucian (67), for example, describes a pantomimic performance as follows:

τὸ γοῦν παραδοξότατον, τῆς αὐτῆς ἡμέρας ἄρτι μὲν Ἀθάμας  
μεμηνῶς, ἄρτι δὲ Ἴνῶ φοβουμένη δείκνυται, καὶ ἄλλοτε Ἀτρεὺς  
ὁ αὐτός, καὶ μετὰ μικρὸν Θυέστης, εἶτα Αἴγισθος ἢ Ἀερόπη·

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<sup>78</sup> Pantomime as well employed such frozen and statuesque-like positions; see Lada-Richards (2004) and (2007).

<sup>79</sup> See Beacham (1999) 143-44 and Lada-Richards (2004) 31.

There is a similar description in Libanius (67): εἶδε Δηϊάνειραν τὸ θέατρον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν Οἰνέα καὶ τὸν Ἀχελῶν καὶ τὸν Ἡρακλέα καὶ Νέσσον.

Libanius' account is particularly interesting; the pantomimic performance he describes is concerned with the final segment of the saga of Heracles and its thematic unity resides in the fact that all the characters have a strict relation with the hero; but, since the episodes related to each character did neither happen at the same time nor in the same place, we have to infer that the transitions between single episodes of the myth were not subjected to a logical development. Rather, each episode was somehow performed in a pictorial- tableau and not in a proper dramatic sequence so that the show consisted of a sequence of juxtaposed danced monologues. Such quality seems to be mirrored in the titles chosen for pantomimic performances such as "Niobe turned to stone" (*rigidam Nioben*) or "the Trojan woman in tears" (*flentem Troada*).<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Claudian, *In Eutropium*, 2, 402-5: *fit plausus et ingens/concillii clamor, qualis resonantibus olim/exoritur caveis, quotiens crinitus ephebus/ aut rigidam Nioben aut flentem Troada fingit.*

## 1.2 Pantomime in Latin culture

### 1.2.1 Affiliations between rhetoric and pantomime

Omnis enim motus animi suum quemdam a natura habet vultum et sonum et gestum; totumque corpus hominis et eius omnis vultus omnesque voces, ut nervi in fidibus, ita sonant ut a motu animi quoque sunt pulsae.

(Cicero, *De oratore* 3, 216)

Quippe non manus solum sed nutus etiam declarant nostram voluntatem, et in mutis pro sermone sunt, et saltatio frequenter sine voce intellegitur atque adficit, et ex vultu ingressuque perspicitur habitus animorum...

(Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 11, 3, 66).<sup>81</sup>

The above quotations from Cicero and Quintilian attest to the intimate connection perceived in Roman culture between emotions and the way such emotions found their physical expression in gestures, movements, tone of voice, and bodily attitudes at large.<sup>82</sup> The oratorical *actio*, which Cicero defines as *quasi sermo corporis* (*De oratore* 3, 222) and *quasi corporis quaedam eloquentia* (*Orator* 55), constituted one of the five parts of rhetoric and concerned the delivery of a

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<sup>81</sup> For the topic see: Fantham (1982b) and (2002); Graf (1992); Aldrete (1999); Hall (2004).

<sup>82</sup> See also Cicero, *Brutus*, 278: *Ubi dolor? ubi ardor animi, qui etiam ex infantium ingeniis elicere voces et querelas solet? Nulla perturbatio animi nulla corporis, frons non percussa non femur, pedis, quod minimum est, nulla suppositio.*

speech; the verbal delivery had to be accompanied by gestures which had the function of conveying and thus arousing emotions in the audience. Because of this, the systematic study of bodily movement had a central position in rhetorical training. In this respect, the bodily language of the oratorical *actio* had obviously many affinities with that employed by actors on the stage. It is well known that Cicero observed with interest the performances of the comic actor Roscius and the tragic actor Aesopus, in order to take inspiration from them for the delivery of his own speeches.<sup>83</sup> Macrobius also reports that Roscius wrote a book in which he compared the art of the public speaker and that of the actor.<sup>84</sup>

Despite the intrinsic affinity of the oratorical and theatrical *actio*, the gesturing of a good orator had to avoid an overtly theatrical mimicry; in fact, elite Romans anxiously policed the divide between the two social categories of orators and actors. In several passages of the *De Oratore*, Cicero cautions against excessive mimicry and especially in indulging in the acting style of mimes; in dealing with the topic of how to use humour in oratorical speeches, Cicero again prescribes moderation in order for the orator not to resemble the vulgar grimacing mime:

2, 239:

Est etiam deformitatis et corporis vitiorum satis bella materies ad iocandum; sed quaerimus idem, quod in ceteris rebus maxime quaerendum est, quatenus. In quo non modo illud praecipitur, ne quid insulse, sed etiam, si quid perridicule possis, vitandum est oratori utrumque, ne aut scurrilis iocus sit aut mimicus.

2, 251:

Atque hoc etiam animadvertendum est, non esse omnia ridicula faceta. Quid enim potest esse tam ridiculum, quam sannio est? Sed ore, vultu, imitandis moribus, voce, denique corpore ridetur ipso. Salsum hunc

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<sup>83</sup> Plutarch, *Cicero* 5; Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, 3, 14.

<sup>84</sup> Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, 3, 14, 12: *quae res ad hanc artis suae fiduciam Roscium abstraxit ut librum conscriberet quo eloquentiam cum histrionia compararet.*

possum dicere, atque ita, non ut eiusmodi oratorem esse velim, sed ut mimum.<sup>85</sup>

That such a restrained appropriation of theatrical rhetoric which Cicero warmly and repeatedly recommends ran counter to a tendency towards exaggeration in his days is attested by a further passage in the *De oratore* (3, 214), where Cicero complains that *histriones* have taken the place of the old and good orators:

*Haec ideo dico pluribus, quod genus hoc totum oratores, qui sunt veritatis ipsius actores, reliquerunt, imitatores autem veritatis, histriones, occupaverunt.*

Even the much praised orator Hortensius was censured for excessive mimicry, which resembled too closely that of an actor. Once he was even mockingly nicknamed as “Dionysia”, a famous dancing-girl (*saltatricula*) of the period.<sup>86</sup> Similarly, the languishing and effeminate gestures of the orator Sextus Titius resulted in a dance which came into vogue after him, being named the Titius.<sup>87</sup>

A century later, Quintilian echoes Cicero’s precepts. In fact, Quintilian also admits that the aspiring orator should master the art of the comic actor, as far as he needs to be educated in the ways of dramatic delivery (1, 11, 1 *Dandum aliquid comoedo quoque, dum eatenus qua pronuntiandi scientiam futurus orator desiderat*).<sup>88</sup> Quintilian then sets up the restrictions with which histrionic gestures and movements ought to be appropriated: the orator needs to employ gestures and

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<sup>85</sup> The passages are echoed in Quintilian (*Inst. orat.* 6, 3, 29): *Oratori minime convenit distortus vultus gestusque, quae in mimis rideri solent.*

<sup>86</sup> Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, 1, 5, 2: *Ad eundem modum Q. Hortensius omnibus ferme oratoribus aetatis suae, nisi M. Tullio, clarior, quod multa munditia et circumspicte compositeque indutus et amictus esset manusque eius inter agendum forent argutae admodum et gestuosae, maledictis compellationibusque probris iactatus est multaque in eum, quasi in histrionem, in ipsis causis atque iudiciis dicta sunt. Sed cum L. Torquatus, subagresti homo ingenio et infestivo, gravius acerbisque apud consilium iudicum, cum de causa Sullae quaereretur, non iam histrionem eum esse diceret, sed gesticulariam Dionysiamque eum notissimae saltatriculae nomine appellaret, tum voce molli atque demissa Hortensius “Dionysia”, inquit, “Dionysia malo equidem esse quam quod tu, Torquate, ἄμουνσος, ἀναφρόδιτος, ἀπροσδιόνυσος”.*

<sup>87</sup> Cicero, *Brutus*, 225: *Quos Sex. Titius consecutus, homo loquax sane et satis acutus, sed tam solutus et mollis in gestu ut saltatio quaedam nasceretur cui saltationi Titius nomen esset.*

<sup>88</sup> See also Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 1, 11, 12.

movements with moderation and he needs to avoid overtly theatrical facial expressions, gesticulation, and moving around.<sup>89</sup> Like Cicero, Quintilian complains about contemporary orators whose increasing appropriation of theatrical style has corrupted oratory. It is possible that the similarities between actors and orators may have become more pronounced over time.<sup>90</sup>

Quintilian himself proclaimed that the style of delivery practised in his time was more animated than that of earlier generations.<sup>91</sup> Quintilian's concern that oratory and acting were becoming too similar may thus reflect a genuine trend toward theatricality on the part of the orators.<sup>92</sup>

It may have been partly the practice of set exercises (*declamationes*), *suasoriae* and *controversiae*, (the former on deliberative topics, the latter on law-court themes), which the young students of rhetoric had to practice in order to achieve proficiency in the art of oratory, that dangerously reduced the distinction between the orators and the theatrical performer since, as Pratt has remarked, such exercises had a marked dramatic nature, in a sense, they were "embryonic drama".<sup>93</sup> *Suasoriae* and *controversiae* alike involved the exercise of impersonating and the art of depicting characters (*ethologia* or *characterismon*). In the case of the *suasoriae*, the student had to impersonate the role of a mythological or historical character confronted with a dramatic choice; in the case of *controversiae*, the student had to play the role of the appellant, legal defendant or opponent in a given trial.

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<sup>89</sup> Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 1, 11, 3: *Ne gestus quidem omnis ac motus a comoedis petendus est. Quamquam enim utrumque eorum ad quendam modum praestare debet orator, plurimum tamen aberit a scaenico, nec vultu nec manu, nec excursionibus nimius.*

<sup>90</sup> See Beacham (1991) 126 for the process of cross-fertilization between oratory and theatrical rhetoric.

<sup>91</sup> Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 11, 3, 184: *Sed iam recepta est actio paulo agitatior et exigitur et quibusdam partibus convenit, ita tamen temperanda ne, dum actoris captamus elegantiam, perdamus viri boni et gravis auctoritatem.*

<sup>92</sup> See Aldrete (1999) 67-73.

<sup>93</sup> Pratt (1983) 145.

In relation to this, Lucian's statement (35, 65) that rhetoric and pantomime share a common ground since both deal with impersonation and the display of *êthos* and *pathos* is worthy to be considered closer:

Lucian (35):

οὐ μὴν οὐδὲ ῥητορικῆς ἀφέστηκεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ταύτης μετέχει, καθ' ὅσον ἤθους τε καὶ πάθους ἐπιδεικτικὴ ἐστίν, ὧν καὶ οἱ ῥήτορες γλίσχονται.

Lucian (65):

Ἡ δὲ πλείστη διατριβὴ καὶ ὁ σκοπὸς τῆς ὀρχηστικῆς ἢ ὑπόκρισις ἐστίν, ὡς ἔφην, κατὰ τὰ αὐτὰ καὶ τοῖς ῥήτορσιν ἐπιτηδευομένη, καὶ μάλιστα τοῖς τὰς καλουμένας ταύτας μελέτας διεξιούσιν· οὐδὲν γοῦν καὶ ἐν ἐκείνοις μᾶλλον ἐπαινοῦμεν ἢ τὸ εἰκέναι τοῖς ὑποκειμένοις προσώποις καὶ μὴ ἀπωδὰ εἶναι τὰ λεγόμενα τῶν εἰσαγομένων ἀριστέων ἢ τυραννοκτόνων ἢ πενήτων ἢ γεωργῶν, ἀλλ' ἐν ἐκάστῳ τούτων τὸ ἴδιον καὶ τὸ ἐξάριετον δείκνυσθαι.

It is worth reading the Lucianic passage against the one in which Quintilian (11, 1, 55) warns against the danger hidden in the practice of fictional and emotionally charged declamations:

Quod praecipue declamantibus ...custodiendum est, quo plures in schola finguntur adfectus, quos non ut advocati sed ut passi subimus: cum etiam hoc genus simulari litium soleat, cum ius mortis a senatu quidam vel ob aliquam magnam infelicitatem vel etiam paenitentiam petunt: in quibus non solum cantare, quod vitium pervasit, aut lascivire, sed ne argumentari quidem nisi mixtis, et quidem ita ut ipsa probatione magis emineant, adfectibus decet. Nam qui intermittere in

agendo dolorem potest, videtur posse etiam deponere.

The danger, as Quintilian puts it, is passivity to the emotions. In a sense, the decline of rhetoric and the rise of pantomime seem to have coincided in this very trend towards an emasculated emotionality. It is no coincidence that declamations and pantomimic performances amply favored themes which were naturally charged with an emotional excitement of their own, such as the supernatural, the miraculous, the horrifying, the violent and the like which attests that both arts were not so much interested in the ideas or situations in themselves but in their potential to generate emotions.

In the part of the *Institutio Oratoria* concerning the delivery of speeches in general, and the *actio* more precisely, Quintilian states that the orator should be as different from a pantomime dancer as possible, an anxiety that hints at the practise of appropriating the gestural language of the stage.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, he considers overtly theatrical and thus inappropriate for the orators the habit of mirroring the words with gestures, which is indeed what the practise of the dancer was; the orator's motion should, instead, reflect the thoughts expressed (11, 3, 88):

Et hi quidem de quibus sum locutus, cum ipsis vocibus naturaliter exeunt gestus: alii sunt qui res imitatione significant, ut si aegrum temptantis venas medici similitudine aut citharoedum formati ad modum percutientis nervos manibus ostendas, quod est genus quam longissime in actione fugiendum.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 11, 3, 89: *Abesse enim plurimum a saltatore debet orator, ut sit gestus ad sensus magis quam ad verba accommodatus*. The prescription was already stated at 1, 11, 19: *Neque enim gestum oratoris componi ad similitudinem saltationis volo, sed subesse aliquid ex hac exercitatione puerili*; similarly at 11, 3, 181: in closing the section devoted to *actio*, Quintilian states again the principle of moderation which needs to be applied to gesturing in order for the apprentice orator not to be confused with the comic actor (*non enim comoedum esse, sed oratorem volo*).

<sup>95</sup> Similar precepts appear in Cicero's *De orat.* 3, 220: *Omnes autem hos motus subsequi debet*

Quintilian's concern is echoed by Tacitus who reports a proverb in circulation in his days according to which orators speak softly while dancers dance eloquently.<sup>96</sup> The trend towards emotionality did not only affect the rhetorical *actio*, but also the oratorical style itself. The frequent injunctions already hinted at by Cicero against the habit of composing excessively rhythmic orations (*De orat.* 1, 151; 3, 188; *Orat.* 57, 175, 229) are more forcefully reiterated by Quintilian (11, 3, 57-60) because of their overtly histrionic character.<sup>97</sup> Quintilian (9, 4, 142) again blames the fact that the word-arrangement (*compositio*) of contemporary orations actually dances:

In universum autem, si sit necesse, duram potius atque asperam compositionem malim esse quam effeminatam et enervem, qualis apud multos, et cotidie magis, lascivissimis syntonorum modis saltat.

If injunctions point to widespread preferences, Cicero's and Quintilian's

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*gestus, non hic verba exprimens scenicus, sed universam rem et sententiam non demonstratione, sed significatione declarans, laterum inflexione hac forti ac virili, non ab scena et histrionibus, sed ab armis aut etiam a palaestra; manus autem minus arguta, digitis subsequens verba non exprimens, brachium procerius proiectum...supplisio pedis in contentionibus aut incipiendis aut finiendis; Orator 59: idemque motu sic utetur, nihil ut supersit: in gestu status erectus et celsus; rarus incessus nec ita longus; excursio moderata eaque rara; nulla mollitia cervicum, nullae argutiae digitorum, non ad numerum articulus cadens.*

<sup>96</sup> Tacitus, *Dial.* 26, 2-3: *Neque enim oratorius iste, immo hercle ne virilis quidem cultus est, quo plerique temporum nostrorum actores ita utuntur ut lascivia verborum et levitate sententiarum et licentia compositionis histrionales modos expriment. Quodque vix auditu fas esse debeat, laudis et gloriae et ingenii loco plerique iactant cantari saltarique commentarios suos; unde oritur illa foeda et praepostera, sed tamen frequens exclamatio, ut oratores nostri tenere dicere, histriones diserte saltare dicantur.* A passage in Pliny (*Epistulae*, IX, 34) indicates the extent to which the figure of orators and actors progressively tended to merge; Pliny is here concerned whether he should have one of his freedmen read the speech for him, since he considers himself a bad reader. He also ponders whether he should accompany the reading with gestures, as some orators do. At the end, he resolves to read himself, since he thinks that his gesticulation is not better than his reading: *Ipse nescio, quid illo legente interim faciam, sedeam defixus et mutus et similis otioso an, ut quidam, quae pronuntiabit, murmure oculis manu prosequar. Sed puto me non minus male saltare quam legere.* The passage is possibly ironic, but it attests that such practice existed.

<sup>97</sup> See Lucian, *Rhetorum praeceptor*, 15: ἀλλὰ καὶ βοήν ὅτι μεγίστην καὶ μέλος ἀναίσχυντον καὶ βᾶδισμα οἷον τὸ ἐμόν. Lucian advises the novice orator to employ the postures and the rhythmic cadences of a mime in order to achieve popularity; see also Tacitus, *Dial.* 26, 2.

considerable efforts to keep apart the art of the orator and that of the theatrical performer suggest that the interface between the two was rather slippery.<sup>98</sup>

### **1.2.2 The influence of sub-literary genres (mime and pantomime) on Latin writers**

As early as 1924, Kroll argued that Latin literature after the third century BC was characterized by a phenomenon he called “*Die Kreuzung der Gattungen*” (“The Crossing of Genres”), which consisted in the appropriation and consequent inclusion of technical and thematic features typical of one genre into another.<sup>99</sup> This “creative confrontation of different literary genres” may have developed as an attempt to overcome the problem of generic exhaustion and renewal of literary genres through the process of cross-fertilization and the resulting creation of new hybrids.<sup>100</sup> In his influential *Arte Allusiva* (1942), Giorgio Pasquali addressed the issue of the role of poetic allusion in Latin texts and interpreted it as a means strategically employed by authors to evoke a poetic memory; thus the poetic allusion had to resonate for the reader and prompt the interpretation of the “hidden” meaning that the allusion generated.<sup>101</sup> Taking inspiration from Pasquali’s interpretation of poetic allusion, and developing Kroll’s too mechanical notion of the crossing of genres, Gian Biagio Conte adapted the techniques of semiotics to the interpretation of the role of poetic allusion.<sup>102</sup> Very recently, Harrison has proposed a synthesis of Kroll’s and Conte’s positions and has coined the notion of “generic enrichment”, i.e. “the way in which generically identifiable texts gain literary depth and texture from detailed confrontation with, and

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<sup>98</sup> See Lada-Richards (2007) 116-20.

<sup>99</sup> Kroll (1924) 202-24.

<sup>100</sup> Harrison (2007) 1.

<sup>101</sup> Pasquali (1942) 275-282.

<sup>102</sup> See Conte (1986) and (1994) 120-23 for the discussion of the inadequacy of the Krollian notion of “*Kreuzung der Gattungen*” and Barchiesi (2001) 142-63.

consequent inclusion of elements from, texts which appear to belong to other literary genres.”<sup>103</sup>

Harrison’s formula of generic enrichment thus comprises both the expansion of the range of genres through cross-breeding and the process of poetic allusions as interpreted by Conte.

Still, the reciprocal appropriation of formal and thematic features between sub-literary and literary genres has not been fully investigated as part of the same process. This neglect is perhaps partly due to the difficulty posed by the scanty survival of mimic *canovacci* and pantomimic libretti. In addition to this, there is an ingrained tendency to believe that sub-literary genres are not likely to have provided thematic or stylistic material for higher literature caused by the prejudicial conviction that the hall-mark of such genres was vulgarity, baseness, and an overall lack of positive artistic value. Indeed, this opinion is not wholly accurate. Several ancient writers attest the erudition of many mimographers. Thus, Seneca praises the learned verses of the mimographer Publilius Syrus twice in his prose works (*Epistles* 8, 8; *De Tranquillitate animi* 11, 8);<sup>104</sup> Horace gives a complimentary judgment on Laberius’ mimes in his *Satires* (I, 10, 5-6). Similarly, Lucian (35; 36) claims that pantomime is an art which requires a great deal of erudition to be fulfilled in a proper way and that the dancer must be learned and endowed with excellent memory.

In fact, the divide or dialogue between “high” and “low” forms of literature was more dynamic than is generally assumed. As Fantham has remarked, mime is a

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<sup>103</sup> Harrison (2007) 1.

<sup>104</sup> Aulus Gellius calls the mimographer Cn. Matius *homo impense doctus* (*Noctes Atticae* 10, 24, 10) and *vir eruditus* (15, 25, 1). Seneca (apud Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 6, 10 =fr. 36 Haase) calls a chief mimic actor learned (*doctus archimimus, senex iam decrepitus, quotidie in Capitolio mimum agebat*).

“missing link in Roman literary history” and another one is pantomime.<sup>105</sup> More generally, there is much evidence for “osmosis and continuity” between the so called high and low genres, to borrow Andreassi’s definition.<sup>106</sup> An important element in the influential role played by the mimic and pantomimic languages resides in the fact that they constituted a commonly shared idiom in the ancient world, which can be traced in several ancient authors who adopted thematic or formal features peculiar to these genres.

For what concerns the complex system of interactions between literary and sub-literary genres, the process can be described as a two directional flow: the sub-literary genres drew motifs well established in the literary tradition and literary genres adopted thematic and stylistic features which belonged to the realm of sub-literary genres. For example, the *Charition-mime*, dated to the first or second century AD, takes its name from the protagonist of the skit, a young Greek woman, who is to be sacrificed by the king of the barbarian country whose power she is in;<sup>107</sup> her brother arrives just in time to rescue her from the hands of the king by making him and his fellows drunk. The mime is clearly a parody of the Euripidean *Iphigenia in Tauris*, where Charition is Iphigenia, the brother Orestes, the fool Pylades, the king Thoas. As in the *Iphigenia in Tauris*, we find the theme of the theft of the goddess’ image (which is in the mime substituted by the goddess’ property). The detail of the means of escape is, instead, reminiscent of the Euripidean *Cyclops*. The prominence of farcical and vulgar elements renders it rather removed in tone from its tragic model. Nonetheless, it is evident that the composer of the *Charition-mime* relied on the audience’s knowledge of the tragic models, otherwise the parodic twist given to them, which constitutes the very

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<sup>105</sup> Fantham (1988-89) 153-163.

<sup>106</sup> Andreassi (1997) 17-20.

<sup>107</sup> See Santelia (1991) for a full discussion of the *Charition-mime*.

source of the fun of the skit, would have been lost.

As I discussed above, also high literature adopts themes and features drawn from the sub-literary tradition. A good example of this is to be found in one episode narrated in Book ten of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* (X, 2-12). The episode deals with the story of a stepmother's love for his stepson who rejects her. Having been dismissed, the cruel step-mother makes an attempt at poisoning him with the help of her compliant slave, but, by mistake, she poisons her own son. She charges his stepson with the murder; he is eventually saved by a physician serving as judge in the trial, while the stepmother is sent into exile and her accomplice slave is crucified.

As to the literary sources of the Apuleian story, the episode is inspired by a tragic model reminiscent as it is of the story of Hippolytus and Phaedra; Apuleius himself acknowledges, though deceptively, that the story he is about to narrate comes from tragedy (*iam ergo, lector optime, scito te tragoediam, non fabulam, legere et a socco ad cothurnum ascendere*).

Nonetheless, the major model of inspiration is that type of adultery mime which involved a sexual attempt of a mistress on her slave who does not reciprocate. Apuleius' indebtedness to a mimic plot has been claimed by Wiemken and more recently by Steinmetz, who believe that Apuleius' story of the incestuous step-mother is indeed the equivalent, in narrative form, of one of the types of the adultery-mime, whose plot is best represented to us by the Adulteress-mime.<sup>108</sup> It seems then that Apuleius crossed the Phaedra tragic plot with the Adulteress-mime plot and created a hybrid overtly reminiscent of its two models. It is difficult to establish whether Apuleius' generic fusion can be accounted as

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<sup>108</sup> Wiemken (1972) 139; Steinmetz (1982) 367; the Adulteress-mime has its model in the Fifth mime of Herodas.

original on Apuleius' part, since a fragment by Laberius seems to have involved the love of a stepmother for her stepson (*Belonistria: domina nostra privignum suum/amat efflictim*); unfortunately, it is not possible to reconstruct the plot of Laberius' *Belonistria* because only few fragments survive. The Apuleian description of the disruptive effects of the stepmother's love for her stepson (*Met.* X, 2) is particularly interesting in relation to the two-directional process existing between literary and sub-literary genres:

At ubi, completis igne vesano totis praecordiis, immodice bacchatus  
Amor exaestuabat, saevienti deo iam succubuit, et languore simulato  
vulnus animi mentitur in corporis valetudine. Iam cetera salutis  
vultusque detrimenta et aegris et amantibus examussim convenire  
nemo qui nesciat: pallor deformis, marcentes oculi, lassa genua, quies  
turbida, et suspiritus cruciatus tarditate vehementior. Crederes et illam  
fluctuare tantum vaporibus februm, nisi quod et flebat. Heu  
medicorum ignarae mentes, quid venae pulsus, quid coloris  
intemperantia, quid fatigatus anhelitus et utrimquesecus iactatae  
crebriter laterum mutuae vicissitudines!

The Apuleian description shows an intricate fabric of allusions to several sources; however, it seems that the major source of Apuleius here is the Senecan portrayal of tragic heroines taken in the grip of passion at large, and, more specifically that of Phaedra (362-83).<sup>109</sup>

It is true that such catalogues of love symptoms became formulaic from Hellenistic love poetry onwards, but the extended length as well as the sort of "clinical" character of Apuleius' description differentiates it from its antecedents, although the allusions to the literary predecessors are often overt.

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<sup>109</sup> Finkler|pearl (1998) 149-183; the Euripidean, Virgilian, and Ovidian echoes are already present in Seneca's description.

Moreover, since the situation portrayed by Apuleius has its model in mime, it is possible that the description of the love-sick *noverca* is modelled on the way the role was actually performed on stage; the description would thus translate into narrative form the gestures and attitudes typical of the character.

There is one formulation in particular that strongly suggests that the Apuleian description, although employing the literary *topoi* of the symptoms of love, is mimic in essence; that is the reference to the physician who is unable to recognize the symptoms of love (*Heu medicorum ignarae mentes*); Apuleius' blame of the doctor patently echoes the Virgilian *heu vatum ignarae mentes* with which the famous description of love-sick Dido begins (4, 65).

The farcical twist given by Apuleius to the Virgilian allusion works via the substitution of the seers (*vatum*) with doctors (*medicorum*). In relation to this, in a passage of the *Institutio Oratoria*, in which Quintilian warns the orator against too descriptive a use of mimicry which he sees as the hallmark of mimic and pantomimic actors, he gives as an example of imitation to avoid the way of suggesting the illness of someone by mimicking a doctor feeling the pulse;<sup>110</sup> since Quintilian's warning explicitly links such an imitation to the repertoire of the mimic and pantomimic actors, it is possible to infer that in their performances such a device was employed. Going back to the Apuleian passage, it seems that the substitution of the Virgilian seers with the doctors would acquire an even more farcical tone in case the doctors hinted at by Apuleius are typical figures of mimic performances.<sup>111</sup> The grafting and transference of an allusion to the Virgilian epic onto a mimic situation would be fitting and in keeping with the

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<sup>110</sup> Quintilian, 11, 3, 88-89 : *alii sunt qui res imitatione significant, ut si aegrum temptantis venas medici similitudine aut citharoedum formatis ad modum percutientis nervos manibus ostendas, quod est genus quam longissime in actione fugiendum. Abesse enim plurimum a saltatore debet orator, ut sit gestus ad sensus magis quam ad verba accomodatus, quod etiam histrionibus paulo gravioribus facere moris fuit.*

<sup>111</sup> The title of an Atellan farce by Pomponius was the Doctor (*Medicus*).

overall mimic nature of the episode. However, the Apuleian episode, no matter whether an original Apuleian creation or not, attests to the on-going and two directional process of generic enrichment between literary and sub-literary genres. In the following sections, examples will be provided of the presence of elements belonging to sub-literary-genres in writers such as Catullus, Cicero, the elegists, Seneca, and Petronius.

### 1.2.2.1 Pantomime in Catullus' Attis (poem 63)

Poem 63 describes Attis' self-castration, his participation in the ritual procession of Cybele and, at the end, his contrition and regret for what he has done; the poem is in galliambics and it is structurally arranged as an alternation between narrative and direct speech.

Poem 63 stands out in Catullus' lyric *corpus* in several respects: genre, originality, and metre (galliambics). As to genre, scholars have long debated to which literary genre the poem is to be assigned; several have been proposed ranging from epyllion and hymn to tragedy and pantomime.<sup>112</sup> The major difficulty in assigning the poem to a specific genre, as Morisi has remarked, is due to its irreducibility to a codified set of literary norms and conventions.<sup>113</sup>

As to its originality, the debate has not been less tantalising. Generally speaking, several scholars have suggested that poem 63 was indebted to a popular Hellenistic genre (i.e. hymns in galliambics addressed to Cybele) and thus modelled on lost Hellenistic poems. This interpretation was based on the alleged

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<sup>112</sup> Epyllion: Quinn (1970) 283; Fedeli (1978) 157-69; Traina (1998) 191, 196; hymn commissioned to Catullus by an aedile for the Megalesia: Wiseman (1985) 205 ff.; combination of hymn and epyllion: Elder (1940) 34; tragedy: Guillemin (1949) 153 (in three acts); Thomson (1997) 374; pantomime: Newman (1990) 348. See also Fantuzzi and Hunter (2004) 477-85.

<sup>113</sup> Morisi (1999) 31: "la sua apparente irriducibilità sui molteplici piani dell'intreccio, dell'atmosfera, dell'intonazione, della lingua, del registro stilistico, del ritmo, ad una forma tipizzata e tributaria di una gamma coerente di norme e convenzioni, complicano terribilmente la possibilità di ascriverlo ad alcuno dei generi conosciuti".

evidence found in the Greek metrician Hephaestion who, in the section of his synopsis of metrical theory devoted to ionic metre, affirmed that the galliambic was the metrical pattern in which poems to the mother of the gods were composed.<sup>114</sup> A gloss on this passage provided the additional information that Callimachus also used this metre.<sup>115</sup>

Wilamowitz, relying on the evidence found in Hephaestion's passage and the *scholium*, identified Catullus' model in a lost poem by Callimachus, of which 63 was either a translation or a close imitation.<sup>116</sup> More recently, the generally accepted scholarly view has been that Hellenistic poems in galliambics existed and that Catullus may have drawn some elements from them, but the extent of such a debt is impossible to establish since the alleged models are now lost to us.<sup>117</sup> In addition to this, Catullus' originality in the composition of 63 seems to find support in the fact that the poem does not consistently belong to any known literary genre, but adopts features and stylistic qualities that can be ascribed to different ones.<sup>118</sup> In this respect, Morisi's claim that the poem cannot be with confidence ascribed to any given genre and that, as an overall characteristic, the arrangement of the poem is eminently dramatic in content and style with its tendency to translate actions and emotions into emphatic scenic gestures seems to

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<sup>114</sup> Hephaestion, *Enchiridion* (12, 3).

<sup>115</sup> The gloss is attributed to Georgius Choeroboscus (a sixth-century Byzantine scholar).

<sup>116</sup> Wilamowitz (1879) 194-201; (1924) 291-95. For a detailed counter-argumentation to Wilamowitz, see Mulroy (1976) 61-72 who has impugned the integrity of Hephaestion's text and consequently Wilamowitz's suggestion.

<sup>117</sup> Ross (1940) 33 strongly claimed that "Catullus' twist to the usual story is original". Courtney's proposal (1985) 88-91 has also had some credit among scholars; he suggested that Catullus 63 drew its models from the *Garland* of Meleager; he thus names as inspiring models the epigrams of Alcaeus of Messene (*AP* 6, 218), Simonides (*AP* 6, 217), Antipater of Sidon (*AP* 6, 219), and Dioscorides (*AP* 6, 220) which all narrate the story of the encounter of a Gallus with a lion which is frightened off by the sound of the tympanon; Shipton (1987) 444-49, although in agreement with Courtney's reconstruction, points out that only two of the four epigrams (those by Alcaeus and Dioscorides) can be said to come from the *Garland*.

<sup>118</sup> Thomson (1997) 374 has singled out the lack of "details of the cult, with allusions to the underlying myths" in Catullus 63 as an argument against the influence of Alexandrian poems on Cybele-worship on it.

be the best possible interpretation given the status of the evidence.<sup>119</sup>

In relation to the dramatic texture of 63, Guillemin's definition of the poem as conceived as a tragedy in three acts deserves a closer scrutiny.<sup>120</sup> She divides the poem as follows:

I act (1-38):

Arrival of Attis at Cybele's Phrygian homeland, self-castration, and frenzied ascent to Mount Ida followed by his companions, the *Gallae*.

II act (39-73): Awakening on the day after and Attis' regret at the self-mutilation; lament and melancholic remembrance of his past life in front of the sea.

III act (74-90): Cybele sends one of her lion to re-kindle his devotion.<sup>121</sup>

Several elements closely recall the tragic genre such as the choice to begin the poem *in medias res*, the dramatic use of speeches in place of narratives, the emphasis on Attis' inner turmoil as well as interest in portraying the psychological effects of a sweeping passion, and stylistic features of diction.<sup>122</sup>

Having said that, it must be remarked that the poem cannot be properly ascribed to the tragic genre, since it lacks the required length and development of the plot.

In light of this, Newman's proposal to ascribe poem 63 to a tragic pantomime seems very suggestive and fitting.<sup>123</sup>

Three elements can be used as corroborating evidence, namely the theme, stylistic

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<sup>119</sup> Morisi (1999) 32-33: "il soggetto, tuttavia, è eminentemente drammatico nella misura in cui gli eventi appaiono estratti dal decorso temporale intrinseco alla narrazione e attualizzati, vissuti come presenti dalla prospettiva individuale del protagonista, i cui atti e sentimenti tendono a tradursi in enfatici gesti di scena".

<sup>120</sup> Guillemin's interpretation has been followed by several scholars, for instance by Thomson (1997) 374 who claims that poem 63 "is clearly in essence a tragedy".

<sup>121</sup> Thomson (1997) 371-72 divides the poem as follows: Day one: outset of religious frenzy, resulting in enslavement to the goddess by self-mutilation; day two: remorse and desire to flee followed by re-enslavement.

<sup>122</sup> The poem alternates narratives (1-11; 27-49; 74-77; 84-90) and monologues (12-26; 50-73; 78-83); emotions: in the poem a great emphasis is given to *furor* which actually leads Attis' actions (compare here the parallel emphasis on emotions in Seneca's running commentaries); diction: use of repetitions, of the first person, of the interjection "ah" (especially attested in tragedy and comedy), and of the self-apostrophe "anime", which is widely employed by Seneca *tragicus*.

<sup>123</sup> Newman (1990) 343-66.

features, and the metre.

As to theme, that the story of Attis featured in pantomimic performances is attested by literary and archaeological evidence.<sup>124</sup> As to literary ones, it suffices to say that an epigram by Dioscorides (*AP* 11, 195), written as early as the middle of the third century BC, attests that a certain Aristagoras danced the role of a Gallus.<sup>125</sup> As to archaeological ones, the popularity of the subject in pantomime performances is attested by the many *oscilla* featuring a mask of Attis, although they belong to a later period.<sup>126</sup> In addition to this, the theme of Attis' frenzied act of self-castration is in itself eminently suitable for pantomime which favoured the representations of characters undergoing emotional strain.<sup>127</sup> Indeed, the poem is an exploration of the workings produced by a maddening passion.<sup>128</sup> Furthermore, the play with the feminine and the interchange of sexual roles is also a common feature in pantomime as can be inferred from the popularity of stories such as that of Hercules and Omphale or that of Achilles in Scyros.<sup>129</sup> As Lada-Richards has remarked, "the transcendence of gender boundaries" is one of the key elements of pantomimic performance and possibly the most dangerous one as perceived by ancient authors, since it "blurred all notions of sexual distinction".<sup>130</sup>

In relation to stylistic features, the preponderance of verbs of activity, the paratactic syntax (where past participles are preferred to subordinate clauses), the

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<sup>124</sup> See Lada-Richards (2007) 20.

<sup>125</sup> For a discussion of Dioscorides' epigram as evidence of the existence of a primeval form of the fully-fledged pantomime in the middle of the third century BC in Greece see this chapter p. 2. The *Galli* were the eunuch priests of Cybele. Tertullian (*Apol.* XV): *vidimus aliquando castratum Attin, illum deum ex Pessinunte*; Arnobius (*Adv. Nat.* VII, 33): *tranquillior, lenior Mater Magna efficitur, si Attidis conspexerit priscam refricari ab histrionibus fabulam?*

<sup>126</sup> See Wooton (1999) 314-55; *oscilla* are "small scale marble sculptures in relief".

<sup>127</sup> Madness was a popular theme in pantomime: see Lucian (41) madness of Hercules and Athamas; Lucian (46) Ajax.

<sup>128</sup> The word *furor* and its cognates are repeatedly employed: *furenti rabie* 4; *rabidus furor* 38; *rabies* 44; *furibunda* 31, 54; *rabie* 57; *furor* 78; *furoris* 79.

<sup>129</sup> *citata* 8; *tremebunda* 11; *Gallae* 12, 34; *notha mulier* 27; *furibunda, vaga* 31; *comitata* 32; *lassulae* 35; *excitam* 42; *ipsa* 45; *allocuta* 49; *furibunda* 54; *mulier* 63; *ministra, famula* 68; *maenas* 69; *teneramque* 88; *illa* 89; *famula* 90.

<sup>130</sup> Lada-Richards (2003) 24.

construction of the verse *κατὰ στίχον*, the absence of enjambment and of carry-over of a main clause into the following line (both these features occur only once: lines 51-52; lines 87-89), and the rhetorical devices employed (repetition, anaphora, *geminatio*, questions, self-address) underline the performative nature of the poem.<sup>131</sup>

The performative nature of the poem is also strengthened by the metrical pattern adopted: the galliambic verse. The galliambic verse was the metre used in the actual rites of the Galli in honour of the Great Mother and took its name from the self-castrating priests of the goddess Cybele whose ritual included processions with music and dance of orgiastic intonation in which a re-enacting of the salient moments of the myth itself took place.<sup>132</sup> This Ionic metre, which is characterised by a preponderance of short syllables over long ones producing a frenzied rhythm, perfectly matches the excited and ecstatic movements characteristic of the dance of the Galli.<sup>133</sup> Kirby has remarked that “in view of the ritual origin of the meter...Catullus’ choice of the galliambic was with a clear view toward its performance” and further that “the poem’s success depends on its actualization in some kind of performance...since the poem needs to be read aloud in order to achieve its poetic effect”.<sup>134</sup>

Furthermore, there is one more remark which needs to be made about this metre in relation to its association with the sotadean, another metre of Ionic origin.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Elder (1940) 34; Ross (1969) 150.

<sup>132</sup> The cult of the goddess was brought to Rome in 204 BC and her temple on the Palatine was dedicated in 191 BC.

<sup>133</sup> The galliambic metre is very rarely employed in Latin poetry. It was used by Varro in one of his Menippean satire entitled *Eumenides* to describe the ritual of Cybele’s acolytes.

<sup>134</sup> Kirby (1989) 72-73. The performative nature of the poem was already suggested by Wiseman (1985) who claimed that the poem was officially commissioned from Catullus by an aedile for the Megalensia; to Wiseman’s theory Kirby objects that it would need to be established “how much narrative such choric hymns contained”.

<sup>135</sup> The sotadean verse was raised to literary recognition by Sotades of Maronea who employed this metrical pattern in the composition of his satires (often obscene in content) for which he was credited with the foundation of cinaedography. See Strabon (14, 1, 41); Athenaeus (XIV, 62e) says

The sotadean, just as the galliambic, was rarely used by Latin writers.<sup>136</sup> The association of galliambics and sotadeans was due to metrical and rhythmical similarities (the weakness and effeminacy of the two are repeatedly remarked on by ancient authors), as is attested, for example, by Martial (*Ep.* 2, 86 1-5).<sup>137</sup>

The association was not confined to metrical issues, but included thematic ones as well just as the galliambics were linked with the *galli*, the sotadeans were linked with the *cinaedi*, these figures being, as it were, perceived as identical.<sup>138</sup> That *galli* were frequently identified with *cinaedi* (especially in satirical portrayals) is attested by the fact that the two terms were used as synonyms.<sup>139</sup>

Additionally, the *galli/cinaedi* were also associated with the pantomime dancers; according to Nonius (5, 16), the word *cinaedus* was actually an appellative for the *saltator* and *pantomimus* (*cinaedi dicti sunt apud veteres saltatores vel pantomimi*).<sup>140</sup>

Thus, the *galli*, *cinaedi*, and pantomime dancers all fell in the same category.<sup>141</sup>

The association is not difficult to understand since all these characters shared similar characteristics, the most conspicuous one being the ambiguity of their gender. In fact, *galli* and *cinaedi* were usually said to be *semiviri*, something in between a male and a female, while the pantomime dancers, even though not

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that such compositions were recited by a cinaedologus.

<sup>136</sup> Ennius (Var. 25-9 Vahlen), Varro (fr. 2, 3), Plautus (*Amph.* 168 ff.), Martial (*Ep.* 3, 29), and Petronius (*Satyricon*, 23, 3; 132, 8) composed poems in sotadeans.

<sup>137</sup> Martial, *Ep.* 2, 86, 1-5: *Quod nec carmine glorior supino/nec retro lego Sotaden cinaedum/nusquam Graecula quod recantat echo/nec dictat mihi luculentus Attis/mollem debilitate galliambon*. See Merkelbach (1973) 92: "Der Rhythmus ist völlig identisch mit dem Sotadeum, nur ist das Versende um eine Stelle verschoben".

<sup>138</sup> Demetrios, *De eloc*, 189 associates the sotadean verse directly with *galli*.

<sup>139</sup> Martial 9, 2, 13: *i nunc et miseros, Cybele, praecide cinaedos*; See Carcopino (1942) 76-92.

<sup>140</sup> See also Plautus, *Miles Gloriosus* (667): *tum ad saltandum non cinaedus malacus aequat/ atque ego*; *Poenulus*, (1317-20): *Anta. Quin adhibuisti, dum istaec loquere, tympanum?/nam te cinaedum esse arbitror magis quam virum./Ag. Scin quam cinaedus sum?ite istinc, servi, foras,/ecferte fustis*; Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, 14.

<sup>141</sup> See also, Lucian's *De mercede conductis* (27): a *cinaedus* talented in singing Ionic songs is said to be the ballet-master in a wealthy household. That *cinaedi* were often part of the household is attested by other ancient writers, for example, Juvenal (6, 1-3): *In quacumque domo vivit luditque professus/obscenum et tremula promittens omnia dextra,/invenies omnis turpes similesque cinaedis*.

marked by the actual physical mutilation which characterised both *galli* and *cinaedi*, also possessed a dubious sexual identity, since their art required them to impersonate female and male roles;<sup>142</sup> as Lada-Richards has remarked that “the perceived link between effeminacy and pantomime” is so strong that pantomimes or dancing-masters are constantly associated with *cinaedi*.<sup>143</sup>

Having set the general context, it is worth looking at a poem in sotadeans in Petronius’s *Satyricon* in relation to the generic nature of Catullus 63.

In the Quartilla episode, a *cinaedus* and his troupe, probably hired for the special occasion, entertain the guests with singing and dancing; the song sung by the *cinaedus* is in Ionics, more specifically in sotadenas (23, 3):

Intrat cinaedus, homo omnium insulsissimus et plane illa domo  
dignus, qui ut infractis manibus congemuit, eiusmodi carmina effudit:  
“Huc huc <cito> convenite nunc, spatolocinaedi,  
pede tendite, cursum addite, convolate planta,  
femoreque facili, clune agili et manu procaces,  
molles, veteres, Deliaci manu recisi”.

The Petronian *cinaedus*’ summon to his fellows (*spatolocinaedi*) recalls closely the Catullan Attis’ invitation to the *Gallae* to launch into dances, the only, though considerable, difference being in the satirical mood of the Petronian passage, which is totally absent in the Catullan one (11-26):

canere haec suis adortast tremebunda comitibus:

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<sup>142</sup> See Juvenal (6, 63-66): *chironomon Ledam molli saltante Bathyllo/Tuccia vesicae non imperat, Apula gannit,/attendit Thymele: Thymele tunc rustica discit*; the remark that Bathyllus’ impersonation of Leda had something to teach even to the mime actress Thymele is telling. Lada-Richards (2007) 69: “(the pantomime) excels in a language of movement that becomes by turn both male and female”.

<sup>143</sup> Lada-Richards (2007) 69. See Novatian (*On the Spectacles* 6, 6): *vir ultra mulierem mollitiem dissolutus*.

“agite ite ad alta, Gallae, Cybeles nemora simul,  
 simul ite, Dyndymenae dominae vaga pecora,  
 aliena quae petentes velut exules loca  
 sectam meam exsecutae duce me mihi comites 15  
 rapidum salum tulistis truculentaque pelagi,  
 et corpus evirastis Veneris nimio odio,  
 hilarate erae citatis erroribus animum.  
 mora tarda mente cedat; simul ite, sequimini  
 Phrygiam ad domum Cybebes, Phrygia ad nemora  
 deae, 20  
 ubi cymbalum sonat vox, ubi tympana reboant,  
 tibicen ubi canit Phryx curvo grave calamo,  
 ubi capita Maenades vi iaciunt hederigerae,  
 ubi sacra sancta acutis ululatibus agitant,  
 ubi suevit illa divae volitare vaga cohors: 25  
 quos nos decet citatis celerare tripudiis”.

Although the intonation of the two passages is different, nonetheless the two poems seem to stand as flip sides of the same coin; thus, they could paradigmatically represent the two types of pantomime as described by the ancient writers who credited Pylades with the development of the tragic and serious one, and Bathyllus with the more comic and light-hearted type.<sup>144</sup>

### 1.2.2.2 Mime in Cicero’s *Pro Caelio*

Katrine Geffcken has shown that in the *Pro Caelio* Cicero relied on elements borrowed from the comic stage to construct his argument in defence of Caelius.<sup>145</sup>

I would like to highlight here those elements specifically borrowed from mime. Such elements are particularly eminent in the characterisation of Clodia and in the

<sup>144</sup> Athenaeus, *Deiph.* I, 20-21. See this chapter p. 9.

<sup>145</sup> Geffcken (1973).

episode in the baths. The inclusion of comic elements was also prompted by the period during which the trial was held (3-4 April 56 BC), that is during the *Ludi Megalenses*. Cicero's speech was delivered on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April, the very opening day of the festivities.<sup>146</sup> Since trials were not supposed to be held during such festivities, Cicero stresses that someone could think that the gravity of the charges against the accused was extremely serious to violate this custom. To show that this is not the case, Cicero immediately states that all the charges against Caelius are imaginary and have been prompted by a single cause, that is the passion of a woman (*muliebre[m] libidinem*) who, through the means provided by her wealth (*opibus meretriciis*), is trying to take a personal revenge on the accused. From the very beginning of his speech, Cicero has thus already brought up the equation of Clodia with a *meretrix* driven by her uncontrollable *libido*.<sup>147</sup> In what follows, Cicero keeps emphatically insisting on the fact that Clodia's behaviour is that of a *meretrix*.<sup>148</sup> Clodia's loose sexual behaviour must have prompted in the mind of the jury association with a *mima*; in fact, *mimae* and *meretrices* were perceived basically as one and the same in the Roman mind.<sup>149</sup>

Additionally, the transformation of a *matrona* into a *meretrix* was a familiar one in mime since Laberius (*Compitalia* frg. 3: *quo quidem/me a matronali pudore prolubium meretricium/progredi coegit*) and Publilius (in Petronius *Sat.* 55 *An ut matrona ornata phaleris pelagiis/tollat pedes indomita in strato extraneo?*).<sup>150</sup>

Later on in the speech, Cicero discusses at length the fifth charge against Caelius

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<sup>146</sup> Cicero, *Pro Caelio*, 1.

<sup>147</sup> See paragraphs 35; 38; 49.

<sup>148</sup> See Geffcken (1973) 34 n. 1 for the occurrences of the word *meretrix* and *meretricius*.

<sup>149</sup> Wiseman (1985) 48; see Cicero, *In Verrem*, III, 83: *...Tertiae mimae condonavit. Utrum impudentius ab sociis abstulit an turpius meretrici dedit an improbius populo Romano ademit an audacius tabulas publicas commutavit*; Horace, *Satires*, I, 2, 58-59: *verum est cum mimis, est cum meretricibus, unde /fama malum gravius quam res trahit*.

<sup>150</sup> The question whether the lines quoted by Petronius are genuinely Publilian or a Petronian original reworking does not bear any consequence on the presence of the theme *matrona/meretrix* in Publilius' mime. See Giancotti (1967) 231-74 for an in depth-discussion of the issue of authenticity of Publilius' lines in Petronius. See Wiseman (1985) 48.

(61-69), that is his alleged attempt at poisoning Clodia (*de veneno in Clodiam parato*); the entire story is said to have taken place in the baths where Licinus, a young friend of Caelius, had to hand over a box of poison (*pyxis*) to Clodia's slaves who were supposed to be Caelius' accomplices, but eventually betrayed him and informed Clodia of Caelius' murderous intentions.<sup>151</sup>

The attempt at poisoning is overtly and strategically equated by Cicero to an illogical badly constructed plot of a mime; even more interestingly, Cicero claims that Clodia herself is the author of such a plot, a poetaster setting in motion *fabellae* or *mimi* which have no coherent plot (63-64):

O magna vis veritatis, quae contra hominum ingenia, calliditatem, sollertiam contraque fictas omnium insidias facile se per se ipsa defendat! Velut haec tota fabella verteris et plurimarum fabularum poetria quam est sine argumento, quam nullum invenire exitum potest!

Such an equation is hinted at when Cicero begins the discussion of the last charge against Caelius; Cicero already states here that he can find neither the origin nor the end (56 *reliquum est igitur crimen de veneno; cuius ego nec principium invenire neque evolvere exitum possum*).

Even the alleged escape of Licinus from Clodia's friends, incredible in its incoherence as it is, is connected with the typical finale of the mimes, in which the development of the action is brought to a sudden and incongruous end by the escape of someone from somebody's hands (65-66):

Tempore igitur ipso se ostenderunt, cum Licinius venisset, pyxidem

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<sup>151</sup> Cicero, *Pro Caelio*, 68: the slaves were then manumitted by Clodia because of their act of loyalty towards their mistress.

expediret, manum porrigeret, venenum traderet. Mimi ergo est iam exitus, non fabulae; in quo cum clausula non invenitur, fugit aliquis e manibus, deinde scabilla concrepant, aulaeum tollitur. Quaero enim, cur Licinium titubantem, haesitantem, cedentem, fugere conantem mulieraria manus ista de manibus amiserit, cur non comprehenderit, cur non ipsius confessione, multorum oculis, facinoris denique voce tanti sceleris crimen expresserint.

A moment later, Cicero strikes again a “malicious allusion” to the finale of one of the most popular mimic plots, the adultery-mime, when he asks (and imagines the possible answer) about where exactly Clodia’s friends would have been hidden in the Senian baths (67):

ex quibus requiram, quem ad modum latuerint aut ubi, alveusne ille an equus Troianus fuerit, qui tot invictos viros muliebre bellum gerentes tulerit ac texerit.

Wiseman has suggestively connected the bath-tub/*alveus ille* with the chest/*arca* (Horace, *Satires*, II, 7, 59), the basket/*cista* (Juvenal, *Satires*, 6, 44), and the jar/*dolium* (Apuleius, *Met.* IX, 23, 26) of the adultery-mime; in such hiding places, the lover of the adulterous woman usually had to hide because of the sudden and unexpected return of the husband.<sup>152</sup> Thus Clodia, the crafty lady (62 *mulier ingeniosa*), just like the cunning *moecha* of the mimes intent at plotting against her husband or rivals in love, is very well acquainted with tricks and subterfuges.

In addition to this, the fact that mimes often involved poisonings (*veneficiae*) would have provided a very apt scenario in which to insert Clodia’s charge; in

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<sup>152</sup> Wiseman (1985) 29.

fact, the link between Caelius' attempt at poisoning Clodia and the popular mimic scenario would have clearly evoked in the jury the idea that the episode in the baths ought to be considered a mimic trick purposely faked up by Clodia.<sup>153</sup>

Thus Clodia, whom at the beginning of the speech Cicero compares to tragic Medea undergoes a progressive degradation to the character of the *moecha* of the mimic stage.<sup>154</sup> As Wiseman has remarked, the association of Clodia with theatrical performances must have been a means to attack not only the luxurious but especially the Hellenised lifestyle of her and her brother Clodius, indulging as they did in theatrical performances and being performers themselves. In the *Pro Sestio* (54, 116) Cicero attacks brother and sister thus: [Clodius] *ipse ille maxime ludius, non solum spectator, sed actor et acroama, qui omnia sororis embolia novit, qui in coetum mulierum pro psaltria adducitur...*

It is not clear whether Cicero meant that Clodia used to perform in balletic interludes (*embolia*) as a dancer (during aristocratic dinner-parties) or that she was the composer of balletic interludes.<sup>155</sup> Perhaps, Cicero is hinting here at the common ground between Roman high society and the popular stage, as attested,

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<sup>153</sup> Compare Cicero, *Pro Rabirio Postumo* (35) for evidence that deceptions and intrigues were the bread and butter of mimes: *Audiebamus Alexandream, nunc cognoscimus. Illinc omnes praestigiae, illinc, inquam, omnes fallaciae, omnia denique ab eis mimorum argumenta nata sunt.*

<sup>154</sup> *Pro Caelio*, 18 (the lines are from Ennius' Medea): *Nam nunquam era errans/hanc molestiam nobis exhiberet/Medea animo aegra, amore saevo saucia. Sic enim, iudices, reperietis, quod, cum ad id loci venero, ostendam, hanc Palatinam Medeam migrationemque hanc adulescenti causam sive malorum omnium sive potius sermonum fuisse.* Geffcken (1973) 15-17 has underlined the pronounced parodist flavour of the analogy Medea-Clodia provided by the epithet Palatinam, and by the fact that Cicero compares Caelius' moving to the Palatine, next to Clodia's own house, to the unfortunate voyage of Jason and his encounter with Medea; the comparison of a mythical situation with a prosaic one involves, in fact, a degradation of the model meant to provoke amusement and it is a typical device used in comedy. See Austin (1960) 148-150 for the discussion of Clodia's identification with Catullus' Lesbia which relies on Apuleius (*Apologia* 10): *C. Catul[l]um, quod Lesbiam pro Clodia nominarit.*

<sup>155</sup> Compare this with the description of Sempronia in Sallust, *Catilinae coniuratio*, 25, 2: *Sed in eis erat Sempronia, quae multa saepe virilis audaciae facinora commiserat. Haec mulier genere atque forma, praeterea viro atque liberis satis fortunata fuit; litteris Graecis et Latinis docta, psallere et saltare elegantius, quam necesse est probae, multa alia, quae instrumenta luxuriae sunt;* with Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 3, 13, 5: *quid enim ait Sallustius psallere saltare elegantius quam necesse est probae? adeo et ipse Semproniam reprehendit non quod saltare sed quod optime scierit.*

for example, by the funerary inscription for the dancer Eucharis, a freedwoman of Licina's household of the late-Republican period:

...Docta erudita paene Musarum manu,  
quae modo nobilium ludos decoravi choro  
et Graeca in scaena prima populo apparui...<sup>156</sup>

The fact that Eucharis performed in the *ludos nobilium* must mean either that she danced in private exhibitions held in noble houses or during votive and funerary games (*ludi votivi* and *ludi funebres*) rather than in the public dramatic festivals, which would have been rather called *ludi deorum immortalium*. Such private games were often a means for the politician to advertise himself and gain popular approval.

Thus, it is possible that Cicero's emphasis in associating the Claudii with the theatre may contain also the allusion that their interest in it was not just of an aesthetic kind but rather for demagogic political exploitation. According to Macrobius, Clodius asked the mimographer Laberius to compose a mime for him, but the Roman knight refused.<sup>157</sup> As Wiseman has remarked, "what made the story worth telling" lies in the fact that Laberius dared to refuse.<sup>158</sup>

### 1.2.2.3 The Adultery-mime in the elegiac poets

The adultery-mime is by far the best known type. It consisted basically of a love-story in which three main characters featured: a jealous husband (the *stupidus*), an adulterous wife, and a lover. The basic plot consisted of the husband deceived by

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<sup>156</sup> *ILS* 5213.

<sup>157</sup> Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, 2, 6, 6: *cum iratus esse P. Clodius D. Laberio diceretur quod ei mimum petenti non dedisset, "quid amplius", inquit, "mihi facturum es nisi ut Dyrhachium eam et redeam?"*, *ludens ad Ciceronis exilium*.

<sup>158</sup> Wiseman (1985) 38.

his wife and her lover. The popularity and longevity of the adultery-mime is attested by references in the ancient authors over a long span of time (from the first century BC to the sixth AD).<sup>159</sup> The first trace of a mime dealing with adultery appears in a fragment of the *Compitalia* by Laberius (*quo quidem/me a matronali pudore prolubium meretricium progredi coegit*).<sup>160</sup>

Ovid (*Tristia*, 2, 497-500, 505-6) provides a basic description of what the plot of the adultery-mime looked like:

quid, si scripsissem mimos obscena iocantes,  
 qui semper vetiti crimen amoris habent:  
 in quibus assidue cultus procedit adulter,  
 verbaque dat stulto callida nupta viro? 500

cumque fefellit amans aliqua novitate maritum 505  
 plauditur et magno palma favore datur.

The rhetorician Choricus of Gaza (VI AD), who wrote a defence of the mimes, attests the existence of a variant on the type: the lover and the wife are caught by the husband and prosecuted in a trial where the judges threaten punishment.<sup>161</sup>

A situation similar to that described by Ovid is found in Juvenal (6, 41-4):

quid fieri non posse putes, si iungitur ulla

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<sup>159</sup> Ovid, *Tristia*, 2, 515: *scribere si fas est imitantes turpia mimos*; Valerius Maximus (2, 6, 7): *Eadem civitas severitatis custos acerrima est, nullum aditum in scaenam mimis dando, quorum argumenta maiore ex parte stuprorum continent actus...*; Seneca the Elder, *Controversiae*, 2, 4, 5: *vere mimicae nuptiae, <in> quibus ante in cubiculum rivalis venit quam maritus*; Juvenal (6, 41-44); Tertullianus (*Apologeticus*, 15, 1) refers to “moechum Anubin” as one of the characters typical of the mime of his days; Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 37, 12: *In scenicis etiam non minor furor et turpitudine prolixior; nunc enim mimus vel exponit adulteria vel monstrat, nunc enervis histrio amorem dum fingit, infligit.*

<sup>160</sup> The fifth mime of Herodas and the Oxyrhynchus Jealous Lady mime (Page [1941] 77) both deal with a jealous mistress in love with a slave, but, as Reynolds has remarked (1946) 77-78, both of them tend to be more “a psychological study of the adulteress than an attempt at bringing out the dramatic possibilities inherent in the situation” as in the later adultery-mime.

<sup>161</sup> Reynolds (1946) 84 has suggested that “a trial scene was of common occurrence in the Imperial mimes”.

Ursidio?si moechorum notissimus olim  
stulta maritali iam porrigit ora capistro,  
quem totiens textit periturum cista Latini?

The presence of Latinus, a famous archimimus during Domitian's reign, proves that Juvenal is here drawing on a well-known mimic scenario.<sup>162</sup>

Suggestively, the situation outlined by Juvenal is already present in Horace (*Satires* I, 2, 127-34; II, 7, 58-61):

nec vereor ne, dum futuo, vir rure recurrat,  
ianua frangatur, latret canis, undique magno  
pulsa domus strepitu resonet, vepallida lecto  
desiliat mulier, miseram se conscia clamet, 130  
cruribus haec metuat, doti deprensa, egomet mi.  
discincta tunica fugiendum est et pede nudo,  
ne nummi pereant aut puga aut denique fama.  
deprendi miserum est: Fabio vel iudice vincam.

quid refert, uri virgis ferroque necari  
auctoratus eas, an turpi clausus in arca,  
quo te demisit peccati conscia erilis, 60  
contractum genibus tangas caput?

Lines II, 59-61 in particular (*...an turpi clausus in arca/quo te demisit peccati conscia erilis,/contractum genibus tangas caput*) matches the situation described

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<sup>162</sup> See Juvenal (1, 36) and Martial, *Ep.* 1, 4, 5-6: *qua Thymelen spectas derisoremque Latinum,/illa fronte precor carmina nostra legas*; 2, 72, 3-4: *os tibi percisum quanto non ipse Latinus/vilia Panniculi percutit ora sono*; 3, 86, 3-4: *sed si Panniculum spectas et, casta, Latinum,/non sunt haec mimis improbiora...*; 5, 61, 11-12: *o quam dignus eras alapis, Mariane, Latini:/te successurum credo ego Panniculo*; 9, 28: *Dulce decus scaenae, ludorum fama, Latinus/illego sum, plausus deliciaeque tuae,/qui spectatorem potui fecisse Catonem,/solvere qui Curios Fabriciosque graves./sed nihil a nostro sumpsit mea vita teatro/et sola tantum scaenicus arte feror;/nec poteram gratus domino sine moribus esse:/interius mentes inspicit ille deus./vos me laurigeri parasitum dicite Phoebi,/Roma sui famulum dum sciat esse Iovis*; 13, 2, 3: *et possis ipsum tu deridere Latinum.*

by the *scholium* at Juvenal (6, 41-44) *superveniente marito sub cista celatus est, ut in mimo*.

An analogous scenario is found also in Propertius (2, 23, 9-10: *cernere uti possis vultum custodis amari,/captus et immunda saepe latere casa?* and 19-20: *nec dicet "timeo, propera iam surgere, quaeso:/infelix, hodie vir mihi rure venit"*); Propertius 4, 8 shows even "more fundamental links with the Adultery-mime".<sup>163</sup> The elegist varies the usual scheme of the plot, inverting the usual roles of deceived husband and adulterous wife, since it is the woman (Cynthia) who returns from Lavinium and finds her man (Propertius) with two girls of questionable reputation.

The inversion of roles itself has also mimic (and pantomimic) overtones, and there are several instances that recall mimic situations where a jealous wife takes the role of the usually jealous husband.<sup>164</sup>

The jealous mistress theme seems to lie behind Propertius 3, 15. The poem deals with Cynthia's jealousy of Lycinna. In the poem, the triangular relationship between Cynthia-Propertius-Lycinna is paralleled to the mythical triangle Dirce-Lycus-Antiope; strangely, Antiope is said to be Dirce's slave (*famulam* 15), but no extant version of the myth makes her Dirce's servant. According to Yardley, it is possible that Propertius "altered the relationship between the characters of the myth to suit the purposes of the poem";<sup>165</sup> the mythical parallel suggests thus that Lycinna is actually Cynthia's slave and Cynthia's jealousy resembles closely that

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<sup>163</sup> McKeown (1979) 74; already Yardley (1972) 135 pointed out that the situation described is not a biographical one and Hubbard (1974) 151 suggested the influence of mime on this elegy.

<sup>164</sup> Juvenal, 6, 275-79: *tu credis amorem,/tu tibi tunc, uruca, places fletumque labellis/exorbes, quae scripta et quot lecture tabellas/si tibi zelotypae retegantur scrinia moechae!/sed iacet in servi complexibus aut equitis*; Petronius (45) *Videbis populi rixam inter zelotypos et amasiunculos*; (69) *Tu autem, Scintilla, noli zelotypa esse*. Fantham (1986) 45-57 has argued that jealousy (*ZHΛOTYPIA*) was a stock theme already in Greek mimes (Herodas' fifth mime about the jealous mistress); the term *zelotypus* entered into Latin where it also had clear mimic overtones.

<sup>165</sup> Yardley (1974) 431.

of the jealous mimic mistress (44 *nescit vestra ruens ira referre pedem*).<sup>166</sup>

Ovid exploits the theme of adultery at *Amores* (3, 4) in a way reminiscent of the love-triangle of the adultery-Mime. McKeown has remarked that the high percentage of the occurrence of the word *adulter/a* in the elegy is a conscious strategy devised to remind his audience of the connection with the popular adultery-Mime.<sup>167</sup>

That the theme of adultery was borrowed from mime is suggested by the fact that the two literary genres which are usually considered to have provided material for Augustan elegy, Hellenistic erotic epigram and comedy, do not feature the theme of adultery in the way the Augustan elegists present it. In fact, in Hellenistic erotic epigram the women usually tend to be prostitutes, while in comedy they are either prostitutes or unmarried girls.<sup>168</sup>

The theme of adultery was popular also in pantomime, as is attested by Lucian (60, 63); in 60 Lucian relates that above all the other themes, the pantomime dancer must know, in order to enact them, all the (adulterous) loves and metamorphoses of Zeus;<sup>169</sup> in 63, in relating how the dancer Paris convinced Demetrius the Cynic of the worthiness of his art, Lucian describes the dancer enacting the love of Ares and Aphrodite, Hephaestus' discovery of the adultery, and the shame of the two lovers caught in the flagrant act.<sup>170</sup>

Suggestively enough, the same mythical episode features in Ovid's

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<sup>166</sup> Scholars have assumed that Lycinna was Propertius' first love on the basis of line 5-6 *illa rudis animos per noctes conscia primas/imbuit, heu nullis capta Lycinna datis*. Thus, they usually tend to interpret the situation described in 3, 15 as an autobiographical one. Yardley, on the contrary, thinks the poem describes a fictional one since the scenario depicted by Propertius seems borrowed from a mime (with Lesky 1951, 173) or from Comedy (with Day 1938, 85-101). See Wyke (1987) 47-61 in relation to the fictional character of Propertius' women.

<sup>167</sup> McKeown (1979) 73-4.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibidem* 74.

<sup>169</sup> See also Jacob of Serugh (*Hom.* 5, F22vb, text in Most [1935 112]) where the Syriac homilist affirms that the danced story of Zeus' adulteries "is famous among the spectacles".

<sup>170</sup> The story of the love of Ares and Aphrodite appears already in Homer (*Odyssey*, VIII, 266-320).

*Metamorphoses* (4, 171-89) and it is couched in a linguistic register very reminiscent of the adultery-mime: first of all, the love of Mars and Venus is emphatically called *adulterium* at the very opening of the story (171-72 *primus adulterium Veneris cum Marte putatur/hic vidisse deus*); then, the emphasis on the adulterous nature of the relationship is reiterated by the terminology employed to describe the three protagonists, since Vulcanus is called husband (*marito*), Venus wife (*coniunx*), and Mars paramour (*adulter*).

#### 1.2.2.4 Mime and pantomime in Ovid

Ovid's compositions are particularly rich in mimic and pantomimic overtones.<sup>171</sup> It has been discussed in the preceding paragraph that the mimic and pantomimic theme of adultery was adapted by Ovid (*Amores* 3, 4; *Met.* 4, 171-89). A passage in the *Tristia*, where Ovid states that his poems have been danced several times even before Augustus himself (2, 519-20 *et mea sunt populo saltata poemata saepe/saepe oculos etiam detinere tuos*), has opened a tantalizing debate among scholars on whether Ovid purposely composed pieces for the pantomimic stage or whether his poems were adapted for the theatre. The phrasing seems to imply that some of his poetic compositions were adapted for the stage rather than written for it on purpose. This interpretation finds support in another passage in the *Tristia* where Ovid claims that he never composed anything for the stage (5, 7, 27-28 *nil equidem feci (tu scis hoc ipse) theatris/musa nec in plausus ambitiosa mea est*). However, this last statement contrasts with the evidence that his tragedy *Medea* was most likely written for the theatre. Generally speaking, scholars have interpreted the Ovidian passages as evidence against composition for the stage. An exception is Cunningham who claimed that Ovid purposely wrote one of his

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<sup>171</sup> See Wiseman (2008a) 210-30.

poetic compositions (i.e. the *Heroides*) for the pantomimic stage.<sup>172</sup> To solve the difficulty posed by *Tristia* 5, 27-28, Cunningham argued that Ovid's words are not to be taken literally and proposed to interpret and translate the lines as "I never wrote for the gallery, nor have I gone out of my way to win applause". Cunningham's thesis was based on three elements, namely Ovid's statement at *Tristia* 2, 519-20, the novelty of the *Heroides* as a literary genre, and internal evidence.

The novelty of the *Heroides*, which Ovid himself claimed not to belong to any previously known literary genre, lies for Cunningham in the fact that "they present Latin erotic elegy in a form adapted to a new type of theatrical performance which was first introduced at Rome when Ovid was a young man".<sup>173</sup> For this reason, Cunningham felt confident to recognise in these poems the most plausible candidate for pieces written for the pantomimic stage. Cunningham brought forward internal evidence to support his thesis such as the monologic unfolding and the subjective mood of the epistle which gave room to explore different and conflicting emotions as well as the fact that the addressee of the letter was often completely forgotten because of the monologue's shifting into soliloquy. In 1996, Cunningham's seminal idea was taken up by Sargent who tried to elaborate further and expand upon Cunningham by comparing the similarities between certain features of pantomime and similar ones found in the *Heroides*.<sup>174</sup> Nonetheless, Cunningham's hypothesis remained isolated and scholars dismissed

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<sup>172</sup> Cunningham (1949) 100: "I wish to suggest that the *Heroides* were originally written as lyric-dramatic monologues to be presented on the stage with music and dancing".

<sup>173</sup> Ovid, *Ars Amatoria* 3, 346: *ignotum hoc aliis ille novavit opus*. Cunningham (1949) 100 remarks that the poetical epistle was not new in itself, since already Lucilius, Horace, and Propertius employed this form; however, the novelty of Ovid's *Heroides* resides in the "adoption of situations and characters from mythology and legend."

<sup>174</sup> Sargent (1996) offered an analysis of *Heroides* 7 and 10 (the letter of Ariadne to Theseus and that of Dido to Aeneas) trying to highlight the hallmarks of their composition as pantomimic libretti.

the idea of an Ovidian poetic collection written for the stage and focused instead on trying to establish which of Ovid's poetic compositions were most suitable to be adapted as pantomimic pieces.

Owen identified the *saltata poemata* of the *Tristia* as portions of the *Ars Amatoria*;<sup>175</sup> Galinsky, instead, underlined some analogies between the *Metamorphoses* and pantomime, namely “the emphasis on the single scenes, the narrator's bravura performance, his sophistication, the constant shifts and changes, and the graphic, visual appeal of many scenes”.<sup>176</sup>

More recently, Ingleheart has signalled three episodes in the *Metamorphoses* (Apollo and Daphne 1, 452-567; Althaea and Meleager 8, 445-546; Iphis 9, 666-796) whose features may have been extremely palatable for pantomimic adaptations.<sup>177</sup>

Setting aside the issue of identifying which of Ovid's works is the most suitable to have received performance in pantomime, it seems more compelling to try to establish whether the aesthetics of pantomime and mime at large can be spotted in Ovid's poetic works. This does not mean that Ovid wrote for the popular stage, but that he appropriated and reshaped elements typical of the popular stage.

In relation to this, Horsfall has proposed that the episode of the Calydonian boar-hunt (*Met.* 8, 260 ff.) shows clear signs of the influence of mime recognisable in the characteristic parodist twisting of epic elements into burlesque.<sup>178</sup>

The possibility of the existence of mimes with mythological themes has been

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<sup>175</sup> Owen (1924) 271.

<sup>176</sup> Galinsky (1975) 68 remarked how strikingly pantomimic are the qualities of the Narcissus' episode. In addition to this, “the scope of the pantomimic artist's undertaking”, which Lucian said to range from chaos to the story of Cleopatra, is very similar to Ovid's scope in the *Metamorphoses* (*Met.* 1, 3-4 *primaque ab origine mundi/ ad mea...tempora*). Compare Lucian, *De Saltatione*, 37: ἀπό γὰρ χάους εὐθύς καὶ τῆς πρώτης τοῦ κόσμου γενέσεως ἀρξάμενον χρηὴ αὐτὸν ἅπαντα εἰδέναι ἄχρι τῶν κατὰ τὴν Κλεοπάτραν τὴν Αἰγυπτίαν.

<sup>177</sup> Ingleheart (2008) 198-217.

<sup>178</sup> Horsfall (1979) 319-32.

much disputed by scholars (especially by Crusius in 1910), but we know that Laberius wrote a mime entitled *Anna Perenna* (an archaic Roman deity) and Varro reports mimes about Liber and the Nymphs.<sup>179</sup>

In addition to this, Tertullian and Minucius Felix attest the existence of a skit on the loves of Cybele in which a young Attis rejects the favours of an aging and decrepit Mother Goddess.<sup>180</sup>

Suggestively, there is a fragment by Laberius (frag. 176 *quid properas? ecquid praecurris Calidoniam?*) which seems to refer to the myth of the Calydonian boar-hunt; the myth is also attested as a theme popular in pantomime since both Lucian (50) and Libanius (67) name the story of Meleager and Atalanta as being a theme of pantomimic performances.

On the same line of thought, Fantham has proposed that at least in four episodes contained in the *Fasti* (2, 303-56; 1, 393-440; 6, 321-344; 3, 677-696) the ancestry of mime or pantomime can be detected.<sup>181</sup> The four episodes all oddly deal with stories of sexual frustration, an awkward theme in the context of the *Fasti*;<sup>182</sup> in addition to this, for three of the four episodes there is no known Hellenistic or Roman source. Fantham thus suggested that Ovid borrowed the

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<sup>179</sup> Varro, *Antiquitates rerum divinarum* fr. 3 (Cardauns): *Ex eo enim poterimus...scire, quem cuiusque causa deum invocare atque advocare debeamus, ne faciamus, ut mimi solent, et optemus a Libero aquam, a Lymphis vinum.*

<sup>180</sup> Tertullian, *Ad. Nat.* 1, 10, 45; *Apol.* 15, 2: *Sed et histrionum litterae omnem foeditatem eorum designant. Luget Sol filium de caelo iactatum laetantibus vobis, et Cybele pastorum suspirat fastidiosum non erubescitibus vobis, et sustinetis Iovis elogia cantari, et Iunonem, Venerem, Minervam a pastore iudicari;* Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 23, 2: *Cybelae Dindyma pudet dicere, quae adulterum suum infeliciter placitum, quoniam et ipsa deformis et vetula, ut multorum deorum mater, ad stuprum inlicere non poterat, exsecuit, ut deum scilicet faceret eunuchum. Propter hanc fabulam Galli eam et semiviri sui corporis supplicio colunt.* See Hepding (1903) 116.

<sup>181</sup> Fantham (1983) 185-216; already McKeown (1979) 76 and Littlewood (1980) 301-21 had signalled the influence of sub-literary dramatic genres on the four episodes in the *Fasti*. See also Barchiesi (1997) 238-46 and Wiseman (2002) 275-99.

<sup>182</sup> Barchiesi (1997) 241 agrees with Fantham: "There is no traditionally accepted explanation to justify these stories of Priapus and Faunus as the causes of Roman rituals and festivals". See Littlewood (1980) 316-17 who, on the contrary, thinks that the inclusion of material drawn from low forms of comic drama fits pertinently and congruously in the *Fasti*, since "the earliest dramatic productions in the ancient world had their first origins in rustic and religious festivals."; mimes, for example, were associated with the festival of the Floralia since the II century BC.

themes from mimic or pantomimic representations.

*Fasti* 2, 303-56 tells the story of the encounter of Hercules, Omphale, and Faunus and comes in the section concerned with this old Roman deity (Pan's counterpart in the Greek world). The story falls into three sections: the first one opens with Hercules and Omphale walking into the wood where they are seen by Faunus who is suddenly burnt with desire for the Lydian princess and resolves to assault her as soon as possible. The second section describes at length the exchange of garments between Hercules and Omphale (probably representing the preliminary period of chastity before initiation to Bacchus).<sup>183</sup> Then Hercules and his mistress reach a grotto where they lie down in separate beds. The third section is devoted to the farcical description of Faunus' misdirected assault (due to the exchange of garments between Hercules and Omphale) and his subsequent frustration. The story is closed by the narrator's remark that the reason why Faunus' worshippers are naked is due to the fact that since Faunus was deceived by garments, he does not love them.<sup>184</sup>

Fantham claims that "this passage of *Fasti* describes a sequence of events that could be fully understood as pantomime by the onlookers" and remarks that the story is more suitable to pantomime since dialogue (of which mime made full use) is not really required to represent the story;<sup>185</sup> at this point, Fantham explicitly states that Ovid "did not compose the story for pantomime, but that he derived it from pantomime".

The story of Anna Perenna (*Fasti* 3, 677-696) is again a tale of sexual frustration. Anna, an old goddess, is asked by Mars to intercede for him with Minerva whom

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<sup>183</sup> It is remarkable that the description of the exchange of garments features several times in Seneca's tragedies: *Hf* 465-71; *Phae* 317-24; *HO* 371-77; such a theme was highly suitable to be exploited in mimic or pantomimic performances where parodist travesty was one of the most common ingredients.

<sup>184</sup> For a detailed analysis of the story see Fantham (1983) 192-201.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibidem* 200.

he is in love with. Anna agrees but then starts delaying the encounter up to the moment in which Mars is not keen to accept any more delays. Thus Anna takes Minerva's place, covers up her own face with a veil, and presents herself to Mars, who, almost deceived and ready to kiss her, finally recognises the old goddess.

Giancotti and Bömer claimed that Ovid derived the story from a mime by Laberius entitled *Anna Perenna* of which some fragments survive; one of them (frag. 10 *conlabella osculum*) seems to be echoed in line 691 (*oscula sumpturus subito Mars aspicit Annam*).<sup>186</sup> Furthermore, that Ovid was probably inspired by a pantomimic situation seems to be also supported by the context of the passage (*Fasti*, 3, 535-38), that is in the description of the plebs gathered to celebrate the festivity of Anna Perenna:

illic et cantant, quicquid didicere theatris,  
et iactant faciles ad sua verba manus  
et ducunt posito duras cratera choreas,  
cultaque diffusis saltat amica comis.

The verses make use of a terminology particularly linked with pantomimic representations; in fact the expression *iactare manus* is the technical term and the verb *saltare* is the *vox propria* used to describe pantomime.<sup>187</sup> Giancotti has also argued that in Ovid's treatment of Anna's life before becoming a deity (i.e. as sister of Dido *Fasti*, 2, 543 ff.) there are other elements reminiscent of a mimic situation, such as Lavinia's jealousy of Anna and Anna's nightly escape half-dressed from Aeneas' palace after the appearance of her sister Dido in a dream

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<sup>186</sup> Bömer (1957) II, 179; Giancotti (1967) 61-65.

<sup>187</sup> See Ingleheart (2008) 200 who provides the following instances: Ovid: *Rem.* 755 *illic assidue ficti saltantur amantes*; Horace: *Sat.* 1.5.63 *pastorem saltaret uti Cyclopa rogabat*; Juvenal: 6.63 *chironomon Ledam molli saltante*; and Velleius Paterculus 2.83.2 *Plancus ... Glaucum saltasset*.

who compelled her to leave.<sup>188</sup> Both jealous mistress and sudden escapes (especially from a window) were, in fact, basic ingredients of the mimes.<sup>189</sup>

Finally, there are two more stories of sexual frustration in the *Fasti*, in which Priapus is firstly aroused by Lotis and then by Vesta (*Fasti* 1, 393-440; 6, 321-344).<sup>190</sup> The figure of Priapus itself is well suited to mimes, as we know from Augustine (*De Civitate Dei* 6, 7: *numquid Priapo mimi, non etiam sacerdotes enormia pudenda fecerunt? an aliter stat adorandus in locis sacris, quam procedit ridendus in theatris?*).

The story of Priapus and Lotis ends with Priapus being discovered and laughed at by all participants, while in the story of Priapus and Vesta, the god manages to escape from the hands of the other gods. The finale (here as in the case of the story of Faunus) is closely reminiscent of what Cicero describes to be the typical ending of the mimes where the villain's escape brings to an abrupt but easy end the not craftily constructed mimic representation.<sup>191</sup>

Furthermore, Barchiesi has remarked that the four comic episodes in the *Fasti* make explicit reference to the theatre so that the language itself signals "the relationship between the story and stage traditions".<sup>192</sup> In addition to this, there are two other elements which overtly hint at the fact that the episodes are "based on a

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<sup>188</sup> See McKeown (1979) 75-76 and n. 23 81.

<sup>189</sup> Giancotti (1967) 63-65. For a discussion of the popularity of the theme of the jealous mistress in mimes see this chapter pp. 54-59. See McKeown (1979) 76 on window entrances and exits as a typical feature of amatory mimes. He quotes Ovid, *Ars Amatoria*, 3, 605-8: *Cum melius foribus possis, admitte fenestra, inque tuo vultu signa timentis habe./callida prosiliat dicatque ancilla "perimus"!/tu iuvenem trepidum quolibet abde loco.*

<sup>190</sup> Fantham (1983) has remarked the oddity that the tale of Priapus' sexual disappointment is told twice with the only change of the victim undergoing Priapus' attempts at raping; thus the two passages are basically doublets.

<sup>191</sup> Cicero, *Pro Caelio* 65: *mimi ergo est iam exitus, non fabulae; in quo cum clausula non invenitur, fugit aliquis e manibus, deinde scabilla concrepant, aulaeum tollitur.*

<sup>192</sup> Barchiesi (1997) 240: *causa pudenda quidem est...iocis non alienus* (Priapus 1, 392 ff.); *traditur antiqui fabula plena ioci* (Faunus 2, 304); *nunc mihi cur cantent superest obscena puella/dicere...inde ioci veteres obscenaque dicta canuntur* (Anna and Mars 3, 675 ff.); *non habet ingratos fabula nostra iocos* (Silenus 3, 738); *scaena ioci morem liberioris habet...Mater, ades, florum, ludis celebranda iocosis* (apparitions of Flora 5, 183); *est multi fabula parva ioci* (Priapus and Vesta 6, 320); *et canere ad veteres verba iocosa modos* (flute players 6, 692).

sort of theatrical code”, namely the “promise of a good jest” (*Fasti* 2, 304; 3, 738; 6, 319) and the “laughter as seal of approval” (*Fasti* 1, 438; 2, 355, 377; 3, 343, 693; 5, 691).<sup>193</sup>

As to the reason why Ovid may have adapted and included mimic and pantomimic elements in the *Fasti*, Barchiesi’s suggestion that the adoption of such elements may be the sign for a search on Ovid’s part “for a literary language that is able to recuperate the ‘popular’ element in the cultivated literature of the Augustan age”, is perfectly fitting with Ovid’s innovative and unconventional literary attitude.<sup>194</sup>

#### 1.2.2.5 Mime in Seneca’s *Apocolocyntosis*

Seneca’s *Apocolocyntosis* is a Menippean satire which was probably written shortly after Claudius’ death in 54 AD and may have been presented at the *Saturnalia* of the same year.<sup>195</sup> Indeed, the satire has a pronounced performative character as has been pointed out by scholars such as Eden, who noticed that the satire strongly “invites recitation before a select audience”.<sup>196</sup> Weinreich had already remarked that the *recitatio* of the *Apocolocyntosis* would give ample scope to display acting abilities to the point that it could easily develop into a *mimus*.<sup>197</sup>

In agreement with Weinreich’s line of thought, Fantham and Purcell have advanced the hypothesis that the *Apocolocyntosis* may have been originally conceived as a mime and subsequently reshaped when written down. More

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<sup>193</sup> Fantham (1983) 190.

<sup>194</sup> Barchiesi (1997) 246.

<sup>195</sup> For a different dating of the satire, see Toynbee (1942) 83-93 who thinks that the *Apocolocyntosis* was written for the *Neronia* of AD 60. In Toynbee’s argument there is one compelling point; she remarks that in the satire Apollo is presented as *citharoedus* and Nero is said to be his double (4, 1), an equation which did not begin before 59/60 AD.

<sup>196</sup> Eden (1984) 8.

<sup>197</sup> Weinreich (1923) 19.

precisely, Fantham has further suggested that Seneca “has reworked in the narrative form of Menippean satire his own original libretto, written for intimate staging at Nero’s *Saturnalia* as a mime in four scenes”.<sup>198</sup> The division of the scenes could have been as follows:

1) Prologue: on earth (1-4)

Claudius is shown on his deathbed while Mercury scolds the fates for prolonging his life.

2) the council of the gods: in Heaven (5-11)

Claudius finally dies and is brought by Mercury to heaven where his deification is discussed.

3) the funeral: on earth (12)

After the denial of the deification, Mercury escorts Claudius back to earth, where he assists to his funeral.

4) The trial: in the Underworld (13)

Claudius is lead into the Underworld and he is judged by Aeacus.

Kehoe has argued for the existence of mimes constituted by more than a single scene and involving a conspicuous number of characters.<sup>199</sup> He has shown that in several cases, it is possible to reconstruct mimes with four scenes, which matches Fantham’s division of the scenes of the *Apocolocyntosis*.

Purcell has suggested that the *Apocolocyntosis* may have been “part of the text performed by whichever *mimus* appeared at Claudius’ funeral”.<sup>200</sup> Purcell’s hypothesis relies on the evidence of the existence of the practice of funerary mimes, but it is not possible to establish what degree of comic hostility was

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<sup>198</sup> Fantham (1988-89) 160.

<sup>199</sup> Kehoe (1984) 89-106.

<sup>200</sup> Purcell (1999) 182-83.

allowed.<sup>201</sup>

It remains a matter for debate as to whether the *Apocolocyntosis* was first conceived as a mime; nonetheless, it is worth pointing out that several mimic elements can be detected in the satire with a good degree of confidence.

Thus, Claudius's depiction, with the emphasis on his physical and mental deformities, seems much indebted to mime, which made heavy use of such grotesque characterisations; this feature is attested by several statuettes representing mimic actors which present grotesquely and emphatically distorted facial and bodily features.<sup>202</sup> As to Claudius's mental and physical defects: the emperor is lame (I, 11 *non passibus aequis*; V, 6 *pedem dextrum trahere*; V, 14 *insolitum incessum*); his utterances are unintelligible since he stammers (V, 7-9 *respondisse nescio quid perturbato sono et voce confusa; non intellegere se linguam eius*; V, 14-16 *ut vidit novi generis faciem, insolitum incessum, vocem nullius terrestris animalis sed qualis esse marinis beluis solet, raucam et implicatam*; VI, 12 *quid diceret nemo intellegebat*); he shakes his head and his hands at all times (V, 6 *nescio quid illum minari, assidue enim caput movere*; VI, 13 *illo gestu solutae manus, et ad hoc unum satis firmae*); he is irascible by nature (VI, 11-12 *excandescit hoc loco Claudius et quanto potest murmure irascitur*); overall, his outward appearance is more that of a monster than of a human (V, 16-17 *diligentius intuenti visus est quasi homo*), so much so that Hercules himself is at first sight scared (V, 12-13 *tum Hercules primo aspectu sane perturbatus est, ut qui etiam non omnia monstra timuerit*).

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<sup>201</sup> A funerary inscription (*CIL* VI 4886) attests the existence of an imitator of the emperor Tiberius (*Caesaris lusor*); it has been suggested that this imitator was the mime who impersonated the emperor at his funeral; Suetonius gives evidence that an *archimimus* impersonated Vespasian at his funeral (*Vesp.* 19): *Sed et in funere Favor archimimus personam eius ferens imitansque, ut est mos, facta ac dicta vivi...* See Sumi (2002) 559-85 for a discussion of "funerary mimes" who impersonated the emperors at their funeral and mimed their life.

<sup>202</sup> Richter (1913) 149-56.

Seneca clearly casts Claudius in the mimic role of the fool from the very opening of the satire, where he is presented as a “born fool” (I, 5-7 *ille, qui verum proverbium fecerat, aut regem aut fatuum nasci oportere*). Stupidity was the distinguishing feature of one of the most popular of mimic characters, the *stupidus/μωρός*. References to Claudius’ dullness are insisted upon in the satire over and over again: Hercules bids him to stop playing the fool (VII, 1 *tu desine fatuari*); he fears that Claudius may have in reserve for him the blow of a fool (VII, 19 *μωροῦ πληγὴν*; VIII, 3). The names of the two companions chosen by Clotho to keep company to Claudius in death, Augurinus and Baba, seem to be selected because they were typically associated with fools; a passage in Seneca’s epistles attests that the name Baba proverbially had such a connotation (15, 9 *quam tu nunc vitam dici existimas stultam? Babae et Isionis?*);<sup>203</sup> scholars have remarked that the names appear in alphabetical order and seem thus to paradigmatically signify that Augurinus, Baba, and Claudius are the ABC of foolishness;<sup>204</sup> Claudius’ life itself is said to be *stolida* (IV, 2 *abrupit stolidae regalia tempora vitae*); the climax of Claudius’ foolishness is then represented by him having impersonated the *Saturnalicus princeps* all his life (VIII, 7-8 *cuius mensem toto anno celebravit Saturnalicus princeps*); here Seneca not only emphasises that Claudius always behaved like a clown prince, but he also hints at the fact that the reversal of roles was a constant feature of his reign. Thus, similarly to the reversal of roles enacted in mimes, in which the cunning slave dexterously deceives his master and the adulterous wife her husband, so the *princeps* Claudius has always been deceived by his canny freedmen and wives.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Paschal (1939) 10.

<sup>204</sup> Purcell (1999) 182.

<sup>205</sup> Generally speaking, scholars think that the reference here is to Claudius’ addiction to banquets and dicing.

The mention of the *pantomimus* Mnester in the satire (XIII, 4) can be interpreted in this light. Mnester was for many years Messalina's lover and all the populace in Rome was well aware of this, apart, it seems, from Claudius who, compelled by his treacherous wife, even commanded Mnester to obey Messalina's bidding. He was then put to death by Claudius shortly after Messalina's disgrace.

Seneca's characterisation of Claudius as the popular mimic fool may have been prompted by the fact that Claudius's dullness had become proverbial, as is attested by a satirical pamphlet about Claudius entitled the "Elevation of the fool" (*μωρῶν ἐπανάστασις*) circulating in Rome during the emperor's lifetime.<sup>206</sup>

According to Suetonius, Claudius' widespread reputation of foolishness was perpetuated even after his death by Nero, who never ceased to make jokes about his predecessor's stupidity (*Nero*, 33, 1: *nam et morari eum desisse inter homines producta prima syllaba iocabatur...*).<sup>207</sup>

Furthermore, the title itself of the satire, *Apocolocyntosis*, is to be connected with stupidity.<sup>208</sup> In fact, the most probable meaning of the word *apocolocyntosis* is "metamorphosis into a gourd" or "gourdification", and it is made up in analogy to "apotheosis", transformation into a god, deification. Thus, as human beings enacting high and almost divine values are transformed into gods, in a similar, though opposite, process, Claudius, whose intrinsic and distinguishing quality is stupidity, is transformed into the very symbol of it, a gourd.<sup>209</sup> That the gourd is

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<sup>206</sup> Suetonius, *Claudius*, 2, 2; 3, 2; 15, 4; 38, 3: *Ac ne stultitiam quidem suam reticuit simulatamque a se ex industria sub Gaio, quod aliter evasurus perventurusque ad susceptam stationem non fuerit, quibusdam oratiunculis testatus est; nec tamen persuasit, cum intra breve tempus liber editus sit, cui index erat μωρῶν ἐπανάστασις, argumentum autem stultitiam neminem fingere.*

<sup>207</sup> The pun lies on *mōrari* (to linger) and *mōrari* (to be a fool).

<sup>208</sup> The title *Apocolocyntosis* is only attested by Cassius Dio (60, 35, 2 ff.) who attributes a satire thus entitled to Seneca. The medieval title of the satire in the manuscript tradition is *Ludus de morte Divi Claudii*.

<sup>209</sup> Pace Eden (1984) 3: "It must be stressed here that there is no evidence that κολοκύντη and cucurbita necessarily conveyed an implication of stupidity". In Italian, expressions such as "zucca

associated with foolishness and vacuity is attested by two passages, one in Petronius and the other in Apuleius.<sup>210</sup> As Coffey has rightly remarked, Seneca “chose the pumpkin as the means of ridiculing Claudius’ divinity on the grounds that it would be difficult to think of anything more lacking in positive characteristics than a pumpkin”.<sup>211</sup>

Moreover, that the satire stands as a mimic travesty of deification is explicitly stated by the contrast made between deification and the farcical imitation of it as presented in the *fabam mimum* (IX, 12-13 *magna res erat deum fieri: iam Fabam mimum fecisti*).<sup>212</sup> The *fabam mimum* is just mentioned here and by Cicero (*Ad Att.* I, 16, 13) and it is not clearly known what the “Bean” mime was about; nonetheless, since in both the Senecan and Ciceronian passages the “Bean” mime is contrasted with apotheosis, it is plausible to infer that the “Bean” mime dealt with the “meanest and most risible form of survival after death”.<sup>213</sup>

As to thematic influences, motifs such as the trial and the descent to the Underworld are attested in mimes and may well be derived from them. Several

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vuota”, “zucca dura”, or “non avere sale in zucca” are proverbially used for singling out someone’s stupidity.

<sup>210</sup> Petronius (*Satyricon*, 39, 12): in the passage Trimalchio explains the kind of people born under each sign of the Zodiac; he says that under the Aquarius (the Water Carrier) innkeepers and numbskulls are born (*in aquario [sc. nascuntur] copones et cucurbitae*); as the innkeepers dilute wine with water, so the numbskulls have a diluted brain, which means that they are stupid. In Italian, the dialectal expressions “vino annacquato” and “avere il cervello annacquato” have the same meaning; Apuleius *Met.* 1, 15, 2: *nos cucurbitae caput non habemus ut pro te moriamur* (*cucurbitae* is genitive of definition).

<sup>211</sup> Coffey (1976) 168.

<sup>212</sup> See Eden (1984) 109. This type of mime is not otherwise known apart from the mention of it found in the Senecan passage (*famam/fama mimum*) and in Cicero (*Ad Att.* I, 16, 13), which has *fabam mimum* instead of *famam/fama mimum* as in Seneca: *sed heus tu, videsne consulatum illum nostrum, quem Curio antea ἀποθέωσιν vocabat, si hic factus erit, fabam mimum futurum?*; see Allen (1959) 1-8 for a discussion of the Ciceronian passage; Watt (1955) 496-500 has proposed to emend *famam/fama* in *Phasma*, which is the attested title of a mime by Catullus.

<sup>213</sup> Eden (1984) 109 with Watt (1964) 251 ff.; in relation to a mimic antecedents of Seneca’s *Apocolocyntosis*, Laberius’ *Cancer*, which seem to have consisted in a parody of the Pythagorean doctrine of transmigration of souls, may stand as such. See Bonaria (1965) 42-3 and Giancotti (1967) 55-6. A passage in the *De ira* (II, 11, 3) attests that Seneca was familiar with Laberius’ mimes.

ancient writers give evidence that trials were a very popular subject in mimes,<sup>214</sup> in relation to this, a funerary inscription found in the *columbarium* in the Vigna Codini in Rome and dedicated most probably to a mimic actor (*lusor mutus*) bears evidence that the role of barrister (*causidicus*) is not only attested in mimes, but also that such a character was one of the most important in mimes; in fact, the deceased performer of Villa Codini is remembered and praised for having discovered how to imitate barristers:

Caesaris lusor  
mutus et argutus imitator  
Ti. Caesaris Augusti qui  
primus invenit causidicos imitari.<sup>215</sup>

The theme of the descent to the Underworld is also a favourite one in mimic performances and two mimes of Laberius seem to have dealt with the topic (*Necyomantia* and *Lacus Avernus*).

In the *Apocolocyntosis*, the trial-scene is set in Aeacus' tribunal in the Underworld (XIV, 1 *ducit illum ad tribunal Aeaci*); Peditio Pomponius acts as the prosecutor and Publilius Petronius as the defence-counsel, to whom Aeacus does not grant a word, since, just after having heard the prosecution, he condemns Claudius straightaway. Claudius is condemned to play dice using a dice-box with a hole in it (XIV, 19-20 *tum Aeacus iubet illum alea ludere pertuso fritillo*).

Suddenly, Gaius Caligula appears and claims Claudius as his runaway slave; he produces witnesses who testify to having seen Claudius being beaten by Gaius with whips, canes, and fisticuffs (XV, 10 *producit testes, qui illum viderant ab illo*

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<sup>214</sup> See Reynolds (1946) 84: Philo (*Legatio ad Gaium* 358 ff.); Petronius (106-107); the mime *Laureolous* may have very plausibly presented a trial-scene; Apuleius (*Met.* 10, 2-12); Origen (*Ep. ad Afric. de Hist. Sus.* II = Migne, P.G. XI 73 ff.); Ammianus Marcellinus (30, 4, 21); Choricus of Gaza (*Apologia mimorum*, 30).

<sup>215</sup> ILS 5225 [=CIL VI 4886]. See Purcell (1999) 181-93.

*flagris, ferulis, colaphis vapulantem*); on the basis of this evidence, Aeacus hands Claudius over to his master who employs him as secretary for petitions.

Such a conclusion has a pronounced mimic quality; Claudius is presented as a runaway slave and the reference to beating and slapping, one of the most common and trivial ingredient of mimes, is an indisputable mark that Seneca chose to represent Claudius, both in life and death, as a character of the mimes.

### 1.2.2.6 Mime in Petronius' *Satyricon*

The most remarkable feature of the *Satyricon* is its pronounced composite nature; it is made up of a generic mixture and is irreducible to a single and prominent genre. Petronius drew the material for its novel form from several different genres such as Menippean Satire, Milesian tale, and the mime.<sup>216</sup> As to the influence of mime, the prominence of mimic elements in Petronius' *Satyricon* was first underlined by the Christian apologist Marius Mercator (late IV early V century) who, in his attack against the emperor Julian, compared the mimic licentiousness of his verses to those, among others, of Petronius:

Erubesce, infelicissime, in tanta linguae scurrilis, vel potius mimicae  
obsenitate. Vulgares tu dignus audire acclamationes: unus tu, unus  
Philistion, unus Latinorum Lentulus, unus tibi Marullus comparandus;  
namque Martialis et Petronii solus ingenia superasti.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Abbot (1911) 257-270: "the romance of Petronius...may be related to the epic, to the serious heroic romance, to the bourgeois story or adventure developed out of the rhetorical exercise, to the prologue of comedy, to the verse-mélange of comedy or the mime, or to the prose-poetical Menippean satire"; Conte (1996) 130 argues convincingly that the most salient feature of Petronius' *Satyricon* is its creativity which cannot be fixed in a category of genre, since the very first aim of the work is the accumulation of different languages, the grafting of a genre onto another one, the inexhaustible contamination of diverse literary forms. Zeitlin (1971) 631-84 has remarked that the generic anarchy of the *Satyricon* is, paradoxically, the cipher of its artistic integrity.

<sup>217</sup> Marius Mercator, *Lib. Subnot. in verba Juliani* 4.1 = Migne, P.L. 48, 126-7. See Sullivan (1968) 112-3.

In the twelfth century, John of Salisbury (*Polycraticus* 3, 8) summarised the very essence of Petronius' *Satyricon* with the statement that *fere totus mundus ex Arbitri nostri sententia mimum videtur implere* and *fere totus mundus, iuxta Petronium, exerceat histrionem*.

The presence of elements borrowed from the mimic and pantomimic stage in Petronius has been established since Collignon's seminal work on the *Satyricon*.<sup>218</sup>

Despite the general agreement in relation to the influence of mime in the *Satyricon*, scholars give different evaluations of the extent of such an influence; these range from considering the mime as the primary "formative" genre to arguing that mime was one, among others, of the constitutive genres of Petronius' *Satyricon*.<sup>219</sup> According to Sandy, elements such as the "fondness for certain stock-characters", the "treatment of sex with *nova simplicitas*", the "inclusion of literary parody and the depreciation of elevated poetry" are clearly mimic; in addition to this, stylistic features such as the mingling of prose and verse and the unparalleled range of tone, subject, and speech can be ascribed to mime.<sup>220</sup> Moreover, the reason which sets in motion the novel is the wrath of the god Priapus, a figure prominent in the mimes (obviously, the theme of the wrath of a divinity is an overt parody of an epic commonplace).<sup>221</sup> The novel is actually constituted by a number of episodes loosely connected one to the other and most of them present situations which are clearly derived from the mime. What follows is a tentative list.

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<sup>218</sup> Collignon (1892) 273-83; Preston (1915) 260-69; Sandy (1974) 329: "Petronian studies...agree almost unanimously that Roman theatre, especially mimes, and its tastes, techniques, and concerns have left many recognizable traces throughout the *Satyricon*".

<sup>219</sup> See Walsh (1970) 24-31.

<sup>220</sup> Sandy (1974) 324-43.

<sup>221</sup> Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 6, 75.

### **The Quartilla-mime (16. 1-26.6): a Priapus-mime?**

As Sandy has remarked, the Quartilla episode is “unusually rich in mimic associations, most notably in the clause: *omnia mimico risu exsonuerunt* (19.1)”.<sup>222</sup> Panayotakis has argued that the episode can be read as the narrative equivalent of a three-scene mimic stage-piece according to the different rooms which serve as setting: 1) the *cella* in the *deversorium* (16-21); 2) the *triclinium* (21.5-26.3); 3) the *cubiculum* (26.3-26.6).<sup>223</sup> The piece’s eminently mimic character is provided by the presence of songs and dance, studied gesturing and flamboyant laughter, sex and slapstick (as in the episode of the Syrian thieves who attempt to steal valuables while the guests are asleep).

Quartilla, the alleged priestess of Priapus, basically acts as the *archimima* whose instructions make the skit unfold. Quartilla is presented as performing a ritual in honour of the god Priapus (*sacrum*), which Encolpius, Giton, and Aschyltos are accused to have disrupted, as Quartilla’s veiled maid let them know (16). As the episode develops, it becomes clear that the protagonists of the novel are not witnessing any religious ceremony, but have simply got involved in an orgy. Then the veiled Quartilla theatrically enters the room (*intravit ipsa* 17), bursts into carefully arranged tears, and claims that she is worried that the three men may reveal to the profane the religious and secret devotions they saw in the chapel of Priapus. After being reassured that they will keep silent, Quartilla and her maids suddenly change their attitude and begin their sexual “exorcism” (19-20). To provide additional pleasure to the guests, Quartilla offers to them the services of her *cinaedi*, who first sing some obscene songs and then make themselves

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<sup>222</sup> Sandy (1974) 339-340. For the presence of the theme of the *cena* in Roman satire and its legacy on Petronius’ *Cena Trimalchionis* see Shero (1923) 126-143.

<sup>223</sup> See Panayotakis (1995) 31-51.

sexually available to the guests.<sup>224</sup>

The last act of the episode stages the mock-marriage between seven-year-old Pannychis and sixteen-year-old Giton (25-26). The mock-marriage is explicitly defined as *mimicae nuptiae*; the pseudo-marriage motif seems to have been a stock theme in mimes; a mime by Laberius and an Atellan farce by Pomponius were entitled *Nuptiae*.<sup>225</sup>

### **The *Cena Trimalchionis* (26):**

The theatricality of the *Cena Trimalchionis* has long since been underlined by scholars;<sup>226</sup> in fact, the *Cena* basically develops as a spectacle constituted by a succession of different performances acted by professionals of the stage (the scissor/essedarius 36: *processit statim scissor et ad symphoniam gesticulatus ita laceravit obsonium, ut putares essedarium hydraule cantante pugnare; Petauristarii* 53; *Homeristai* 59; the *comoedi* recite a medley of Atellan farce and Virgilian epic 68; 79), the household slaves (*puer Alexandrinus* 68; Habinnas's slave 68; Massa 69; the cook Daedalus 70), and finally by Trimalchio himself (he sings a *canticum* from the *Laserpicarius* mime 35: *atque ipse etiam taeterrima voce de Laserpicario mimo canticum extorsit*). Trimalchio sings the songs of Menecrates 73; he recites verses of the mimographer Publilius Syrus 55 and imitates the mimic actor himself 52).<sup>227</sup> The *cena* is framed by continuous

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<sup>224</sup> Rostovtzeff (1937) 87-91 interprets a scene on a bowl now in the Louvre where slaves sexually arouse a donkey as "a well-known scene of a famous mime"; Sandy (1974) 340 argues that the "attempts made by the *cinaedus* to arouse Ascyrtos and Encolpius are strikingly similar" to that of the bowl of the Louvre.

<sup>225</sup> See also Seneca the Elder, *Contr.* 2, 4, 5: *vere mimicae nuptiae <in> quibus ante in cubiculum rivalis venit quam maritus*; pseudo-Quintilian, *Dec.* (ed. C. Ritter, 139, 21-22): *ecquid semoto illo nuptiarum mimo atque inani tantummodo nomine virum esse cogitatis et dignum, qui abdicetur, quod hominem non occiderit?*; Bonaria (1965) 117-18.

<sup>226</sup> For an analysis of the *Cena Trimalchionis* see Sandy (1974) 330-39; Rosati (1983) 213-27; Panayotakis (1995) 52-109.

<sup>227</sup> For a discussion about the authenticity of the lines of Publilius quoted by Trimalchio see: Skutch (1959) 1923-24; Giancotti (1967) 238-74; Sandy (1976) 286-87.

musical accompaniment,<sup>228</sup> the slaves sing while attending to their duties (31 *Ac ne in hoc quidem tam molesto tacebant officio, sed obiter cantabant... Paratissimus puer non minus me acido cantico exceptit, et quisquis aliquid rogatus erat ut daret...*). This gives the impression to Encolpius that the whole affair resembles more an actor's dance than a gentleman's dining-room (31 *pantomimi chorum, non patris familiae triclinium crederes*). Trimalchio theatrically enters to music (32 *...cum ipse Trimalchio ad symphoniam allatus est*); the different courses are introduced or taken away as well to musical accompaniment (33 *accessere continuo duo servi et symphonia strepente scrutari paleam coeperunt*; 34 *cum subito signum symphonia datur et gustatoria pariter a choro cantante rapiuntur*; 36 *Haec ut dixit, ad symphoniam quattuor tripudiantes procurrerunt superioremque partem repositorii abstulerunt*).

Sandy has argued that “the *Cena Trimalchionis* simply cannot be accounted for in the traditions of Menippean satire” and has claimed that mime, instead, “may have provided the germ of a burlesque *convivium* replete with brummagem and bungled erudition”.<sup>229</sup> For what concerns *cenae* as a common theme in Roman satire by which Petronius could have been inspired, Sandy has convincingly argued that features such as the “extended dramatization and exuberance of character and incident that distinguish it” are lacking in the satirical *cenae*, while these very elements seem to appear eminently mimic.<sup>230</sup> As to the sources of mimic *cenae*, Pliny and Jerome possibly provide evidence to support that the banquet featured in mimes.<sup>231</sup> The passage in Jerome (*Ep.* 52, 8, 3) deals with a quotation of a lost speech of Cicero in which the orator blames the credulity of

<sup>228</sup> For the role of music in the *Cena* see Panayotakis (1995) 60 n. 19 who quotes the work of: Sandy (1974), 331; Bonaria (1982) 136-8; Rosati (1983) 217; Horsfall (1989b) 197-8.

<sup>229</sup> Sandy (1974) 342.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibidem* 337-38.

<sup>231</sup> See Giaccotti (1967) 119-28.

uneducated people who uncritically believe what they see on stage. To illustrate this, Cicero gives the example of the overt anachronism of a theatrical piece entitled *Convivia poetarum ac philosophorum* which stages a discussion between the non-contemporary Euripides and Menander, Socrates and Epicurus. Cicero does not specify what sort of performance he is referring to, but the hypothesis that the *convivia* was a mimic performance is suggested by the fact that the performance is described as unsophisticated; a passage in Pliny (*Naturalis Historia*, VIII, 209) seems to provide further evidence for the presence of the theme in mime:

Hinc censoriarum legum paginae, interdictaque cenis abdomina, glandia, testiculi, vulvae, sincipita verrina, ut tamen Publili mimorum poetae cena, postquam servitutem exuerat, nulla memoretur sine abdomine, etiam vocabulo suminis ab eo inposito.

Pliny states that in every dinner (*cena*) given by the mimographer Publilius the belly of a sow always features among the dishes he offered and to which he gave the name of *sumen* (sow or hog).<sup>232</sup> Skutsch has interpreted *cena* as a staged mime by Publilius, possibly entitled *Sumen*, and not as a reference to the mimographer's private life. Additional evidence of *mimic convivia* is to be found in a passage by Choricus (*Apologia mimorum*, 110), in which he reports that the host and his guest as well as banqueters more generally were mimic roles.

### **The sea-trip and shipwreck on the way to Croton<sup>233</sup>**

The adventures on board Licha's ship experienced by Encolpius, Giton, and Eumolpus present two motifs which are derived from the mime; the first one, the

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<sup>232</sup> The word is employed by Plautus: *Curc.* 2, 3, 44; *Ps.* 1, 2, 33; *Capt.* 3, 4.

<sup>233</sup> See Collignon (1892) 276-9; Panayotakis (1995) 136-57.

motif of sea-adventures, which was a recurring one in almost all of the surviving Greek romances, was also popular in the mimes.<sup>234</sup> Gellius attests that one of the character in Laberius' *Anna Peranna* was a *gubernius* (steersman);<sup>235</sup> in his reconstruction of the plot of Laberius' *Anna Peranna*, Giacotti has suggested that the mime may have included a sea-trip; he based this assumption on the account found in Ovid's *Fasti* (III, 544) which narrates a sea-trip undergone by Anna Peranna to escape Iarbas' invasion of Carthage (565-6 *nacta ratem comitesque fugae pede labitur aequo/moenia respiciens, dulce sororis opus*); the presence of a steersman (586 *navita*; 589 *pugnante magistro*; 593/594 *nec iam moderator habenis/utitur*) also in Ovid's account reasonably corroborates Giacotti's reconstruction of the plot of the *Anna Peranna*.<sup>236</sup> A passage in Seneca's *De ira* (2, 2, 4-5) also illustrates the popularity of the sea-trip as a theme in the mimes:

Quae non sunt irae, non magis quam tristitia est, quae ad conspectum mimici naufragii contrahit frontem, non magis quam timor, qui Hannibale post Cannas moenia circumsidente lectorum percurrit animos....

Moreover, in the Charition-mime (II AD), a sea-trip is featured (105-107) which, as in the case of Anna Peranna, is a means to escape enemies.

The second motif is that of the trial (106-107). A trial-scene features in the second mime of Herodas, in which a pimp has to defend himself in a court. Panayotakis has suggested that a court-scene may have featured in the Laureolus-mime (usually dated to the age of Caligula), which could have taken place before the

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<sup>234</sup> The P. Berol. 13927 (= Manteuffel, 1930, no. 17; Wiemke 192 ff.) contains a list of stage-properties for mimes which includes ship's tackle.

<sup>235</sup> Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, 16, 7, 10: (Laberius) in *Anna Peranna* "gubernium" pro "gubernatore" dicit.

<sup>236</sup> Giacotti (1967) 63-65.

crucifixion of the brigand.<sup>237</sup> Apuleius describes a trial-scene in an episode of his *Metamorphoses* which is overtly indebted to the mime (10, 2-12).<sup>238</sup> Choricus of Gaza attests that a trial constituted the finale of the adultery-mime at least in his age (*Apologia Mimorum*, 30).

**The Fugitive Millionaire-mime (117):**<sup>239</sup> “*Quid ergo*”, inquit *Eumolpus*, “*cessamus mimum componere?*”

After having been shipwrecked in an unknown location, Encolpius and his friends finally come to know from an old man that the city they see on the top of the mountain is Croton. They then question the farm-bailiff about how people earn their living in such an old and famous city; the old man replies with a monologue full of blame in which he informs our heroes of the contemporary practise at Croton where the means of one’s support is earned by a single activity: legacy-hunting (*sed quoscunque homines in hac urbe videritis, scitote in duas partes esse divisos. Nam aut captantur aut captant*).<sup>240</sup> Because of this, Eumolpus has the brilliant idea of constructing a mime, in which he plays the part of the rich man at the point of death and his friends act as his assistants. Eumolpus casts himself as the *dominus gregis* (*facite ergo me dominum*) and instructs his troupe about the plot of the skit and the roles everyone is going to play: Encolpius and

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<sup>237</sup> Panayotakis (1995) 153. For the Laureolus-mime see Suetonius (*Gaius*, 57) who reports that such a mime was performed on the day of Caligula’s death (41 AD): *et cum in Laureolo mimo, in quo actor proripiens se ruina sanguinem vomit, plures secundarum certatim experimentum artis darent, cruore scaena abundavit*.

<sup>238</sup> See Wiemken (1972) 139 ff.; Steinmetz (1982) 367 ff.

<sup>239</sup> For evidence of the popularity of the theme see: Cicero, *Phil.* 2, 65: *in eius igitur viri copias cum se subito ingurgitasset, exsultabat gaudio persona de mimo, “modo egens, repente dives”. Sed, ut est apud poetam nescio quem, “Male parta male dilabuntur”*; Seneca, *Epistulae*, 114, 6: *hunc esse qui [in] tribunali, in rostris, in omni publico coetu sic apparuerit ut pallio velaretur caput exclusis utrimque auribus, non aliter quam in mimo fugitivi divitis solent. heres petitor* is the title of an Atellan farce by Pomponius.

<sup>240</sup> Fedeli (1988) 12 argues that the old man functions as the “Prologue” of the ensuing mime that Eumolpus and his friends will stage at Croton. He thus performs the function of providing the information needed for the following actions to ensue.

Giton will be the *mimi calvi*, and Corax the buffoon slave. The alleged mimic troupe acts out the script so well, that the legacy hunters in the city are so convinced by their performance that among the legacy-hunters a harsh competition starts to win Eumolpus' favour and his legacy.<sup>241</sup>

Although several generic strands form the *Satyricon*, the motif that life is a *theatrum mundi* lies at the heart of this work and the *mimicus risus*, as Panayotakis puts it, is indeed the leitmotif of the novel.<sup>242</sup>

### **1.2.2.7 The pantomime of the Judgment of Paris in Apuleius (*Met.* 10, 30-34)**

Apuleius' description of the pantomime of the judgment of Paris is an extremely important source for our knowledge of this genre since it is the only description of a pantomimic performance transmitted to us. Unfortunately, it is difficult to establish whether Apuleius' account faithfully records the real proceedings of pantomimic performances or whether his narration is a free adaptation of them. Scholars have argued that Apuleius' "Judgment of Paris" is not a straight translation of pantomime into narrative form since there are many deviances from what the pantomimic norm seems to have been and because of the authorial interventions present in the text.<sup>243</sup>

If we compare Apuleius' description with the information found in other sources referring to pantomime, some discrepancies arise. The first one is that pantomime is said to be a solo performance, while in the Apuleian version we find five principal dancers and a large number of extras. This divergence from the norm, if a norm existed at all, is explicable since the existence of pantomimic

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<sup>241</sup> See Panayotakis (1995) 157-60.

<sup>242</sup> Panayotakis (1994) 327.

<sup>243</sup> See Steinmetz (1982) 352-55 and Fick (1990) 225.

performances entailing a larger cast is attested by Plutarch (*Quaest. Conviv.* 711e) and Lucian (83).<sup>244</sup>

A major issue arises also in relation to the use of masks attested in pantomimic performances, since in Apuleius' description no explicit mention of the use of masks by the dancers is made and the text seems to describe facial expressions of the characters (30 *vultu honesta*); therefore, it has been inferred that the dancers are actually unmasked.<sup>245</sup>

Moreover, the pantomime described seems also to lack the usual accompanying libretto. In relation to this, I would suggest that the verbal description of the performance made by the author actually works as a substitute for the libretto. It mirrors the typical features of the libretto and, at the same time, distances itself through authorial intrusions emphasising the artificiality of the performance. The insistence upon the fictional nature of the spectacle could also in itself be meant to reflect, through a deliberately exaggerated mirroring, the overtly fictional character of pantomimic performances.<sup>246</sup> Several features contained in Apuleius' description are clearly attested as typical of the pantomimic genre. For instance, the charming beauty of the performance is in keeping with the enchanting nature of pantomimic performances as described by ancient writers.<sup>247</sup>

The narration focuses on a segment of the story of the judgement of Paris, namely

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<sup>244</sup> See Hall (2002) 29 who rightly claims that "there was no single correct way to stage a pantomime".

<sup>245</sup> However, an expression such as *vultu honesta* could refer to the mask rather than to the face of the dancer, and it could have been the way the libretto hinted at the actual mask of the dancer in a somehow implicit way.

<sup>246</sup> See Zimmerman (2000) 366-92; e.g.: *ad instar incluti montis illius; instructus fabrica; consitus; de manibus fabri; in modum Paridis, Phrygii pastoris; pecuarium simulabat magisterium; cognatione simili; indicabant; qui Paris videbatur; in deae lunonis speciem similis; scaenici pueri*; for the fictional nature of pantomimic performances see Ovid, *Remedia Amoris*, 751-66: *illic assidue ficti saltantur amantes*.

<sup>247</sup> See Lucian (72); the Judgement of Paris is attested as a very popular one in pantomimic performances (Lucian, 45); Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* (18, 10): *illud quod de tribus deabus, lunone scilicet et Minerva et Venere, quae pro malo aureo adipiscendo apud iudicem Paridem de pulchritudinis excellentia certasse narrantur et...inter theatricos plausus cantantur atque saltantur*; Tertullianus, *Apol.* (15, 2); see also Steinmetz (1982) 350 and n. 148.

the contest of Juno, Minerva, and Venus. The background motivation of the story is not mentioned; basically, the performance enacts a reduced and simplified version of the plot which focuses around its climactic moment. Moreover, the real interest of the performance resides in the artful gesticulations and movements of the dancers rather than the content of the story itself.

The characters played by the dancers are recognised by means of costuming and props; the character of Paris is identified through the tiara and the short cloak (30 *aurea tiara contecto capite; barbaricis amiculis umeris defluentibus*); Mercury through the wings, the caduceus, and the virgula, (30 *et inter comas eius aureae pinnulae cognatione simili sociatae prominebant; quem caduceum et virgula Mercurium indicabant*); Juno by a diadem and a sceptre (30 *nam et caput stringebat diadema candida, ferebat et sceptrum*); Minerva by a helmet topped with a olive wreath, a shield, and a spear (30 *caput contecta fulgenti galea, et oleaginea corona tegebatur ipsa galea, clypeum attollens et hastam quatiens*); Venus by a light and luxurious silky tunic (31 *pallio bombycino*).

The stage-setting of the action is provided (30):

Erat mons ligneus, ad instar incliti montis illius, quem vates Homerus Idaeum cecinit, sublimi[s] instructus fabrica, consitus virectis et vivis arboribus, summo cacumine, de manibus fabri fonte manante, fluvialis aquas eliquans.

The setting described implies an extraordinary structure representing Mount Ida planted with real trees (30 *summo cacumine, consitus virectis et vivis arboribus*) and a fountain pouring water (30 *de manibus fabri fonte manante, fluvialis aquas eliquans*) where goats are shown browsing the grass (30 *capellae pauculae tondebant herbulas*).

Now, it is attested that such ambitious structures could be staged, but they did not constitute “a representational norm for the genre”.<sup>248</sup> In addition to this, the fact that the stage-setting is actually mirrored through the conventional literary device of an *ecphrasis topou* of a *locus amoenus* seems to me a sign that, in most cases, the stage-setting was primarily constituted by a verbal scenery conjured up by the words of the libretto. Moreover, the narrator’s claim that Mount Ida represented is not the real one, but that described by Homer (30 *ad instar incliti montis illius, quem vates Homerus Idaeum cecinit*) and the use of epic phrasing (30 *summo cacumine; virectis; fonte manante*) seems to point in this direction.<sup>249</sup> It is hence possible to suggest that the verbal scenery evoked by the libretto may have employed famous and familiar descriptions of *loci amoeni* as well as *horridi* depending on the story enacted. Such an appropriation would have been a useful tool because of the familiarity of the audience with such descriptions; moreover, the fact that the landscape portrayed may have been more imaginary and thus evocative than strictly real is absolutely in keeping with the essence of pantomime itself whose charm consisted mainly in the allusive and evocative power of the dancer’s movements.

After having provided the setting, five main characters appear on stage in succession: Paris, Mercury, Juno, Minerva, and Venus. Their swift entrances are stylistically marked by the initial position of the verbs introducing them: *adest* (Mercury); *insequitur* (Juno); *inrupit* (Minerva); *introcessit* (Venus); *influent* (Graces and Hours); the verbs also indicate the characteristic ways in which the characters move: the epiphany-like appearance and disappearance of Mercury is illustrated by the verbs *adest/facessit*; his swift and elegant dance steps are

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<sup>248</sup> See Lada-Richards (2007) 39-40.

<sup>249</sup> See Zimmerman (2000) 366-69.

indicated by *saltatorie procurrrens* and *protinus gradum scitule referens*,<sup>250</sup> Minerva's impetuous gait is illustrated by *inrupit*; the flowing quality of the Graces and Hours by *influunt*.

The first character appearing on stage is the dancer playing the role of Paris, who pretends to be guarding his herd on Mount Ida. There, he is reached by Mercury who gives him the golden apple to be awarded to the most beautiful of the goddesses. Then, the three dancers playing the role of the three goddesses make their entrance and dance in turn accompanied by their own entourage (Juno by Castor and Pollux; Minerva by the personifications of Terror and Metus; Venus by Cupids, Hours, and the Graces).

The diverse quality of the dancing of the three performers is emphasised by explicit statements about the different types of gesticulation and movements adopted by each:

Juno's movements are described as quiet and unaffected (31 *procedens quieta et inadfectata gesticulatione*); through lady-like nods she indicates to Paris what her reward would be if he would award her the prize (31 *nutibus honestis pastori pollicetur*);<sup>251</sup>

Minerva's eye and head movements as well as gestures, instead, are quick and jerky (31 *inquieta capite; oculis in aspectu[m] minacibus; citato et intorto genere gesticulationis*). The two personifications accompanying the goddess, Terror and Metus, exhibit themselves in war-like leaps (31 *nudis insultantes gladiis*).

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<sup>250</sup> *Ibidem* 371-72 remarks that the adverb *saltatorie* is attested only here, while the adjective *saltatorius* is attested only twice: Scip. min. orat. 20 and Cicero, in *Pisonem* X, 22: *cum collegae tui domus cantu et cymbalis personaret, cumque ipse nudus in convivio saltaret; in quo cum suum illum saltatorium versaret orbem, ne tum quidem fortunae rotam pertimescebat.*

<sup>251</sup> The nods of the head seem to play a relevant role in the dance vocabulary of pantomime (*honestis nutibus; nutu significans; adnutante capite*); compare Quintilian (11, 3, 182) which attests the use of nodding by actors at large: *Hic enim dubitationis moras, vocis flexus, varias manus, diversos nutus actor adhibebit. Aliud oratio sapit nec vult nimium esse condita: actione enim constat, non imitatione.*

The dance steps of Venus are slow, languid, and undulating (32):

...longe suavior Venus placide commoveri cunctantique lente vestigio  
et leniter fluctuante spi[n]nula[s] et sensim adnutante capite coepit  
incedere, mollique tiliarum sono delicatis respondere gestibus, et  
nunc mite coniventibus, nunc acre comminantibus gestire pupulis, et  
nonnumquam saltare solis oculis.

Similarly, the movements of the Hours and Graces accompanying the goddess are fluid and flowing (32 *influunt*).<sup>252</sup>

The dancer impersonating Venus concludes her solo by signifying the prize she will give to Paris through a motion of her arms (32 *nisu brachiorum polliceri videbatur*).

After the prize has been awarded to Venus by Paris, the dancers playing the roles of Juno and Minerva show their bitterness and rage (34 *tristes et iratis similes; indignationem repulsae gestibus professae*), while the dancer impersonating Venus manifests her happiness by leaping around the stage (34 *Venus vero gaudens et hilaris laetitiam suam saltando toto cum choro professa est*).

The representation is ended by the splitting open of the earth and the sinking of the wooden mount into the abyss. The puzzling sinking of the scenery seems a spectacular way, both in its visual and aural impact, to end the piece.

It is noticeable that Apuleius' description combines a detached and quite satirical attitude towards the performance, attained by his constant reminding of its artificiality and illusionary nature, with a portrayal of it which indulgently

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<sup>252</sup> See also the dance of Fotis (*Met.* 2, 7, 30, 20) which shows a similar wave-like quality: *illud cibarium vasculum floridis palmulis rotabat in circulum et in orbis flexibus crebra succutiens et simul membra sua leniter illubricans, lumbis sensim vibrantibus, spinam mobilem quatiens placide decenter undabat*. Compare the overall charming quality of Venus's solo with Ovid, *Amores* 2, 4, 29-30: *illa placet gestu numerosaque brachia ducit/et tenerum molli torquet ab arte latus* and Juvenal (*Satires*, 6, 63): *chironomom Ledam molli saltante Bathyllo*.

emphasises its beauty.<sup>253</sup>

The contradictory attitude seems to be the sign of a tension in Apuleius' vision (or Lucius') of the spectacle. In a way, the satirical stance seems constantly employed as a tool to maintain a detached and alert gaze; the need to constantly keep the gaze (and thus one's frame of mind) under control seems to be prompted by the need to prevent and avoid being absorbed by the charming and sweeping effect of the performance; therefore, even in this respect, Apuleius' description of the pantomimic enactment of the judgement of Paris is a faithful testimony of the almost ecstatic effect which such a spectacle could provoke and of its power to deeply affect the audience; such a characteristic is attested by the ancient writers at large and especially by the fierce opposition shown by the Church Fathers to pantomimic performances.<sup>254</sup>

Despite the well attested hostility shown by the Church Fathers towards mimic and pantomimic performances, appropriation of mimic elements is to be found even in Paul; his appropriation of mimic elements shows the extent to which the idiom of sub-literary genres constituted a common cultural currency, since the presence of such an idiom in a Christian writer is somehow paradoxical. According to Windisch, in one of his letters to the Corinthians (2, 11-12) Paul presents and characterises himself as the mimic fool so well known from the stage.<sup>255</sup>

On Windisch's line of thought, Welborn has remarked that Paul, in his own portrait as a fool, has combined several types of fools, such as the "leading slave" (11:21b-23), the "braggart warrior" (11: 24-27), the "anxious old man" (11: 28-

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<sup>253</sup> For a discussion of the emphasis on the beautiful quality of the performance see Zimmerman (1993) 143-161.

<sup>254</sup> See Webb (2005) 3-11.

<sup>255</sup> Windisch (1924) 316.

29), and “the learned impostor” (12: 1b-4).<sup>256</sup> It is interesting to underline that, in doing so, Paul may have had as inspiring model Seneca’s characterisation of Claudius as the mimic fool in the *Apocolocyntosis*.<sup>257</sup> Leaving aside the consideration of Paul’s agenda in presenting himself as the mimic fool, which do not concern us here, it is, instead, important to underline that his adoption of the popular theatre as a familiar background to convey his message provides evidence for the popularity of such a *milieu*. Therefore it is perhaps no coincidence that he employs allusion to the mimic stage in the Letters addressed to the inhabitants of Corinth, the same city in which the wanderings of Apuleius’ fictional character, Lucius, find a closure and the place where the many theatrical performances included in Apuleius’ novel take place. Corinth was indeed known for its lascivious costumes and for its addiction to gladiatorial contests and theatrical performances of mimes and pantomimes.<sup>258</sup> According to Mason, Apuleius chose Corinth for the “reputation of the city, which he employed as a symbol of the secular world and contrasted with the life of the devotee of Isis presented in the final book”.<sup>259</sup>

Because of this, Paul’s adoption of the mimic language only in his epistles addressed to the Corinthians can be interpreted as a strategic choice directly linked with the suitability of such a language for its inhabitants.

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<sup>256</sup> Welborn (1999) 137.

<sup>257</sup> Betz (1972) 82-3.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibidem* 162; on the theatrical life at Corinth see Engels (1990) 47-48.

<sup>259</sup> Mason (1971) 160.

## Chapter 2

### Pantomime and the structure of Seneca's tragedies

#### 2 Introduction

Several features of Seneca's plays contribute to what scholars unanimously observe to be a remarkably loose dramatic structure: the independence of individual scenes at the expense of the dramatic coherence of the whole;<sup>1</sup> the diversity of the episodes; the severe suspension of dramatic time produced by lengthy descriptions that do not advance the action of the main plot, conversely, the extreme acceleration of dramatic time due to the condensation of several actions in a brief span of time; the fluidity of setting; the abandonment of the unifying handling of the chorus; the lack of consistent indications of the characters' entrances and exits or, more generally, the relative scarcity of dramatic information; the prominence of monologues rather than dialogues. Regenbogen rightly described the result of this process as "dissolution of the dramatic structure".<sup>2</sup>

This chapter takes a detailed look at these controversial elements of Seneca's tragedies (all of which diverge from classical norms) and tries to provide support to the thesis that they may reflect Seneca's adoption of the aesthetics of pantomime, as defined in the previous chapter. After an overview of the structure of each play (2.1), I shall return in more detail to the above mentioned characteristics (2.2).

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<sup>1</sup> This is due to the lack of transitions and connections between the acts themselves or between single scenes within the acts.

<sup>2</sup> Regenbogen (1961) 430.

## 2.1 Systematic analysis of Seneca's tragedies<sup>3</sup>

### 2.1.1 *Hercules furens*

**Act 1 (1-124):** Juno **place:** in front of the royal palace of Thebes (134-35)

Juno is angered because of the presence in heaven of many illicit sons of Juppiter. She fears now that Hercules, the most detested of her stepsons, having successfully concluded the last task she has imposed on him, will attack heaven.

**Transition:** the entrance of the chorus is un-cued.

**Chorus I (125-204):** Dawn song.

**Transition:** the chorus announces the entrance of Megara and Amphitryon (202-04).

**Act 2 (205-523):** Amphitryon, Megara, Lycus

**Scene 1 (205-331):** Amphitryon, Megara

Amphitryon and Megara hope Hercules will soon return and save them from the threats of the usurper Lycus.

**Transition (329-31):** Lycus' entrance is announced by Megara.

**Scene 2 (332-523):** Lycus, Megara, Amphitryon

Lycus, wanting to legitimise his status as king of Thebes, intends to marry Megara, but she refuses his marriage offer. Having been rejected, Lycus sentences Hercules' whole family to death.

**Chorus II (524-91):** Hercules' labours.

**Transition:** Hercules' entrance is announced by Amphitryon (521-23); Theseus' one is un-cued (his presence on stage is made explicit only later in the act by Hercules who addresses him just before his exit. Most probably, Theseus is meant to enter on stage with Hercules).

**Act 3 (592-829):**

**Scene 1 (592-640):** Hercules, Amphitryon, Theseus, Megara (mute)

Hercules returns with Theseus from the Underworld. He comes to learn of the situation in Thebes and immediately leaves to confront Lycus.

**Transition:** Hercules announces his exit (637-40).

**Scene 2 (640-829):** Theseus, Amphitryon, Megara (mute)

Amphitryon asks Theseus to narrate Hercules' descent to the Underworld.

**Transition:** the entrance of the chorus is announced by Theseus (827-29).

**Chorus III (830-94):** song of praise for Hercules speculating on the frailty of human life.

**Transition:** the chorus announces Hercules' entrance (893-94); we must infer that Amphitryon, and Megara remain on stage during the choral song. As to Theseus, even though his exit is not cued, we must infer that he leaves the stage at some intervening point.

**Act 4 (895-1053):** Hercules, Amphitryon, Megara, chorus, sons of Hercules (mute), servants (mute)

**Scene 1:** Hercules, Amphitryon, Megara, chorus, sons of Hercules (mute), servants (mute)

Hercules returns from the killing of Lycus. He then prepares to make offerings to the gods. As he attends to the sacrifice, an attack of madness possesses him. Because of it, Hercules has hallucinatory experiences which make him confuse his own sons for Lycus' ones and his wife Megara for Juno, whom he kills one by one.

**Transition:** the entrance of the chorus is not announced.

**Chorus IV (1054-1137):** mourning song for Hercules

**Transition:** the entrance of Theseus is not cued

**Act 5 (1138-1344):** Hercules, Amphitryon, Theseus

**Scene 1:** Hercules, Amphitryon, Theseus

Having realised what he has done, Hercules threatens to commit suicide; the hero is restrained by the plea of his father Amphitryon and by Theseus who offers to take Hercules to Athens for purification from bloodguilt.

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<sup>3</sup> The tragedies are listed according to the order of the E manuscript tradition (*Hercules, Troades, Phoenissae, Medea, Phaedra, Oedipus, Agamemnon, Thyestes, Hercules*). The A manuscript tradition gives them in a different order and, in some cases, with different titles (*Hercules furens, Thyestes, Thebais, Hippolytus, Oedipus, Troas, Medea, Agamemnon, Octavia, Hercules Oetaeus*). Most editors adopt the order of E, but distinguish the two Hercules plays following A (*furens* and *Oetaeus*).

## 2.1.2 Trojan Women

**Act 1 (1-163):** Hecuba

**place:** at Hector's tomb

**Scene 1 (1-66):** Hecuba mourns over the fall of Troy.

**Transition:** no indication that the chorus has entered, but *lamenta cessant* (63) suggests that they have been moaning softly on stage.

**Chorus I (67-164):** Hecuba leads the chorus of Trojan women in a formal antiphonal lament for Troy, Hector, and Priam.

**Transition:** Talthibius' entrance is un-cued.

We have to infer that Hecuba exits at 164 and the chorus remains on stage.

**Act 2 (164-370):**

**place:** at Hector's tomb; from 203 in the Greek camp

Talthibius, chorus of Trojan women, Agamemnon, Pyrrhus, Chalcas

**Scene 1 (164-202):** Talthibius, chorus of Trojan women

Talthibius recounts to the chorus of Trojan Women the appearance of Achilles' ghost, demanding that Polyxena be sacrificed to him.

**Transition:** Pyrrhus' and Agamemnon's entrances are un-cued.

**Scene 2 (203-370):** Pyrrhus, Agamemnon, Chalcas

Pyrrhus and Agamemnon discuss Achilles' demand.

They afterwards summon Chalcas (351-52, appears 353) who proclaims that not only Polyxena but also Hector's son

Astyanax must be killed before the Greeks can sail.

**Transition:** the intervention of the chorus is un-cued.

**Chorus II (371-408):** reflective ode on the afterlife

**Transition:** Andromache's entrance is un-cued

**Act 3 (409-813):** Andromache, old man, Astyanax, Ulysses

**place:** at Hector's tomb

**Scene 1 (409-523):** Andromache, old man, Astyanax (mute)

Andromache, warned by her dead husband Hector in a dream hides her son Astyanax in Hector's tomb chamber.

**Transition:** Ulysses' entrance is cued; no information is provided of the movements of the old man.

**Scene 2 (524-813):** Andromache, Astyanax, Ulysses

Ulysses arrives to fetch the boy; Andromache almost convinces him that the boy is dead, but her nervousness betrays her. Ulysses drags the boy away.

**Transition:** the intervention of the chorus is un-cued.

**Chorus III (814-60):** the chorus lists all the different cities and regions in Greece to which the Trojan women may be sent.

**Transition:** all entrances are un-cued apart from that of Pyrrhus (enters 999 and exits 1003).

**Act 4 (861-1008):**

**place:** near Sigeum (931);  
battlefield and Achilles' tomb (893-95)?

**Scene 1 (861-1008):** Helen, Andromache, Hecuba, Polyxena, Pyrrhus

Helen is sent to collect Polyxena, on the pretext of preparing her for marriage. Unable to maintain the pretence, she reveals the truth. Finally Pyrrhus enters and silently drags Polyxena away.

**Transition:** the intervention of the chorus is un-cued.

**Chorus IV (1009-55):** the chorus reflects on the nature of grief which is more endurable when shared.

**Transition:** all entrances are un-cued.

**Act 5 (1056-1179):** Messenger, Hecuba, Andromache

**place:** by the shore

A messenger recounts at length the deaths of Astyanax and Polyxena.

### 2.1.3 *Phoenissae*

**Act 1 (1-319):** Oedipus, Antigone

**Place:** on or near Cithaeron

Oedipus's longing for death is restrained by Antigone who tries to convince her father to intervene to stop the strife between his sons, Polynices and Eteocles.

**Transition:** the entrance of the *nuntius* is unannounced.

**Act 2 (320-62):** Nuntius, Oedipus

A messenger, sent on behalf of the Thebans, asks Oedipus to halt the fraternal strife, but Oedipus not only refuses to do so, but also hopes that the brothers will attack each other.

**Transition:** the entrance of Jocasta and the *satelles* are unannounced. Antigone's movements are not indicated. Since a change of scene is required from the wildness of Cithaeron to the battlements of Thebes, Antigone should supposedly exit at some point and enters again to spur Jocasta to halt the fraternal strife (403-6).

**Act 3 (363-442):** Jocasta, *Satelles*, Antigone

**place:** on the battlements of Thebes; at 425-26 Jocasta moves to the battlefield;

Antigone and the *satelles* urge Jocasta on to go and reconcile the brothers.

**Transition:** the change of scene from the battlements to the battlefield, the setting of the next act, is described as it is taking place. The *satelles* describes Jocasta rushing down from the battlements and arriving at the battlefield where her sons are about to fight.

**Act 4 (443-664):** Jocasta, Polynices, Eteocles;

**place:** on the battlefield of Thebes

Jocasta urges her sons to stop the fight or kill her. She then addresses the two of them in turn and asks Polynices to withdraw from the battle and avoid staining himself with the crime to have attacked his own city. Polynices laments that in so doing Eteocles will not be punished for his crime, but Jocasta replies that being king of Thebes is a sufficient punishment. Eteocles closes the act with the statement that for him a kingship is worth any price.

### 2.1.4 *Medea*

**Act 1 (1-55):** Medea

**place:** in front of the palace of Corinth

**Scene 1 (1-55):** Medea

Medea, abandoned by Jason for Creusa, invokes the gods to assist her revenge.

**Transition:** the chorus' entrance is unannounced; Medea supposedly remains on stage since she hears the choral song (116 *occidimus: aures pepulit hymenaeus meas*).

**Chorus I (56-115):** Hymn for Jason's marriage to Creusa sung by the women of Corinth.

**Transition:** the nurse's entrance is unannounced.

**Act 2 (116-300):** Medea, nurse, Creon

**Scene 1 (116-49):** Medea

The hearing of the wedding song sharpens Medea's hatred; she is now resolved to destroy Creon who is guilty of having forced Jason, by means of his tyrannical power, to abandon her for Creusa.

**Transition:** the entrance of the nurse is unannounced.

**Scene 2 (150-178):** Medea, Nurse

The nurse, scared by Medea's resolve to avenge herself, tries to restrain and convince her to bend to the circumstances.

**Transition:** Creon's entrance is announced by Medea (177-78 *Sed cuius ictu regius cardo strepit?/Ipse est Pelasgo tumidus imperio Creon*).

**Scene 3 (179-300):** Medea, Creon, Nurse (mute)

Creon faces Medea and bids her to leave his kingdom immediately; Medea prays him to grant her one more day to prepare for exile; Creon reluctantly concedes it and leaves in haste to assist to the marriage rites.

**Transition:** Creon announces his exit (299-300); the entrance of the chorus is un-cued.

**Chorus II (301-79):** First argonautic ode (anapaests); the chorus is impersonal (*nefas Argonauticum*)

**Transition:** the chorus provides no clue about the presence or absence of Medea and the nurse.

**Act 3 (380-578):** Nurse, Medea, Jason

**Scene 1 (380-430):** Nurse, Medea

The nurse tries again to calm Medea's *furor*, but Medea cannot be restrained.

**Transition:** Jason's entrance is un-cued.

**Scene 2 (431-578):** Jason, Medea

Jason tries to justify and exculpate himself from Medea's accusations with the motivation that his new marriage is a means to protect their sons against Acastus. Medea, unable to convince Jason to flee again with her, feigns resignation.

**Transition:** Jason's exit is announced by Medea (560 *Discessit*); the intervention of the chorus is un-cued.

**Chorus III (579-669):** Second argonautic ode.

**Transition:** the chorus provides no clues about the presence or absence of Medea and the nurse.

**Act 4 (670-848):** Nurse, Medea, children (mute)      **place:** inside Medea's house from line 675-6.

*(Namque ut attonito gradu/evasit et penetrare funestum attigit)*

**Scene 1 (670-739):** Nurse

The nurse describes at length Medea's preparation of the poisonous concoction through which she will cause Creusa's and Creon's death.

**Scene 2 (740-848):** Medea

Medea invokes the gods of death and Hecate to assist her in the preparation of the poison.

**Transition:** the entrance (843-44) and exit (845-46) of the children is announced by Medea.

**Scene 3 (817-48):** Medea, Nurse (mute), children (mute).

Medea summons the nurse and orders her to bring in her children who have to deliver the poisonous robe to Creusa. **Transition:** the intervention of the chorus is un-cued.

**Chorus IV (849-878):** Medea maenad.

**Transition:** the entrance of the messenger is un-cued.

**Act 5 (879-1027):** Messenger, chorus, Nurse, Medea, children (mute), Jason, soldiers (mute)

**Scene 1 (879-90):** Messenger and chorus

The messenger reports that Creon and Creusa are dead and that the royal palace is on fire.

**Transition:** all entrances are un-cued.

**Scene 2 (891-970):** Nurse, Medea, children (mute)

The nurse compels Medea to escape; Medea kills one of her sons and, as soon as she hears Jason and the soldiers approaching, she climbs on the roof of the palace.

**Transition:** the entrance of Jason and the soldiers is announced by Medea (971-74).

**Scene 3 (971-1027):** Medea, Jason, children (mute), and soldiers (mute)

Medea is on the roof where she kills her second son and from there throws the dead bodies of her children to Jason; she then escapes in a chariot drawn by dragons.

### 2.1.5 *Phaedra*

**Act 1 (1-273):** Hippolytus, huntsmen (mute), Phaedra, Nurse

**Scene 1 (1-84):** Hippolytus, huntsmen

**place:** Attica

Hippolytus and his fellow hunters prepare for a hunt.

**Transition:** Phaedra's entrance is un-cued.

**Scene 2 (85-128):** Phaedra

**place:** royal palace at Athens

Phaedra soliloquises about the fierce and shameful love she feels for her stepson Hippolytus.

**Transition:** the entrance of the nurse is un-cued.

**Scene 3 (129-273):** Phaedra, Nurse

The nurse tries to bring Phaedra to her senses, but when she threatens suicide as the only possible solution, the nurse changes her attitude and promises to approach Hippolytus in order to soften the fierce mind of the young man.

**Transition:** the entrance of the chorus is un-cued.

**Chorus I (274-359):** ode on the universal sway of Love.

**Transition:** the chorus announce the return of the nurse (358-59).

**Act 2 (360-735):** chorus, Nurse, Phaedra, Hippolytus

**Scene 1 (360-405):** chorus, Nurse, Phaedra

Questioned by the chorus about Phaedra's condition, the nurse replies that the queen is in a pitiful state (360-83); as soon as Phaedra exits from the royal palace, her attitude reveals her frenzied state.

**Scene 2 (406-430):** Nurse

The nurse prays to the virgin goddess Diana to favour her undertaking.

**Scene 3 (431-588):** Hippolytus, Nurse

The nurse confronts and criticises Hippolytus for his contempt of love and sex and tries to convince him to tame his wild nature (435-482); Hippolytus gives a lengthy reply asserting that his way of life is pure and innocent and that he does not want to change it (483-564).

**Scene 4 (589-735):** Phaedra, Hippolytus, Nurse

An increasingly distraught Phaedra arrives and confesses to Hippolytus her love for him. Hippolytus is horrified by the revelation and almost ready to kill Phaedra with his sword. He then desists and runs away leaving his weapon behind him. The nurse resolves to accuse Hippolytus of rape and uses his sword as proof of his crime.

**Transition:** the intervention of the chorus is un-cued.

**Chorus II (736-834):** ode on beauty's brief span.

**Transition:** the entrance of Theseus is announced by the chorus (829-834).

**Act 3 (835-958):** Theseus, Nurse, Phaedra

**Scene 1:** Theseus, Nurse, Phaedra

Theseus returns to Athens from the Underworld and comes to know from the nurse Phaedra's decision to die; he confronts then the woman who confesses that her desire to die is caused because of Hippolytus' attempt at raping her. Having heard the news, Theseus curses his son with the last wish granted him by Neptune.

**Transition:** the entrance of the chorus is un-cued.

**Chorus III (959-90):** the orderly course of heavenly bodies is contrasted to the chaos of human life.

**Transition:** the chorus announce the messenger's entrance (989-990).

**Act 4 (991-1122):** messenger, Theseus

The messenger provides a lengthy description of Hippolytus' death (991-1122).

**Transition:** the entrance of the chorus is un-cued.

**Chorus IV (1123-55):** ode on the fickleness of fortune, of which Theseus is an example (1123-53).

**Transition:** Phaedra's entrance is announced by the chorus (1154-55).

**Act 5 (1156-1280):** Phaedra, Theseus, chorus

Phaedra confesses her guilt and commits suicide (*coram populo*); Theseus mourns over Hippolytus' mangled body.

## 2.1.6 *Oedipus*

**Act 1 (1-109):** Oedipus, Jocasta

**Place:** in front of the royal palace of Thebes

**Scene 1 (1-81):** Oedipus

Oedipus laments over the plague affecting Thebes. The king thinks that the fierce epidemic is a punishment Fate has disposed against him.

**Transition:** Jocasta's entrance is un-cued.

**Scene 2 (82-109):** Oedipus, Jocasta

Jocasta spurs Oedipus to set aside the laments and think and act in accordance with his kingly status.

**Transition:** the entrance of the chorus is unannounced.

**Chorus I (110-205):** ode on the effects of the plague at Thebes.

**Transition:** Creon's entrance is announced by the chorus (201-5).

**Act 2 (206-402):** Oedipus, Creon, Manto, Tiresias

**Scene 1 (206-90):** Oedipus, Creon

Oedipus questions Creon about the response of the Delphic oracle about the causes of the plague which affects Thebes. The response of the oracle is that the plague is caused by the presence in the city of Laius' murderer, who must be discovered and leave the city.

**Transition:** the entrance of Tiresias and Manto is announced by Creon (288-90); Creon's presence on stage in the next scene is not made explicit from the text; nonetheless, he must assist the necromancy of Laius since in the third act he will be in charge of delivering the response.

**Scene 2 (291-402):** Oedipus, Tiresias, Manto, Creon (mute)

Tiresias orders a divinatory sacrifice in order to name the murderer of Laius. The sacrifice proves ineffective and Tiresias decides to resort to the necromancy of Laius' ghost.

**Transition:** the intervention of the chorus is announced by Tiresias (401-2).

**Chorus II (403-508):** hymn of in honor of Bacchus.

**Act 3 (509-708):** Oedipus, Creon; attendants (mute)

**Scene 1:** Oedipus, Creon; attendants (mute)

Creon narrates at length the necromancy of Laius' ghost which reveals that Oedipus is the murderer. After the revelation, Creon is imprisoned.

**Transition:** Creon's exit is cued by Oedipus' order to his attendants to lead Creon in prison (707-8); the intervention of the chorus is un-cued.

**Chorus III (709-63):** the chorus does not believe that Oedipus is guilty, but that the plague is caused by the longstanding hatred of the gods towards Thebes.

**Transition:** the entrance of Jocasta is unannounced. She is possibly on stage since the opening of the Oedipus' speech who addresses her at 773-75.

**Act 4 (764-881):** Oedipus, Jocasta, Old man of Corinth, the shepherd Phorbas

**Scene 1 (764-83):** Oedipus, Jocasta

Shaken by Creon's accusation against him, past and confused memories begin to surface in Oedipus' mind; he begs Jocasta to help him clarify his confusion.

**Transition:** the entrance of the old man is unannounced.

**Scene 2 (784-844):** Oedipus, old man from Corinth, Jocasta

An old man from Corinth brings the news that Polybus, Oedipus's alleged father, has died and he is now called to the throne. Oedipus refuses the kingship because he is in dread of his mother Aerope; in order to dispel such fear, the old man reassures him that Aerope is not his true mother since he himself received the infant Oedipus from the hands of a shepherd.

**Transition:** the entrance of Phorbas is announced by Oedipus (838-40).

**Scene 3 (845-81):** Oedipus, Jocasta, old man from Corinth, the shepherd Phorbas.

The shepherd Phorbas mentioned by the old man happens to be present and is questioned about the truth of the old man's words which Phorbas confirms; finally Oedipus understands the truth.

**Transition:** the exit of Oedipus is announced by the character himself (880-81); all other exits are un-cued. The next brief intervention of the chorus is un-cued.

**Chorus IV (882-914):** the chorus praises a modest status in contrast with the dangers faced by a high status.

**Transition:** the entrance of the messenger is un-cued.

**Act 5 (915-1061):** messenger, chorus, Oedipus, Jocasta<sup>4</sup>

**Scene 1 (915-79):** messenger

A messenger narrates Oedipus' self-blinding.

**Choral interval (980-96):** the power of Fate.

**Scene 2 (997-1009):** Oedipus, chorus leader

Oedipus bursts into a brief monologue of satisfaction for the self-punishment he has inflicted on himself in retribution for his guilt.

**Transition:** the chorus leader announces the entrance of Jocasta (1004-9).

**Scene 3 (1010-61):** Oedipus, chorus leader, Jocasta.

Jocasta kills herself (*coram populo*) and Oedipus goes into exile.

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<sup>4</sup> The fifth act of the *Oedipus* has a peculiar structure even by Senecan standards. It is constituted by two scenes separated by a choral intervention (980-96); in no other Senecan play, a choral interlude features between the scenes of a single act. The first scene deals with the messenger's narration of Oedipus' self-blinding; the second scene, separated from the first by the chorus, presents the confrontation between the blind Oedipus and Jocasta which will lead to Jocasta's suicide (*coram populo*). The chorus leader, who is actively involved in this final unfolding of the dramatic action, fulfils the role of an external commentator more than that of a character; in fact, he is in charge of the description of the entrance of a frenzied Jocasta (1004-9) and of her final suicidal blow (1040-41).

### 2.1.7 Agamemnon

**Act 1 (1-56):** Thyestes' ghost

**place:** in front of the house of the Pelopids  
(6-7 *video paternos, immo fraternos lares./hoc est vetustum  
Pelopiae limen domus*)

**Scene 1 (1-56):** Thyestes' ghost

Thyestes' ghost announces that Agamemnon will return to Mycenae and will die at the hands of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus.

**Transition:** the entrance of the chorus is un-cued.

**Chorus I (57-107):** Ode on the mutability of Fortune.

**Transition:** the entrance of Clytemnestra and the nurse is un-cued.

**Act 2 (108-309):** Clytemnestra, Nurse, Aegisthus

**Scene 1 (108-124):** Clytemnestra

Clytemnestra, torn between contrasting feelings of loyalty to her husband Agamemnon and desire of avenging Agamemnon's sacrifice of their daughter Iphigenia and his infidelities, soliloquises.

**Scene 2 (125-225):** Clytemnestra, Nurse

The nurse attempts to restrain Clytemnestra from her plans of revenge against her husband Agamemnon.

**Transition:** Aegisthus' entrance is unannounced.

**Scene 3 (226-309):** Aegisthus and Clytemnestra

Aegisthus wins Clytemnestra's doubts and spurs her to prepare to act against Agamemnon.

**Chorus II (310-391):** the women of Argos sing a thanksgiving song to the gods for Agamemnon's victory at Troy.

**Transition:** Eurybates' entrance is announced by the chorus (388-91).

**Act 3 (392-588):** Eurybates, Clytemnestra

**Scene 1 (392-588):** Eurybates, Clytemnestra

The messenger narrates the shipwreck undergone by the Greek fleet on the way back to Greece.

**Transition:** Cassandra's and the Trojan women's entrance is announced by Clytemnestra (586-88).

**Chorus III (589-658):** The Trojan women lament over their destiny while recollecting their memories of the last day of Troy.

**Act 4 (659-807):** Cassandra, chorus, Agamemnon, Clytemnestra (mute)

**Scene 1 (659-781):** Cassandra, chorus of Trojan women

While the Trojan women lament over their destiny, Cassandra has a first clairvoyant vision of Agamemnon's murder.

**Transition:** Agamemnon's and Clytemnestra's entrance is announced by the chorus (778-81).

**Scene 2 (782-807):** Agamemnon, Cassandra, Clytemnestra (mute), Trojan women (mute)

Agamemnon finally arrives and finds Cassandra in a faint. As she speaks, he thinks she is still under the effects of prophetic *furor* and fails to understand that Cassandra is predicting to him his death at the hands of Clytemnestra and her lover.

**Transition:** the intervention of the chorus of Argive women is un-cued.

**Chorus IV (808-66):** hymn to Hercules.

**Transition:** the exits of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra are un-cued.

**Act 5 (867-1012):** Cassandra; Electra; Orestes (mute); Strophius; Pylades (mute); Clytemnestra; Aegisthus

**Scene 1 (867-909):** Cassandra

Cassandra describes her clairvoyant vision of Agamemnon's murder which takes place at the same moment the prophetess is having her vision.

**Transition:** all entrances are un-cued.

**Scene 2 (910-52):** Electra, Strophius, Orestes (mute), Pylades (mute)

After Agamemnon's murder, Electra fears for the life of his brother Orestes who she decides to entrust to Strophius. **Transition:** Clytemnestra's entrance is announced by Electra (497-50); that of Aegisthus by Clytemnestra (978-80)

**Scene 3 (953-1012):** Electra, Clytemnestra, Aegisthus, Cassandra

Electra refuses to reveal to Clytemnestra and Aegisthus the hiding place of Orestes. Electra is led to prison and Cassandra to execution.

### 2.1.8 *Thyestes*

**Act 1 (1-121):** Tantalus, Fury<sup>5</sup>

**Place:** in front of the royal palace of Argos

The ghost of Tantalus is dragged out from the Underworld by a Fury in order to infect the royal house of Argos with its maddening influence.

**Transition:** the chorus enters unannounced.

**Chorus I (122-75):** the chorus prays that the gods will stop the evil-doing among Tantalus' descendants.

**Transition:** the entrance of Atreus and the *satelles* are un-cued.

**Act 2 (176- 335):** Atreus, *satelles*

Atreus plans his revenge against his brother Thyestes by offering him a share in the throne; the *satelles* tries to convince Atreus to take a better course of action, but the king of Argos is unmoved in his thirst for revenge.

**Transition:** the intervention of the chorus is un-cued.

**Chorus II (336-403):** ode on true kingship and praise of simple life.

**Transition:** the entrance of Thyestes and his sons is un-cued.

**Act 3 (404-545):** Thyestes, Tantalus, Atreus (mute until 491)

Thyestes does not trust the alleged reconciliation offered by his brother Atreus and his son Tantalus has to convince him to continue his journey to Argos. As soon as they get to the city, Atreus welcomes his brother and falsely reassures him of his good intention.

**Transition:** the intervention of the chorus is un-cued.

**Chorus III (546-622):** ode on the mutability of Fortune.

**Transition:** the entrance of the messenger is un-cued.

**Act 4 (623-788):** messenger, chorus leader

The messenger narrates Atreus' slaughter of Thyestes' sons, the cooking of their flesh, and Thyestes' banqueting on them.

**Transition:** the intervention of the chorus is un-cued.

**Chorus IV (789-884):** *conflagratio mundi*.

**Transition:** the entrance of Atreus is un-cued; the entrance of Thyestes is announced by Atreus (900 ff.).

**Act 5 (885-1112):** Atreus, Thyestes

Atreus rejoices over his accomplished revenge; Thyestes, who is still ignorant of the truth, cannot dispel a feeling of foreboding; Atreus finally reveals to Thyestes what he has done. Thyestes calls for the gods of revenge to whom he consigns for punishment his brother Atreus.

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<sup>5</sup> The *Thyestes* is the only play which presents a dialogic prologue.

### 2.2.1 Detached episodes rather than dramatic coherence and lack of plot development

As has been observed above, one of the factors that produce the characteristic structural looseness of Seneca's plays is the independence of individual scenes, which are often juxtaposed without connecting passages or appropriate transitions and seem curiously 'freestanding'.<sup>6</sup> In so doing, Seneca overtly transgresses Aristotle's precept about the primary importance of a well structured and coherent plot.

All Senecan plays, to a greater or lesser extent, present such an emphasis upon episodes at the cost of sustained dramatic development.<sup>7</sup> As Owen has remarked, this neglect seems partly motivated by the fact that Seneca is substantially more interested in "collapse" rather than development; hence, his actions basically consist of "an amplification of *dénouement*".<sup>8</sup> Such a reiteration of *dénouement* seems a strategic tool chosen by Seneca to exhibit as many melodramatic and pathetic situations as possible. This tendency is noticeable already in the prologues, which seem not so much designed to set up the plot, but to "create a portrait of violent and uncontrolled emotion".<sup>9</sup> Medea's *ira* (*Med*), Oedipus' maniac sense of guilt (*Oed*), Juno's hatred (*Hf*), the infecting and maddening effects of Thyestes' and Tantalus' ghosts (in the *Thy* and *Ag* respectively), Phaedra's love (*Phae*), Hecuba's grief (*Tro*), Oedipus' longing for death (*Phoe*) are spasmodic already in the prologue.<sup>10</sup>

The prologue of the *Hercules furens* exemplifies well this feature; the speech is delivered by Juno and consists of a monologue or rather a soliloquy since it is not addressed to an audience; it has no expository function, but it portrays a furious Juno

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<sup>6</sup> *Tro* 203-370 and 203-370; *Med* 380-430 and 431-578; 879-890 and 891-977; 978-1027; *Thy* 404-409 and 491-545; *Ag* 108-225 and 226-309.

<sup>7</sup> See Regenbogen (1961) 461.

<sup>8</sup> Owen (1969) 295.

<sup>9</sup> Fitch (1987a) 116. Tarrant (1985) 85 has claimed that the Senecan prologue is "less an introduction than a microcosm of the play".

<sup>10</sup> In the prologue of the *Oedipus* in particular, the *dénouement* is exceptionally foreshadowed; in fact, Oedipus is already aware that he is the cause of the plague which is devastating Thebes (36 *fecimus caelum nocens*). In the prologue of the *Thyestes* (54-62), the *dénouement* is similarly foreshadowed.

enraged by Hercules' return from the Underworld which she presents as something already happened as she is speaking (50-63). This is in contrast with the development of the action as described in the following acts, in which Hercules' return from the Underworld takes place only at the closing of act two. Inconsistencies of this kind are not unusual in Seneca's plays; in the specific case of the *Hercules furens*, the inconsistency between the prologue and act two seems to be caused by Seneca's interest in exploiting the dramatic effects of Hercules' return from the Underworld in the prologue to provide immediacy to Juno's fears. Thus, the handling of the prologue of the *Hercules furens* provides an additional instance of Seneca's tendency to anticipate the *dénouement* of the action for emotional effects. A similar interpretation is prompted by the choice of Juno as prologue speaker. Even though the jealous wrath of Juno pursuing Hercules is a traditional motif, the goddess does not appear as *dramatis persona* in Euripides' *Heracles*, the Greek prototype of Seneca's *Hercules furens*. In Euripides, Iris and Lissa are sent on earth to carry out Juno's plans (822-74). In the choice of Juno as prologue speaker, Seneca was most probably inspired by the numerous depictions of Juno *irata* found in the epic tradition, where Juno's resentment against Jupiter's infidelities was a familiar literary *locus*.<sup>11</sup> However, the use of Juno gave Seneca "an opportunity for a good recitation of her wrongs and plans of vengeance".<sup>12</sup>

More generally, such a handling has as a consequence that the action cannot really develop since, in a sense, the emotional intensity has peaked at the beginning of the play. In the acts, a similar tendency can be observed. Usually Seneca dwells on the portrayal of emotionally distraught characters who soliloquise about their obsessive passions or are described in their broken state of mind by other characters on stage

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<sup>11</sup> See Fitch (1987a) 116-17: see Virgil, *Aen.* 1.37 ff., 7.293 ff; Ovid, *Met.* 2.508 ff, 3.259 ff, 4.420 ff.

<sup>12</sup> Bragington (1933) 13. The different length of Juno's soliloquy (124 lines) and the speeches of Iris and Lissa (52 lines) points into this direction as well.

rather than on plot-development. This lack of plot-development affects also the construction of dramatic suspense. In Greek tragedy, dramatic suspense is usually built up through a series of events which leads to the climactic moment of the final revelation; in Seneca, the presence of several climactic moments is actually built almost independently into each single episode of the play.<sup>13</sup>

Scholars have offered conflicting explanations of this peculiar feature of Seneca's tragedies. For Zwierlein, in his influential *Die Rezitationsdramen Senecas* (1966), the lack of organic structure provides strong evidence of a lack of interest in stage drama. Tarrant, approaching the issue from the perspective of dramatic history reaches the conclusion that "Seneca's neglect of classical norms of coherence" may be inherited from postclassical tragedy.<sup>14</sup> More recently, Erasmo has proposed that "Seneca's concentration on episodes, rather than on the dramatic structure as a whole, may be due not only to the influence of epic, but also to the success of the episodic mime productions of Publilius Syrus and to the influence of pantomime".<sup>15</sup> My argument develops a similar hypothesis.

The fact that Seneca sacrifices large-scale structure in order to privilege momentary effects and organises the dramatic action around a series of theatrical high spots has suggestive affinities with the same trend in pantomimic entertainment which, as we have seen in chapter 1, focused primarily on the most emotionally climactic and spectacular moments of the chosen myth and did not present the development of the myth as a whole. The story was presented more as a sequence of pictorial tableaux than

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<sup>13</sup> See especially Pratt (1939).

<sup>14</sup> Tarrant (1978) 230: "Indirect evidence confirms the impression that postclassical drama sacrificed structural coherence to the emotional or rhetorical effect of a single scene. Aristotle records the damaging effects of the actor's supremacy on fourth-century tragedy: the highly developed rhetorical and pathetic skills of the performers encouraged writers of tragedy to emphasize histrionically effective solo writing at the expense of a coherent whole. These pressures could only have grown stronger in the Hellenistic period, when evidence for the performance of selections from classical tragedy is most abundant. Seneca's neglect of classical norms of coherence may thus be the natural outcome of a long evolution in dramatic history".

<sup>15</sup> Erasmo (2004) 134.

as drama proper where one action causes the following one and the structure is coherent and unified. Similarly, Zwierlein has claimed that Seneca's tragedies are constituted by a "juxtaposition of various independent and self-contained tableaux".<sup>16</sup>

For instance, the dramatic structure of Seneca's *Agamemnon* is extremely loose, more so, perhaps, than in any other of his plays. The play is thematically arranged in two parts: the first one unfolds around the plotting of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus against Agamemnon before his return; the second part is concerned with the return of Agamemnon and the destiny of the enslaved Trojan women. In this bipartite structure, Eurybates' long narration of the shipwreck of the Greek fleet returning after the fall of Troy, which spans over 157 lines and has all the features of a set-piece, occurs as the dividing line between the events happened before and after Agamemnon's return.<sup>17</sup>

A remarkable aspect of the play is the lack of a central dominant figure; in fact, Agamemnon, who is supposed to be the title role, delivers only twenty lines and his role within the action of the play is not particularly significant; the focus of the play are rather the characters' reactions set in motion by the return of Agamemnon from Troy. As a consequence, no character has a central role in the tragedy and Cassandra is the only figure who dominates two adjacent acts, thus establishing the major presence on stage.

As to dramatic structure, the acts are constructed almost independently from one another and even scenes within the same act are often unconnected. The prologue is spoken by Thyestes' ghost and no transition is provided for the subsequent unfolding of the action. The second act is constituted by two unconnected scenes, the first one deals with Clytemnestra and the nurse and the second features a confrontation between Aegisthus and Clytemnestra.

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<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Motto and Clark (1972) 70 describes Seneca's tragedies as presenting neither an "interlocking chain of events nor inevitable unfolding of action", but "pictures in clipped segments, each picture being but a miniature portrayal of a single phase".

<sup>17</sup> Tarrant (1976) 3-6.



The third act features Eurybates and Clytemnestra and the long narration of the shipwreck of the Greek fleet returning after the fall of Troy. Eurybates' entrance is announced by the chorus and we have to infer that Clytemnestra remains on stage during the second choral ode. No notice is given about the movements of Aegisthus and the nurse; again, we have to infer that exits take place since they are not on stage during the next act. The third choral ode is a lamentation over the fall of Troy sung by the Trojan captives, which, although not specified, requires a subsidiary chorus, since the previous one, a hymn of thanksgiving to several gods for the victory of the Greeks over Troy, cannot be sung by the Trojan women but by the citizens of Argos. The fourth act is devoted to Cassandra, the actual protagonist of this section; she first dialogues with her fellow captives and then, as Agamemnon finally arrives, with the king, whose impending death she foreshadows in a first clairvoyant vision. The fifth act is peculiar in many respects; it is constituted by three unconnected scenes; the first scene revolves around Cassandra uttering, for the second time, a clairvoyant vision of Agamemnon's murder. The second one focuses on Electra who fears for the life of her little brother Orestes. The last one deals with the destiny of Electra and Cassandra which are now in the hands of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. Thus Cassandra appears in the first scene and foreshadows Agamemnon's murder, which actually takes place as she is having her vision; in fact, in the following scene, Electra has, in some unspecified way, come to know of Agamemnon's murder. No proper transition features between the Cassandra scene and the Electra one; moreover, Cassandra will reappear in the third scene of the act, but we have to infer that she leaves the stage during the Electra scene and comes back at some point. Tarrant thinks that the lack of unity between the scenes of this last act as well as the condensed nature of the second section, which contains five short

scenes in the space of 100 lines, could be a sign that Seneca awkwardly conflated two different models.<sup>18</sup>

As to lack of plot development, the structure of the *Phoenissae*, which is outstanding even within Seneca's tragic *corpus*, is particularly illustrative.<sup>19</sup> The play consists of two structurally unconnected sections, of which the first one deals with the story of Oedipus and Antigone in exile and the second deals with Jocasta attempting to halt the fraternal strife. The antecedent of the first section is Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, while Euripides' *Phoenician Women* is that of the second; most probably, Seneca originally combined together "two strands of the legends into a unique drama".<sup>20</sup> This tendency to combine in one play events which traditionally belong to different plays is evidence that Seneca was not so much interested in developing a tragic action in full, but rather in exploiting the climactic core provided by the single events. For instance, in the *Phoenissae*, no tragic action is really developed. The play actually works through a juxtaposition of the figures of the furious Oedipus and the grief-stricken Jocasta and their reactions to the same event, the strife of their sons. The fact that the play does not have a proper conclusion may well be due to its incompleteness as well as to the fact that, since no proper tragic action is developed, no resolution can be sought.

### 2.2.2 Diversity of the episodes and doubling of themes

Seneca tends to develop episodes unevenly; this disproportionate handling is produced by either excessive expansion or extreme condensation of single themes, episodes, or

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem* 333-35.

<sup>19</sup> See Tarrant (1978) 229-30: "The *Phoenissae* displays Seneca's emancipation from classical tragic form at its most extreme". The play lacks the choruses, it does not feature the common five-act division to which the other plays basically conform to, and it requires two changes of setting. Because of the absence of choral odes and the uneven length of the four acts in which the play can be divided, the play has been considered incomplete by some scholars, while others, such as Tarrant, has maintained that the play is indeed complete and has interpreted its structural unconventional peculiarities as a sign that the play is "an essay in a distinct sub-genre of tragedy" an example of which is Ezekiel's *Exagoge*.

<sup>20</sup> Frank (1995) 27. In this respect, the case of the *Phoenissae* is not isolated since also the *Trojan Women* features a similar combination of events which, in the antecedents, belong to different plays.

actions. Expansion and condensation heavily affects the flow of dramatic time, which becomes slowed down or almost suspended in the first case and extremely accelerated in the second.

As a general tendency, episodes dealing with melodramatic, spectacular or emotionally charged themes are treated expansively, while actions relevant to the development of the plot are condensed.<sup>21</sup>

For instance, the fourth act of the *Medea* is entirely devoted to Medea's spectacular magic (670-842);<sup>22</sup> the episode, although relevant to the development of the dramatic action, is expanded well beyond what the conveying of dramatic information would require. Despite the fact that the preparation of the poisonous concoction is dealt with at length, the final phase of the scene is condensed in the exiguous space of five lines (843-48) in which, moreover, several actions which are crucially relevant for the subsequent development of the plot take place: Medea summons the nurse to bring the children; the children arrive; Medea orders them to deliver the deadly gift to Creusa.<sup>23</sup>

The fifth act of the *Agamemnon* presents an unprecedented condensation of events even by Senecan standards: Cassandra has a lengthy vision of Agamemnon's murder (867-909); no transition links this first scene to the following one in which Electra, somehow privy to Agamemnon's murder, tries to save her brother Orestes from the fury of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus (910-43); Strophius arrives at this point and agrees to shelter Orestes under his protection; then Clytemnestra arrives and threatens Electra to

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<sup>21</sup> Expansion is particularly conspicuous in the narrative set-pieces of the *Medea* (the incantation scene), *Oedipus* (the necromancy), *Hercules furens* (the descent to the Underworld), *Agamemnon* (the storm), *Phaedra* (the sea-monster), *Trojan women* (the double death of Astyanax and Polyxena), and *Thyestes* (the banquet) which are analysed in Chapter 4.

<sup>22</sup> The scene requires a change of setting; in fact, the previous acts take place in front of the royal palace, but in this one Medea is said by the nurse to have moved inside her house, where she attends to the preparation of the poison.

<sup>23</sup> A similar condensation characterises the last act of the play since several events crowd the finale. First, a messenger announces the death of Creon and Creusa; then Medea appears on stage and, after having been long torn between her motherly feelings and her desire of revenge on Jason, kills her first child; then Jason arrives with soldiers and the protagonist has to escape on the roof of the palace where, in front of Jason, she finally kills the second child and throws the corpses of the children to their desperate father.

reveal where her brother is hidden, but the girl refuses and is taken to prison (944-1000); now Clytemnestra and Aegisthus turn to Cassandra who is taken to execution (1001-13).<sup>24</sup>

In the fourth act of the same play, Cassandra's visions (659-774) occupy the major part of the act, while the first and last appearance of Agamemnon and his encounter with Clytemnestra, which could be accounted as one of the pivotal moments of the play, is dealt with in just few lines (782-806).<sup>25</sup>

In the *Oedipus*, large expansion is given to the treatment of the supernatural which forms the subject of the second (206-402) and third act of the play (509-708);<sup>26</sup> while the fourth act, which is devoted to the *anagnorisis* (764-881), is fairly short (117 lines). Despite the pivotal role of the recognition in the unfolding of the plot, this act is briefer in comparison to the second and third ones, which, from the point of view of development of the dramatic action, are not as centrally relevant.<sup>27</sup>

The tendency to develop expansively secondary episodes presents itself also in the form of doubling of themes and episodes which are recast not so much as to provide additional dramatic information, but for the spectacular possibilities they offer. For instance, the lengthy description of the macabre effects of the plague which features in Oedipus' opening monologue is doubled by the description of the epidemics narrated in the first choral ode (110-205). In the *Phaedra*, the presentation of the emotionally distraught Phaedra features in the first act and it is recast in the second one with little changes;<sup>28</sup> despite the fact that Phaedra's state of mind has already been described and

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<sup>24</sup> Tarrant (1976) 5 has remarked that the action of the finale is extremely fragmented.

<sup>25</sup> Awkwardly, the encounter between Clytemnestra and Agamemnon occupies two lines and no dialogue features between the two of them; in fact, Clytemnestra remains mute in the entire scene.

<sup>26</sup> The second act deals with the unclear response given by the Delphic oracle in relation to the cause of the plague afflicting Thebes and with the divinatory sacrifice (extispicy) ordered by Tiresias in order to disclose the truth. The third deals with the description of the necromancy of Laius' ghost narrated by Creon to a distraught Oedipus.

<sup>27</sup> Act II is 196 lines long and Act III is 199.

<sup>28</sup> The first act features a love-sick Phaedra revealing, in an emotionally charged monologue, her love for Hippolytus (85-128). In the second, it is the nurse who presents the distraught state of mind of the queen.

thus does not serve to provide additional dramatic information, the disproportionate length of this act in comparison with the average length of the other acts of the play, is even more striking.<sup>29</sup>

In the *Medea* too, Seneca seems so interested in exploiting the spectacular elements embedded in the episode of the magic that he casts them twice: the first time they are described by the more external stance of the nurse, which allows a more objective and detached narration; then they are described by Medea, the direct agent of the magic, thus providing a more emotional and subjective account.<sup>30</sup>

### 2.2.3 Un-cued transitions, entrances, and exits

A characteristic feature of Seneca's tragedies is the lack of transitions between acts or even scenes in the same act as well as of consistent indication of entrances and exits of characters. All instances are listed in the outlines of the plays at the beginning of the chapter. Here, I again limit myself to pointing out some particularly striking instances of what is a pervasive phenomenon.

For instance, in the *Thyestes*, the dramatic movement from the prologue to the first act lacks an explicit transition; the prologue is spoken by the ghost of Tantalus and no indication is provided for Atreus's entrance in the following act. In the *Phaedra*, the prologue of the play is constituted by two unconnected scenes; the prologue is spoken by Hippolytus and the subsequent entrance of Phaedra is left unannounced. The prologue of the *Phaedra* is unusual within the Senecan *corpus*. In fact, the play opens

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Such doubling of the same material is common in Seneca's tragedies; for instance, the second act of the *Medea* consists basically of a recasting of Medea in the grip of *furor* already provided in the prologue; she is here accompanied by the nurse who tries to persuade her to opt for a milder and safer course of action.

<sup>29</sup> The second act runs for 375 lines, while the average length of the other acts amount around 130 lines.

<sup>30</sup> This shift between first and third person narration is a Senecan hall-mark; the technique is employed widely either in scenes such as this in which two characters are in charge of the narration or also in scenes in which a single character adopts at times a first person narration and at others a third one in the same speech. In this second case, this technique produces a displacing effect, since the voice of a single character is capable of an extremely subjective and emotional account of his/her state as well as a detached and objective anamnesis of the same. Tarrant (1976) 199 says that the "combination of emotional chaos and detached intellectual analysis" is distinctively Senecan.

with a first scene in anapaests, actually a lyric monody. The division of the first act in two scenes is also unusual; generally, the first act is constituted by a single scene followed by a choral song after which the dramatic action begins. The prologue has no expository function since no information concerning the action of the play is provided and we have to infer that the speaker is Hippolytus since the text provides no clue for the identification of the character; actually, Hippolytus is presented simply as a huntsman urging his fellow huntsmen to get ready for the hunt and it actually stands as a self-contained tableau portraying a hunt-scene.<sup>31</sup>

The connection between the prologue and the second scene is very weak. Scholars have tried to link them on the basis of psychological contrast, namely between Hippolytus' idyllic prologue and Phaedra's tormented love; but this kind of juxtaposition is hardly a device of dramatic cohesion. Basically, the prologue presents a self-contained tableau which does not provide information important for the development of the dramatic action. The fact that the prologue is a lyric monody reinforces the impression that it was written as a virtuoso song.

In the *Agamemnon*, there is no transition between the prologue and the second act which features a distraught Clytemnestra whom the nurse attempts to restrain.<sup>32</sup> Neither Clytemnestra's nor the nurse's entrance are announced, so no indication is provided about when they enter on stage. Transition is also lacking between the two scenes which constitute the second act. In fact, the subsequent entrance of Aegisthus is again unannounced; he appears on stage and delivers an entrance monologue aside which is followed by a dialogue between him and Clytemnestra. As Tarrant has remarked, the

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<sup>31</sup> See Coffey and Mayer (1990) 89.

<sup>32</sup> This act features a dramatic technique largely used by Seneca which scholars have called "passion-restraint" scene; it features in the *Med* (116 ff.), *Phae* (85 ff.), *Thy* (176 ff.), *Hf* (1186 ff.), *Oed* (81 ff.). Usually, a subordinate character tries to restrain the protagonist; this dramatic technique allows Seneca to present the emotional state of the characters through the reactions they have to the attempts at restraint made by the subordinate ones.

second act of the *Agamemnon* is constituted by two “independent dramatic units”, whose connection is just thematic.<sup>33</sup>

Similarly, the connection between the two scenes constituting the second act of the *Trojan Women*, i.e. Talthybius’ lengthy narration of the appearance of Achilles’ ghost demanding the sacrifice of Polyxena and the *altercatio* between Agamemnon and Pyrrhus about this request, is just thematic, since an explicit transition is lacking. Here as in the *Agamemnon*, the two scenes are simply juxtaposed instead of linked together by appropriate connecting material.

In the cases in which transitions or information about the movements of the characters are provided, these tend to be awkwardly and implausibly crafted. The entrance of Chalcas in the *Agamemnon* (351-53), that of Medea’s children in the *Medea* (843-45), or that of Pyrrhus in the *Trojan Women* (999-1003) are, among several other instances, good examples of how characters appear on stage at a moment’s notice. In the same way, characters disappear with no notice.

Zeitlin has employed the term “dance-pattern” to describe the random and chaotic appearances and disappearances of characters in Petronius’ *Satyricon*; the same term can be applied to the entrances and exits of Seneca’s tragic characters, who often step on stage unannounced, give no reason for their coming or leaving, and whose movements are often difficult to trace.<sup>34</sup>

It is possible to argue that entrances and exits of characters in pantomime were similarly handled. In this type of performance in fact, a strictly logical and verisimilar handling of entrances and exits were not needed since pantomime did not rest on a linear development of plot or on a well crafted structuring of the dramatic action. As discussed in Chapter one, pantomime tended to portray single episodes in a tableau-like manner,

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<sup>33</sup> Tarrant (1976) 193.

<sup>34</sup> Zeitlin (1971) 653-54 has borrowed the term “dance-pattern” from Miller (1967) 13-20.

which featured temporal and spatial leaps as well as characters leaping in and out without any further notice.

#### 2.2.4 Fluidity of setting

Seneca's tragedies are characterised by fluid settings.<sup>35</sup> In this respect, the *Trojan Women* presents the most severe case of lack of unified location, since the play is obviously not confined to a single setting. According to Fantham, the actions of the first, second and third acts are meant to take place in front of Hector's tomb, but the second scene of act two has its setting in the Greek camp. The fourth act is set near Sigeum (931), the battlefield, and Achilles' tomb (893-95), and the fifth perhaps by the shore.<sup>36</sup> In the *Phaedra*, a change of setting from the wild in Attica to the royal palace of Athens between the first and the second scene of the first act is required.<sup>37</sup>

More generally, spatial location is often ambiguously handled. In the *Hercules furens*, *Thyestes*, *Medea*, *Phaedra*, and *Agamemnon* scenes which are supposed to take place inside are handled as if happening on stage.<sup>38</sup>

Moreover, Seneca handles space in a symbolic rather than realistic or concrete manner. For instance, the geographical apparatus displayed (1-30) in the prologue of the *Phaedra* is representative of this tendency. Even though Seneca is describing real Attic locations, the places are so far away one from the other that it is evident he is not aiming to provide a concrete setting for the hunt (just as an example, Parnetho in line 3 is a mountain range north of Athens, Marathon in line 16 is a town north-east of Athens, and Hymettus in line 21 is a mountain south-east of Athens; Seneca even includes the Rhiphaean mountains which were located in the extreme north, in Scythia 8). Thus, the

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<sup>35</sup> Zwierlein (1966) 38-45 provides a list of "vague and inconsistent information about the scenography".

<sup>36</sup> Fantham (1982a) 38.

<sup>37</sup> This change of setting has long troubled scholars who have tried to make the play conform to the "in-front-of-the-palace-setting"; Kragelund (2008) 181-94 claims that in the *Phaedra* Seneca adopts a "symbolic scenography" which is not bound to a single setting.

<sup>38</sup> Marshall (2000) 27-51 offers a discussion of "the fluid sense of space on Seneca's stage".

landscape becomes more an imaginary one suited to recall in the audience very famous and well known areas within Attica. Similarly, in the *Hercules furens*, Juno's soliloquy opens with a long and detailed *ecphrasis* of the constellations in the night-sky (6-18), which she actually seems to be able to see since the presence of the adverbs *hinc* (repeated four times, lines 6, 8, 10, 12) and *illinc* (one occurrence line 10) points to the position of the stars in the different regions of the sky. The opening *ecphrasis* of the *Hercules furens* is classified by Larson among the numerous descriptions found in Seneca's tragedies of transient aspects of the environment;<sup>39</sup> descriptions of such a kind outdo those of topography, which are, instead, heavily preponderant in Greek theatre, where they are purposely employed as a sort of stage-direction to convey to the audience the physical setting and the time of day of the action. Larson rightly states that while descriptions of topography are concrete and tend to make explicit the reality of the stage, descriptions of transient aspects of the environment tend to be necessarily more abstract and thus to substitute imagination for reality. Larson describes this tendency thus: "the typical Senecan description invites the audience to ignore their present circumstances and those of the reciter(s) or actors to replace them with a world of imagination".<sup>40</sup> Because of this, such descriptions set the mood and atmosphere of the play but they do not convey information about the physical reality of the setting of the stage. Seneca then is not interested in delimiting the space in which the action takes place, but, on the contrary, he strives to expand that space as much as he can; now, since this tendency is a pervasive mark of Senecan style, we have to infer that Seneca purposely aimed at this substitution of reality for imagination.

This sort of landscape, where places which are separated by a consistent distance are put together or transient aspects of environment are depicted, would certainly be fitting for a

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<sup>39</sup> Larson (1994) 19.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem* 56.

pantomimic performance where an imaginary and symbolic landscape would have provided a more appealing atmosphere than a strictly concrete one.

### 2.2.5 Prominence of monologues over dialogues

Monologues are a prominent feature of Seneca's tragedies. Five of the eight genuine plays have a monologic prologue (*Trojan Women* 1-163, *Phaedra* 1-84, *Medea* 1-55, *Hercules furens* 1-124, *Agamemnon* 1-56); the prologue of the *Oedipus* comprises a long monologue spoken by Oedipus (1-81) and a brief concluding exchange between Oedipus and Jocasta (82-109), while the *Thyestes* (1-121) is the only play which has a prologue in true dialogic form. In itself, this would not necessarily be significant. After all, many classical Greek tragedies also begin with a monologue; Euripides, for instance, likes to employ a divinity to "clue in" the audience before the action proper starts. Still, in Seneca the opening monologues are more than convenient introductions; rather, they set the tone for the rest of the play.

Seneca favours monologues so much that his tragedies are all but built up of successive monologues, whereas the place of dialogues is much diminished;<sup>41</sup> for example, the first act of the *Phaedra* (85-273; 188 lines) contains two monologues of Phaedra (85-128; 177-194 for a total of 60 lines) intercalated with two of the nurse (129-177; 195-217 for a total of 70 lines), and only the last 55 lines feature a proper dialogue between the two. The last act of the same play features one long monologue by Phaedra (1159-1200) preceded by a brief question asked by Theseus (1156-58) and one monologue by Theseus (1201-1280) interrupted by one brief intervention of the chorus (1244-46). In the *Agamemnon*, the fourth act (659-807; 148 lines) features three speeches of Cassandra (659-63; 695-709; 720-774 in lyric metre) and three interventions of the

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<sup>41</sup> Seneca's predilection for monologic prologues as well as for monologues in general over dialogues is due to the fact that they constitute a fitting dramatic device well suited to better convey emotional paroxysm.

chorus (664-94 in lyric metre; 710-19; 775-81). Only the first speech by Cassandra (659-63) is directly addressed to the chorus; similarly, the chorus does not engage in any kind of dialogue with Cassandra; only its first intervention is set up as a sort of reply to Cassandra's words at least initially, but quickly turns into a lyric monody that mourns the desperate fate of the house of Priam. The other two interventions of the chorus simply describe in the third person Cassandra's prophetic frenzy.

The fourth act of the *Medea* is made up of two monologues (670-848): the first one is uttered by the nurse (670-739) and the second by Medea (a lyric monody 740-848). No dialogue features between the two, and Medea addresses the nurse, ordering her to bring the children to her, only at the very end of her long speech (843-48).

The fifth act features Atreus' revelation to Thyestes of his accomplished revenge on him perpetuated through Thyestes' eating of his own sons. The act is characterised by the predominance of monologic interventions, through which Atreus (885-919; 976-97; 1052-68) and Thyestes (920-69; 999-1004; 1006-21; 1035-51; 1068-96) confront each other. It is remarkable that even though the dialogic form would well suit the needs of the dramatic conflict at hand, Seneca has privileged the monologic form which allows the characters to indulgently expand on their feelings: fulfilment over the accomplished revenge in the case of Atreus, grief and outrage for the bloodthirsty act in the case of Thyestes. In the *Phaedra*, the second act of the play features the confrontation between the nurse and Hippolytus; the handling of the dialogue between Hippolytus and the nurse shows again Seneca's preference for monologues over dialogues, since the debate of the two characters takes place through alternate monologues rather than proper dialogic exchanges.<sup>42</sup> This technique allows Seneca to make the characters expand on personal motifs which are tangential to the specific issue at hand. Thus, Hippolytus'

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<sup>42</sup> This pattern is common in Senecan tragedy; characters rarely engage in proper dialogues, but they utter monologues in turn. The result is that characters are juxtaposed one to the other and thus they do not give the impression of interacting, but rather of speaking in isolation.

long intervention (483-564) configures itself as a generalising eulogy of the simple and natural life in the wild as compared with the corrupted life of the city, and, in a sense, it is a self-contained set piece.<sup>43</sup>

In addition, the acts featuring narrative set-pieces also have substantially a monologic form. For instance, in act three of the *Agamemnon* the messenger's narration of the storm which shipwrecked the Greek fleet is a monologue. The speech is preceded by an introductory dialogue (392-420) between Clytemnestra and the messenger, but the proper narration of the storm (421-578, 157 lines) is delivered without any intervention of Clytemnestra at all. In act four of the *Phaedra*, the messenger's *rhexis* of Hippolytus' death is again introduced by a brief dialogue between him and Theseus (990-99) and then the messenger's narrative proceeds without any interruption for 114 lines (1000-1114).

Messenger reports are typical cases in which some degree of interaction with other characters on stage is supposed to occur. Examples are found in the *Hercules furens* or in the *Thyestes*. But even in most of these passages, the speech maintains a pronounced monologic texture. For example, in act three of the *Hercules furens*, Theseus' description of the Underworld (658-829 171 lines) is preceded by a short introductory dialogue (645-57) in which Amphitryon compels Theseus to narrate Hercules' deeds in the Underworld. Theseus' speech is interrupted by brief questions asked by Amphitryon (five interventions of one or two lines: 697; 707-08; 727-29; 747-49; 760-61) which Seneca seems to have introduced mainly to avoid the necessity of providing linking transitions between the parts of the narrative; nonetheless, despite Amphitryon's brief interventions, Theseus' speech develops basically as a soliloquy.

Similarly, in the messenger's narration of Atreus' murder of Thyestes' sons to the chorus (act four of the *Thyestes* 641-788, i.e. 147 lines), which is the most advanced

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<sup>43</sup> Hippolytus' speech has been judged a "declamation" on a common theme by Coffey and Mayer (1990) 134-35.

instance in the direction of dialogue, the seven interventions of the chorus (690; 716; 719; 730-31; 743; 745-46; 747-48) do not substantially alter the monologic character of the speech.<sup>44</sup>

A special category of monologues, which Tarrant has called “entrance monologues”, features as an innovative dramatic technique in Seneca’s plays.<sup>45</sup> Entrance monologues are those in which a character enters on stage while the action is in progress and delivers a soliloquy without realising the presence of other characters since he/she addresses them in the third person. They are placed at the beginning of each scene and delivered in a void since they are not addressed to any of the characters on stage and the impression produced is that of a character speaking out loud. The character’s speech is thus totally isolated from the action which is taking place (*Hf* 329 ff. Lycus; *Tro* 861 ff. Helen; *Med* 179 ff. Creon; 431 ff. Jason; *Thy* 491 ff. Atreus; *Ag* 108 ff. Clytemnestra; 226 ff. Aegisthus). Tarrant has pointed out that “the Senecan passages resemble each other so closely that one may justly speak of a new convention”.<sup>46</sup>

In Greek tragedy there is no precedent for this technique. In Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*, the herald’s invocation (530 ff.) does not seem addressed to any character in particular and his speech produces the impression that he is thinking out loud. Aegisthus’ speech (1577 ff.) shares the same features. Nonetheless, both the Aeschylean instances do not achieve the degree of isolation of the character and suspension of dramatic time found in Seneca. Closer instances can be found in Euripides (*Hecuba* 1109-13, *Trojan Women* 860 ff., *Suppliants* 1034 ff., *Orestes* 356 ff. 1554 ff., *Phoenician Women* 261-77); the instance in the *Phoenician Women* is the closest one and looks forward to the Senecan entrance monologues: in Polynices’ entrance monologue the hero pours out his feelings without noticing the presence of the chorus on stage.

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<sup>44</sup> See Tarrant (1985) 180.

<sup>45</sup> Tarrant (1978) 231.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem* 237.

For what concerns a parallel technique in comedy, similar entrance monologues can be found in Aristophanes' *Plutus* (335 ff.) and in Menander's *Dyscolus* (153 ff.). In Roman comedy, there are instances in Plautus (*Trinummus* 843 ff.; *Stichus* 58-67 ff. 68-74; 75-87; *Amphitruo* 551 ff.).

According to Tarrant, the prominence of monologue in New Comedy finds its explanation in the need to give more details in portraying characters' states of mind and feelings. Seneca thus could have pushed forward a technique already in existence in post-classical drama. Seneca's fondness for monologues is a conscious stylistic choice adopted to minutely portray the interior of the characters; in fact, such detached speeches delivered in a void allow an exploration of the character's flowing emotions; thus the function of the diffuse use of monologues in Seneca's plays can be accounted as a sort of stream of consciousness *ante litteram*. The preference for monologues over dialogues is not to be interpreted, anyway, as a sign of Seneca's poor expertise in dramatic composition, but rather as a deliberate adoption of a dramatic technique meant to exploit at its fullest the emotional effects offered by a monologue. Such a choice also has implications concerning the type of dramatic performance other than conventional drama which was in Seneca's mind when composing his tragedies.

Finally, even when a confrontation between characters occurs, the characters rarely engage in proper dialogues, but rather utter monologues in turn. The result is that characters are juxtaposed one to the other and thus they do not give the impression that they interact, but rather of speaking in isolation.<sup>47</sup> Proper dialogues feature rarely in Seneca's tragedies and they tend to assume the form of stichomythic exchanges in which the utterances of the characters feature often a moral maxim (*sententia*) in each line of the exchanges;<sup>48</sup> the passion-restraint scene between Clytemnestra and the nurse

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<sup>47</sup> Eliot (1951) 68 has remarked that Senecan characters actually "recite in turn".

<sup>48</sup> *Sententiae* were moral maxims usually short and epigrammatic; they were widely employed by the rhetoricians. Seneca makes a large use of them both in his prose writings and in the tragedies. A large

in the *Agamemnon* (145-58) and the *altercatio* between Medea and Creon in the *Medea* offer particularly representative examples of this technique:

*Agamemnon* (145-58):

Nutr. Caeca est temeritas quae petit casum ducem.

Clyt. Cui ultima est fortuna, quid dubiam timet?

Nutr. Tuta est latetque culpa, si pateris, tua.

Clyt. Perlucet omne regiae vitium domus.

Nutr. Piget prioris et novum crimen struis?

Clyt. Res est profecto stulta nequitiae modus.

Nutr. Quod metuit auget qui scelus scelere obruit.

Clyt. Et ferrum et ignis saepe medicinae loco est.

Nutr. Extrema primo nemo temptavit loco.

Clyt. Rapienda rebus in malis praeceps via est.

Nutr. At te reflectat coniugî nomen sacrum.

Clyt. Decem per annos vidua respiciam virum?

Nutr. Meminisse debes subolis ex illo tuae.

Clyt. Equidem et iugales filiae memini faces...

*Medea* (192-201):

Med. Quod crimen aut quae culpa multatur fuga?

Cr. Quae causa pellat, innocens mulier rogat.

Med. Si iudicas, cognosce; si regnas, iube.

Cr. Aequum atque iniquum regis imperium feras.

Med. Iniqua numquam regna perpetuo manent.

Cr. I, querere Colchis.

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number of the *sententiae* employed by Seneca are by the mimographer Publilius Syrus, who became widely popular among the rhetoricians from the Augustan age onwards, as is attested by a passage in Seneca the Elder (*Controversiae* VII, 3, 8); see Giancotti (1967) 282-84; the affinity between Publilius and Seneca is attested not only by the large use of Publilian *sententiae* found in Seneca's writings at large and by Seneca's words of praise for Publilius, but also, quite suggestively, by the title "*Proverbia Senecae*" given to the collection of Publilius' *sententiae* in the medieval codices which transmit it. See Giancotti (1967) 335-36 who suggests that the compiler of the Publilian collection may have been Seneca himself or someone closely related to him. That the collection of Publilian *sententiae* formed in Seneca's age and not before seems attested by a passage in Seneca in which, referring to the learned *sententiae* of Publilius, he uses the expression *quantum disertissimorum versuum inter mimos iacet*; Giancotti (1967) 298 claims that such an expression implies that Seneca is not referring to isolated *sententiae* detached from their context, but to *sententiae* as they were found in the mimes as a whole.

Med. Redeo: qui avexit, ferat.

Cr. Vox constituto sera decreto venit.

Med. Qui statuit aliquid parte inaudita altera,  
aequum licet statuerit, haud aequus fuit.

Cr. Auditus a te Pelia supplicium tulit?  
sed fare, causae detur egregiae locus.

Such a handling of dialogues does not aim at any kind of nuanced portrayal of individualised characters debating their personal situations, but of mouthpieces oddly and extensively employing general and universal truths in crucially dramatic moments.<sup>49</sup> Now, such a handling of dialogue seems to undergo a stylisation, since it employs a sort of fixed linguistic repertoire, well intelligible and easily understood by everyone thanks to the gnomic nature of the *sententiae*; Seneca himself attests to this quality of *sententiae* by quoting some of Publilius (*Epistles* 108, 8; 11):

Non vides quemadmodum theatra consonent, quotiens aliqua dicta  
sunt, quae publice adgnosimus et consensu vera esse testamur?

“Desunt inopiae multa, avaritiae omnia”

“In nullum avarus bonus est, in se pessimus”

Ad hos versus ille sordidissimus plaudit et vitiis suis fieri convicium  
gaudet...

magis tamen feriuntur animi cum carmina eiusmodi dicta sunt:

“Is minimo eget mortalis qui minimum cupit”

“Quod vult, habet, qui velle, quod satis est, potest.”

In relation to this, it is interesting to consider a passage in Quintilian (6, 3, 65) which can be useful for understanding Seneca’s peculiar handling of dialogues and connecting it with a device of pantomime: *Nam et finitione usus est Augustus de pantomimis*

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<sup>49</sup> See Canter (1925) 88-93 for a list of the occurrences.

*duobus qui alternis gestibus contendebant, cum eorum alterum saltatorem dixit, alterum interpellatorem...*<sup>50</sup>

Quintilian's passage implies that a gestural dialogue of some kind could be a feature in pantomime; the gestural dialogue of the dancers was accompanied by the matching verbal dialogue. It is conceivable that such a gestural dialogue was mimetic in essence and that the content of the verbal dialogue accompanying it must have verbally matched such mimicry. Weinreich ventured the hypothesis that the performance of the *saltator* and *interpellator* consisted of a sort of imitation fight ("Zeichendisput").<sup>51</sup>

Now, Seneca's dialogues basically appear in two categories, those contained in the passion-restraint scenes and those in which two characters confront themselves. The dialogues in the passion-restraint scenes basically consist of a sort of verbal duel which is fought between the passions of one character and the reasons offered by the other; similarly, the second category of dialogues presents a verbal duel between two opponents (Medea's and Creon's in the *Medea*; Medea's and Jason's in the *Medea*; Lycus).<sup>52</sup> Therefore, the combination of *stichomythia*, rapid fired responses, and *sententiae*, a codified system of set meanings easily understandable and universally

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<sup>50</sup> The passage in Quintilian together with another in Lucian (83) and in Plutarch (*Quaestiones Conviviales* 711e) attest that pantomime not always consisted of a solo performance (pace Jory, 1998), but that the dancer could be accompanied by an assistant playing secondary roles (as in the episode referred to by Lucian in which the dancer playing Ajax was flanked by one playing Odysseus). See Rotolo (1957) 16 and Hall (2002) 29 who rightly states that it is difficult to maintain that there was a "single correct way to stage pantomime".

<sup>51</sup> Weinreich (1948) 144 n. 1; see Slater (1990) 217-18. See Chapter 1 p. 14-15 and n. 48.

<sup>52</sup> In relation to this issue, a passage in Choricus of Gaza is particularly relevant (*Apologia mimorum*, 110) in which he provides a list of all the things that mimes can imitate, among which, he includes the imitation of an angry character who is being quieted by another one: *Τίς δὲ οὐκ ἂν ἀπείποι καταλέγειν ἐπιχειρῶν, ὅσα μιμοῦνται; δεσπότην, οἰκέτας, καπήλους, ἀλλαντοπάλας, ὄψοποιούς, ἐστιάτορα, δαιτυμόνας, συμβόλαια γράφοντας, παιδάριον ψελλιζόμενον, νεανίσκον ἐρῶντα, θυμούμενον ἕτερον, ἄλλον τῷ θυμουμένῳ πραῦνοντα τὴν ὀργήν.* Choricus is referring to mimes, but it is possible that he using the term "mime" as a general one which could in fact include pantomime as well; for instance, the same ambiguity of terminology is to be found in Isidore of Seville (*Etymologiae* 18, 49): *Mimi sunt dicti Graeca appellatione quod rerum humanarum sint imitatores; nam habebant suum auctorem, qui antequam mimum agerent, fabulam pronuntiare[n]t. Nam fabulae ita componebantur a poetis ut aptissimae essent motui corporis.* It is clear that the last sentence of the passage refers to pantomime.

applicable, could be a well envisioned device to verbally reproduce the sort of mimetic fight hypothesised by Weinreich.

## 2.2.6 The non integration of the chorus

Senecan choruses tend to be loosely connected or even un-related to the preceding or following course of action. Quite often they stand as lyric interludes detached from the action (e.g. *Phae* 274-359; *Ag* 808-66; *Oed* 403-508). In addition to this, the choruses are often impersonal, since they lack an explicit identity;<sup>53</sup> the chorus' movements are not consistently cued and their presence on stage can be difficult to establish. Finally, they often ignore events which they are supposed to know, or, conversely, they know events which they are not supposed to be aware of.

Some scholars have claimed that thematic consistency ensures the interlacing between action and choral interventions; it is true that thematic connections exist; but, as Tarrant has pointed out, thematic consistency by itself does not provide organic unity.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, at times scholars desperate to establish a connection between chorus and dramatic action (and be it a thematic one) have resorted to what amounts to very tenuous arguments. For instance, the last chorus of the *Agamemnon* (808-66) deals with a description of Hercules' twelve labours; the very slight and almost irrelevant connection of the chorus with the action is that Hercules, like Agamemnon, is a conqueror of Troy. The verbal echoes between the choruses and the episodes are perhaps more a consequence of the fact that Seneca employs a rather repetitive vocabulary instead of aiming for a cogent thematic relationship. There are set phrases, descriptions and themes which are recurrent in the whole *corpus*. Despite the fact that they do not perform the dramatic function fulfilled in Greek tragedy, Senecan choruses are nonetheless dramatically powerful. Their dramatic potential then is not the result of

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<sup>53</sup> e.g. *Ag* 57-107; *Phae* 274-375.

<sup>54</sup> Tarrant (1972) 196 and (1976) 324.

a strict relationship between the chorus and the action, but is intrinsic to the chorus itself. In a way, the dramatic power of the chorus is of a self-contained and self-sufficient nature. The dramatic quality of the choruses combined with their nature of lyric interludes, which stand as bravura solos, may have been conceived as such by Seneca in accordance with the contemporary practise of pantomime in which *cantica* were sung by the choir accompanying this form of performance.<sup>55</sup>

Moreover, it is possible to see the choruses as being in tune with the performance culture of Seneca's age if we view them (and the emphasis is indeed on viewing) as being influenced by mime and pantomime. Two recurrent features point in this direction: thematic affinities between Seneca's choral interludes and the mimic and pantomimic repertory; and the surprising frequency with which Seneca refers to specific body parts in some of his choral odes.

As for the themes, in what follows, I am not arguing that Seneca derived the themes of his choral odes (such as the fickleness of fortune, the omnipotence of love, or the praise of Bacchus) from pantomime. They were the stock-in-trade of any genre at the time that dealt in moral philosophy—such as declamation, mime, pantomime, as well as Seneca's tragedies. Nevertheless, the clear parallels between the preoccupations of some of Seneca's choral odes and the thematic preferences of the mimic and pantomimic stage would seem to point to an intertextual (or rather inter-dramatic) relationship of sorts. Such an affinity exists, for instance, in the predilection for rehearsing the mutability of fortune, which Seneca shares with pantomime. Many of his choruses comment on the fickleness of Fortune,<sup>56</sup> and while this motif is of course very common in rhetorical declamations, it can also be said to constitute the essence of pantomime. As Manilius

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<sup>55</sup> See Hall (2002) 29. She quotes Apuleius' description of the marriage of Cupid and Psyche (*Met.* 6). The danced performance with which the marriage is celebrated is most likely a pantomimic one in which "Venus dances, the Muses sing choral odes, Apollo sings to the cithara, while Satyrus and Paniscus speak to the pipe". Thus, pantomime could "accommodate both solo singing and accompanied recitation".

<sup>56</sup> *Ag* 57-107; *Hf* 524; *Phae* 972ff; 1141 ff; *Oed* 987 ff.; *Thy* 546 ff.

maintains, a dancer would impress in particular if he was able to assume every aspect of fortune's vicissitude.<sup>57</sup> The theme featured no less prominently in the mimes, the sister art of pantomime. Sudden changes of fortune constituted the very essence of the genre.<sup>58</sup>

Many of Publilius Syrus' *sententiae* are devoted to Fortune, and in the prologue prefacing the mime presented by Laberius in the famous dramatic contest between him and Publilius Syrus, Fortune is blamed for having reserved a cruel blow to the aged Laberius (155-61; 167-70):<sup>59</sup>

Fortuna inmoderata in bono aequae atque in malo,	155
si tibi erat libitum litterarum laudibus	
florens cacumen nostrae famae frangere,	
cur cum vigebam membris praeviridantibus,	
satis facere populo et tali cum poteram viro	
non me flexibilem concurvasti ut carperes?	160
nuncine me deicis ? quo? quid ad scaenam adfero?	
non possunt primi esse omnes omni in tempore,	167
summum ad gradum cum claritatis veneris,	
consistes aegre, et citius quam ascendas, cades.	
cecidi ego, cadet qui sequitur, laus est publica.	170

<sup>57</sup> *Astronomica* 5, 483: *omnis fortunae vultum per membra reducet*; suggestively, Cicero (*In Pis.*, X, 22) equates the circle of dances (*saltatorium orbem*) to the wheel of Fortune (*fortunae rotam*) possibly attesting to the way in which the theme was rendered in a danced performance.

<sup>58</sup> See Zeitlin (1971) 656-58. See e.g. Cicero *Phil.* 26, 65: *in eius igitur viri copias cum se subito ingurgitasset, exultabat gaudio persona de mimo, modo egens, repente dives. Sed, ut est apud poetam nescio quem "male parata male dilabuntur"*; Seneca, *De Brevitate vitae* 12, 8: *I nunc et mimos multa mentiri ad exprobrandam luxuriam puta. plura me hercules praeterunt quam fingunt et tanta incredibilium vitiorum copia ingenioso in hoc unum saeculo processit, ut iam mimorum arguere possimus negligentiam*; in Petronius' *Satyricon*, the characters obsessively fear a reversal of fortune.

<sup>59</sup> See Giancotti (1967) 387-95: the theme of Fortune's mutability is all pervasive in the Publilian sentences: *Fortuna cum blanditur, captatum venit*; *Fortunam citius reperias quam retineas*; *Fortuna unde aliquid fregit, quassat omnia*; *Fortuna nimia quem fovet, stultum facit*; *Fortuna obesse nulli contenta est semel*; *Fortuna vitrea est: tum cum splendet frangitur*; *Facit gratum Fortuna, quem nemo videt*; *Fortuna plus homini quam consilium valet*; *Homo semper aliud, Fortuna aliud cogitat*; *Homo ne sit sine dolore, Fortunam invenit*; *Levis est Fortuna: cito reposcit, quod dedit*; *Legem nocens veretur, Fortunam innocens*; *Minimum eripit Fortuna, cum minimum dedit*; *Nec vita hominibus nec fortuna perpes est*; *Plures tegit Fortuna, quam tutos facit*; *stultum facit Fortuna, quem vult perdere*.

A similar argument can be made for the universal sway of love, which is the theme of the first choral ode of the *Phaedra* (274-357). The first chorus of the *Phaedra* neither identifies itself nor is it identified by others. Boyle has suggested, on a purely speculative basis, that the chorus may be composed of Cretan women.<sup>60</sup> In addition to this, the character of the chorus is markedly impersonal. The entrance of the chorus is left unannounced and no information is provided for the reason of their entrance or for how they came to know that Phaedra is burning with love. The theme of the ode is thematically connected with the preceding episode since at lines 186-94 Phaedra has said that Cupid dominates her and she has to obey to his will. The chorus opens with an invocation to Venus as mother of Cupid whose power over human beings, gods and animals is all-pervasive.<sup>61</sup> After the opening invocation, Seneca provides a list of the effects of love on human beings (285-93); gods (294-337), and animals (338-52) which constitutes a series of vignettes following one another. The section devoted to the *exempla* of love's power over the gods is particularly interesting; the chorus opens this section by stating that the power of love compelled the gods to abandon heaven and dwell on earth with disguised features (294-95 *et iubet caelo superos relicto/vultibus falsis habitare terras*). This well introduces the examples revolving around Juppiter, who disguised himself under different forms to conquer his beloved; the chorus mentions Juppiter's love for Leda and Europa and Juppiter's metamorphoses into a bird and a bull (299-308). Juppiter's infidelities were a stock theme in pantomimic performances as well as Hercules' love for Omphale to which the following section of the ode is devoted (317-29).<sup>62</sup> Seneca's description of the episode of Hercules and

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<sup>60</sup> Boyle (1987a) 154: such a claim is based on the presence in E of the word GRESSAE after chorus. Boyle thinks that GRESSAE may be a corruption of CRESSAE, "Cretan women". See also Davis (1993) 52.

<sup>61</sup> The argument of the ode may have been suggested to Seneca by the much briefer ode in Euripides' *Hippolytus* (525 ff.).

<sup>62</sup> The episode is narrated at some length even in the *Hercules furens* (465-71): *Fortem vocemus cuius ex umeris leo,/donum puellae factus, et clava excidit/fulsitque pictum veste Sidonia latus?/ fortem vocemus*

Omphale is much indebted to Ovid (*Her.* 9, 55-118). In the Ovidian epistle, Deianira reproaches Hercules for having betrayed her in favour of the Lydian princess Omphale. A humorous version of the episode is narrated by Ovid at *Fasti* 2, 303-56. In relation to the *Fasti*, Fantham has suggested that the episode may be indebted to mime.<sup>63</sup>

The closing of the chorus *vincit saevas cura novercas* (357) contains an allusion to Phaedra, but also, more generally, to the figure of the *noverca* (stepmother) which was a stock theme in several different genres as is attested by Jerome (54, 15, 4): *Omnes comoediae et mimographi et communes loci in novercam saevissimam declamabunt*. In the chorus, as Boyle has remarked, *novercae* “are presented as the climactic instance of love’s conquests”.<sup>64</sup>

Even more importantly, it is notable that Lucian (9) states that dance came into being and made its first appearance together with the cosmogonic Love (Eros); moreover, in relation to the dances of the Spartans, even the contemporary ones, Lucian (11) reports that the songs which they sing while dancing are invocations to Aphrodite and of the two Loves. Later on in the speech, Lucian (38) explicitly affirms that the power of the two Loves is a theme of pantomimic performances.

The second chorus of the *Oedipus* (403-508), a hymn in praise of Bacchus, has troubled scholars since the ode both serves no purpose in the dramatic progress of the action and its joyous character strikingly contrasts with the catastrophic situation at Thebes.<sup>65</sup> The

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*cuius horrentes comae/madure nardo, laude qui notas manus/ad non virilem tympani movit sonum,/mitra ferocem barbara frontem premens?*

<sup>63</sup> See Chapter 1 pp. 62-63.

<sup>64</sup> Boyle (1987a) 160.

<sup>65</sup> Tarrant (1978) 227-28 and Henry and Walker (1985) 28 consider this ode as a lyric interlude barely connected with the action; for an opposite interpretation of this chorus see Davis (1993) 202-07 and Stevens (1999) 281-307. The juxtaposition of scenes whose atmosphere is strikingly in contrast is indeed a technique much favoured by Seneca. A case similar to that of the *Oedipus* is to be found in the *Medea*; in fact, Medea’s first soliloquy is a speech full of rage and hatred, while the following chorus is a joyous wedding song. Interestingly, the contrast is not given just by the opposite mood of the two scenes, but it is also conveyed, so to say, in a pictorial way which one could call baroque or expressionistic; in fact, whereas in Medea’s monologue the prominent colour is black and darkness, in the chorus it is the bright quality of the white colour which is insisted upon. Such a visual device may have been inspired by pantomimic performances which must have relied on contrasting colours in costumes and scenery to create the atmosphere of the scene or to typify the characters.

theme and the stylistic features of the ode may be directly inspired by pantomime. First of all, the popularity of Bacchic themes in pantomime is attested over and over again by the ancient authors; the lengthy portrayal of Bacchus (413-28) and of the Bacchic *thiasos* (Silenus and the Bacchantes 420-43) with its detailed account of gestures and clothing gives the depiction a particularly vivid, pictorial, and dynamic dimension:<sup>66</sup>

Te decet cingi comam floribus vernis,  
te caput Tyria cohibere mitra  
    hederave mollem  
    bacifera religare frontem,                   415  
spargere effusos sine lege crines,  
rursus adducto revocare nodo:<sup>67</sup>  
qualis iratam metuens novercam  
creveras falsos imitatus artus,  
    crine flamenti simulata virgo,           420  
    lutea vestem retinente zona.  
inde tam molles placuere cultus  
et sinus laxi fluidumque syrma.

Moreover, the description of Bacchus who wears a silky, flowing transparent dress, has long hair, shows a pronounced *mollitia* of behaviour, and disguises his male nature under a female appearance, seems actually to be the mythical progenitor of the pantomimic dancer.

In addition to this, the high number of metamorphoses (the transformation of Ino and Melicertes into sea divinities, Leucothea and Palaemon respectively 445-48; the

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<sup>66</sup> As Töchterle (1994) 372 has remarked, the syntactical construction, *decet* plus infinitive, provides dynamism and immediacy to the description.

<sup>67</sup> Compare this with *Phaedra* 370-72: *iubet/...solvi comas/rursusque fingi* and 401-02: *nodo comas/coegit emisitque*.

transformation of the sea into a meadow 449-56; the transformation of the Tyrrhenian pirates into dolphins 457-67; the transformation of nature wrought by Bacchus' presence 491-96; the transformation of Apollo and Juppiter taking part to Bacchus' and Ariadne's marriage 448-503) contained in the ode makes it extremely suitable to a pantomimic rendition; in fact, the most praised feature of the genre consisted in the protean ability of the dancer to metamorphose swiftly from one form to the other.

In the *Trojan Women*, the first chorus featuring the only lyric exchange between the character of Hecuba and the chorus, could well have been influenced by pantomime. The chorus clearly echoes the parallel one in Euripides' *Trojan Women* (153 ff.); at the same time Euripides' chorus is "less ritualistic and formal, focusing on the fates awaiting the Trojan women, not on the deaths of Hector and Priam or on Troy's tragic past".<sup>68</sup> As Boyle has observed, the character of the chorus is not only ritualistic in content but also in form: the Trojan women perform wild gestures such as the beating and baring of their breasts and the tearing of their hair, which are the typical gestures of the lamentation for the dead; the expression *iusta Troiae facite* at line 65 confirms that the women are performing the prescribed acts of the dirge. The sacred effect of the lamentation, which in Euripides is in part dissipated by the inclusion of dramatic information, is in Seneca particularly emphasised.<sup>69</sup>

The heavy presence of gestures which are required to perform the instructions given by Hecuba to the chorus are interpreted by Fantham as necessary since "Seneca's public sees no chorus but draws their ideas of the action from the poetry alone".<sup>70</sup> Fantham's interpretation implies that Seneca's tragedies were not written for performance and thus extended descriptions were required to make the audience understand what they could not see. In the case of a performance, instead, such detailed descriptions would have had

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<sup>68</sup> Boyle (1994) 144-5.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>70</sup> Fantham (1982a) 226.

no point since the action was taking place in front of the audience. Even if this were the case, namely that Seneca did not write the tragedies for performance, which is, however, still a controversial question in the scholarly interpretation of the Senecan *corpus*, nonetheless Fantham's interpretation does not seem to take into account the strong spectacular and visual character of the passage. It looks as if Seneca conceived this particular passage as a written paraphrase of a vivid image. In this regard, the display of the Trojan women in mourning was not only a favourite literary topic, but also a popular one in pantomimic performances.<sup>71</sup>

That the portrayal of the Trojan women as a mournful crowd lamenting for their dead was a diffuse one seems to be confirmed by Hecuba's very words at lines 95-96: *placet hic habitus,/ placet: agnosco Troada turbam*.<sup>72</sup> These words, whose metatheatrical implications were rightly recognised by Boyle, could imply and refer both to the long literary tradition in which the Trojan women were typically represented in mourning and to the pantomimic tradition which exploited the performing possibilities of that representation.<sup>73</sup>

A remarkable stylistic feature of the choruses in the *Phaedra*, *Oedipus*, and *Trojan Women* is the language of corporality used by Seneca. The ode in the *Phaedra* contains a conspicuously high number of references to body parts (274-359): *frontem; medullas; pectus; vultibus; fronte; terga; ungula; pectore; digitis; capillis; crura; plantas; manu; umeris*. Similarly, the ode in the *Oedipus* (403-508): *comam; bracchia; palmis; caput; vultu; comam; caput; frontem; crines; artus; crine; tempora; pede; pectora; comam;*

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<sup>71</sup> Claudian, *In Eutropium*, 2, 402-5: *Hic dictis iterum sedit; fit plausus et ingens/concilii clamor, qualis resonantibus olim/exoritur caveis, quotiens crinitus ephebus/aut rigidam Niobem aut flentem Troada fingit*.

<sup>72</sup> I follow Fitch's arrangement of the colometry (2002-2004), which is still debated by scholars. The *A* tradition writes a series of anapaestic dimeters irregularly closed by monometers, while the *Etruscus* writes each of Hecuba's speech as anapaestic dimeters. See Fantham (1982a) 110-13 and Fitch (1987b) for fuller discussion about the colometry of anapaests.

<sup>73</sup> Boyle (1994) 147. See also Boyle (2006) 217 for the similar case at *Medea* 1021-2: *coniugem agnoscis tuam?/sic fugere soleo*. Medea's final words to Jason have always troubled scholars because of their enigmatic meaning. Boyle's interpretation that "the metatheatrical sense is that this is how Medea leaves her play" seems to make the meaning clear.

*latus; manu; artus; membra; facies; bracchia; utero; pectus; lateri; manus; humero; capillis.* So too the ode in the *Trojan Women* (67-163): *manum; crinem; colla; capilli; manus; lacertos; utero; artus; pectora; manus; crinem; coma; ora; umeris; latus; pectora; dextras; manus; pectus; dextra; lacertos; umeros; caput; dextera; ubera; palmis; umeris; truncus; cervice; colla; manus; terga; dextra.*

This language of the body and its emphasis on physicality could have been employed with the function of mirroring the semiotic system of the body characteristic of the pantomimic genre.

In this respect, Ovid already had made use of such language of the body and Seneca may have borrowed it from him;<sup>74</sup> however, the formulaic nature of the language of the body used by Seneca seems a feature connected or rather inspired by a fixed and stereotypical system of body signs, thus quite similar to the one which most probably constituted the body grammar of pantomime. Seneca's language of corporeality has nothing of the sophisticated, elusive, and complex character of Ovid's language of the body. However, it is possible to suggest that Ovid's use of the language of the body was a feature which made his poems suitable to be adapted in pantomime (*Tristia* 2, 519-20 *et mea sunt populo saltata poemata saepe*). Seneca's tendency to employ a somehow simplified and less poetically sophisticated version of Ovid's language of the body would seem to reflect his engagement with pantomime.

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<sup>74</sup> See Lateiner (1996) 225-53 for a study of non-verbal behaviours in Ovid.

## Chapter 3

### Pantomime and descriptive running commentaries

#### 3.1 Introduction: the role of descriptions in Seneca's tragedies

Scholars have unanimously pointed out that Seneca's tragedies are highly descriptive. Descriptions can occur in the forms of broad narrative passages or briefer accounts of a character's behaviour. An example of the former is the storm-description in the *Agamemnon*, which expands on the shipwreck of the Greek fleet (421-578, 157 lines); an example of the latter is the chorus describing Cassandra's frenzied movements produced by prophetic *furor*, again in the *Agamemnon* (710-19, 9 lines long).

In general, the presence of narrative passages hinders the development of the plot since it results in a suspension of dramatic time and a "freezing of the action".<sup>1</sup>

Extended descriptions are a conventional device of epic where they are widely employed as a means for visualisation and picture-making. In fact, description has the power to bring the subject vividly before the mind's eye and to generate an emotional response in the audience (either readers or listeners). Now, if descriptions have a natural place in epic, enabling the readers or listeners to appreciate the visual dimension of the tale, the same does not apply in tragedy, where the audience can actually see onstage what is happening. While descriptions are not totally absent in Greek tragedy, where they serve the function of overcoming difficulties of stage production or of describing briefly a character's attitude, they are usually brief and always pertinent to the action like the narration of past events strictly relevant to the advancement of the plot or events which cannot be presented on stage (such as killings and death). Because of their restrained character, descriptions in Greek theatre do not result in a suspension of the dramatic time and can be placed within the dramatic conventions.

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<sup>1</sup> Bain (1977) 61.

Unlike descriptions found in Greek drama, descriptions in Seneca's tragedies heavily disrupt dramatic conventions, so that their presence has been interpreted by many scholars, starting with Leo in the late nineteenth century, as a mere means for rhetorical display and the narratives have been dismissively labelled as "pieces of virtuoso entertainment".<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, descriptions have also been used as evidence of Seneca's lack of interest in dramatic coherence and stage performance, since, in the case of a stage performance, extended descriptive narratives would have been redundant and out of place. Among recent scholars, Zwierlein was the one who most strongly considered the occurrence of descriptive narratives as evidence that Seneca wrote the tragedies for recitation instead of stage performance.<sup>3</sup> In this case, their presence would have the function of supplying information which can not be conveyed by means of stage-production.

On the same line of thought as Zwierlein, Larson, who devoted an extensive study to the role of descriptions in Seneca's tragedies, has also claimed that "the predilection for description in Senecan tragedy is indicative of a lack of concern for dramatic effect"; she further argues that "its presence represents the *importation of an alien technique*, which properly belongs to the narrative mode, into drama".<sup>4</sup> Thus, what Larson defines as the "hybrid mixture of narrative technique with dramatic genre" is interpreted as a tool employed by Seneca to achieve an "authorial control over the audience's understanding and interpretation of the tragedies".

I would suggest, instead, that the alien technique imported into drama derives from the penetration into Seneca's tragic texts of the stylistic technique of composition of pantomimic libretti, which adopted features typical of both epic and tragedy, and indeed all previous genres and artistic media.

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<sup>2</sup> Larson (1994) 135.

<sup>3</sup> Zwierlein (1966).

<sup>4</sup> Larson (1994) 53. Italics are mine.

Pantomimic libretti, so the evidence suggests, featured a similar hybrid mixture of narrative technique with dramatic genre attributed by Larson to Seneca's tragedies.<sup>5</sup> It is likely that pantomimic libretti were made up of narratives, where the character in charge of delivering the narrative acquired the stance of an external narrator rather than a character involved in the action, this being due to the difficulty of portraying complicated interaction between several characters and the consequent need for the story to be told somehow explicitly especially since the pantomimic dancer was wordless. Furthermore, it is likely that pantomimic libretti employed descriptions to set and evoke the scenario and atmosphere in which the movements of the dancer took place or to act as a commentary on his gestures. If this is right, we may describe pantomimic libretti as compositions in between epic and tragedy.<sup>6</sup> This is possibly supported by Lucian's statement (61) that pantomimic libretti "were adapted from the best epic and tragic poets of the past". Several ancient writers attest that pantomimic libretti were adapted from Virgil and Ovid claims that his poems were adapted in pantomimic performances (*Tristia*, 2, 519: *et mea sunt populo saltata poemata saepe*).<sup>7</sup> It is now appropriate to examine in more detail the narrative parts of Seneca's tragedies in the attempt to define more precisely their connection with pantomime.

### 3.2 General features of running commentaries of on-stage actions

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<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 1 p. 25.

<sup>6</sup> See Chapter 1 pp. 25-26.

<sup>7</sup> Suetonius, *Nero* (54, 1): *Sub exitu quidem vitae palam voverat, si sibi incolumis status permansisset, proditum se partae victoriae ludis etiam hydraulam et choraulam et utricularium, ac novissimo die histrionem saltaturumque Vergili Turnum*; Lucian 46 (the wandering of Aeneas and the love of Dido); Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 5, 17, 5: *quod ita elegantius auctore digessit, ut fabula lascivientis Didonis, quam falsam novit universitas, per tot tamen saecula speciem veritatis obtineat et ita pro vero per ora omnium volitet, ut pictores fectoresque et qui figmentis liciorum contextas imitantur effigies, hac materia vel maxime in effigiandis simulacris tamquam unico argumento decoris utantur, nec minus histrionum perperuis et gestibus et cantibus celebretur*; Augustine, *Sermones* 241.5 =PL 38, 1135-6.

Running commentaries are those passages of Seneca's tragedies in which the emotions, actions, or physical appearance of a character are described by the chorus or by another actor in the third person; usually, the character described remains mute and does not hear or react to the words spoken about him. Running commentaries can either describe actions which are taking place onstage or offstage.<sup>8</sup> Running commentaries thus consist of a speaking actor describing a mute performance by a silent one. Greek theatre does not feature such a technique. In fact, in Greek theatre emotions are portrayed by means of very brief and simple physical description or are usually "conveyed implicitly rather than explicitly described";<sup>9</sup> furthermore the observations of an actor's behaviour are usually addressed to him and in turn trigger a response.

Running commentaries can either portray a character undergoing emotional strain (Medea driven by anger, Phaedra by love, Cassandra by prophetic madness) or describe various actions performed by characters, such as Astyanax's supplication, Medea's preparation of the poison, or Hercules' killing of his family. Senecan tragedies contain the following running commentaries, which can be divided in two groups on the basis of their occurrence on-stage or off-stage:

on-stage running commentaries:

- *Medea* 380-96; 849-78: nurse and chorus on Medea
- *Agamemnon* 710-19: chorus on Cassandra
- *Hercules furens* 895-1053: Amphitryon on Hercules
- *Trojan Women* 705-35: Andromache on Astyanax
- *Trojan Women* 883-85; 845-48; 925-26; 965-68: Helen and Andromache on Polyxena

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<sup>8</sup> I adopt here Larson's definition (1994) 31.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem* 28.

off-stage running commentaries:

- *Phaedra* 362-83: nurse on Phaedra
- *Oedipus* 915-79: messenger on Oedipus
- *Hercules Oetaeus* 233-53: nurse on Deianira
- *Agamemnon* 867-909: Cassandra on Agamemnon
- *Medea* 670-751: nurse on Medea
- *Phoenissae* 427-42: messenger on Jocasta

The presence of descriptions of the character's movements has played an important role in the evaluation of Seneca as a dramatist. Zwierlein defined these descriptive parts as a "mute performance" ("stummes Spiel") and did not like the result: "The audience must receive the impression that he is witness to a pantomime described in a troublesome and pedantic way by a third person, as if the audience were blind".<sup>10</sup> The fact that the action is described by a third person makes Zwierlein think that the tragedies were meant for recitation because, if they were staged, there would have been no need to describe the action, as it would have been before the eyes of the audience. More recently, Bernard Zimmermann, however, reconsidered the widespread descriptive scenes present in the tragedies.<sup>11</sup> He argues that they can be easily explained as pantomimic elements and suggests that three different types of pantomime scenes can be found in Seneca's tragedies: "regelrechte Pantomimen" (actual pantomimes) is the one in which the chorus describes the action of a character (*Med* 849-78; *Ag* 710-19; *Hf* 1082-93); the second is the one in which an actor describes the action of another actor (*Med* 380-96); "pantomimische Kurzkommentare" (short pantomimic commentaries) is the one in which the chorus or an actor announces the entrance or the exit of another actor, giving a

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<sup>10</sup> Zwierlein (1966) 56-63; 58 "Der Zuschauer müsste den Eindruck bekommen, er werde Zeuge einer Pantomime, die ihm- lästig genug, auch noch pedantisch von dritten Seite beschrieben wird, als sei er blind".

<sup>11</sup> Zimmermann (1990) 161-67.

brief description of the character's movements (*Phae* 583-586; 728; 829-34; *Tro* 615-17; *Med* 186; *Ag* 775-81). Zimmermann gives some examples for each of the three types, but his analysis is not exhaustive.

In what follows, I want to build on his insight that Seneca's running commentaries are pantomimic elements, both through a systematic analysis of all the running commentaries found in the plays and by asking why Seneca found this technique so attractive.

More specifically, I would suggest that the influence of the aesthetics of pantomime in Seneca's running commentaries dealing with descriptions of emotions is apparent in three aspects: content, distinctive stylistic features, and construction of the verse.

Running commentaries deal with descriptions of characters under the effects of harmful emotions such as erotic passion, *furor*, anger, madness, and pain. For instance, Phaedra, Medea, Deianira, Cassandra are all characters who experience extreme emotional states.

The representation of a character in a mental state of extreme intensity by means of a highly sophisticated allusive gesturing was typical of pantomimic performances.<sup>12</sup>

Seneca's interest in the potential offered by absorbing techniques from this emotive theatrical medium may, therefore, have been aroused by a perception that pantomime was exceptionally suited to display the effects of passions. Indeed, Seneca tells us in his own words that his appreciation for pantomime was due to the dancer's ability to portray emotions (*Epistulae*, 121, 6): *Mirari solemus saltandi peritos quod in omnem significationem rerum et adfectuum parata illorum est manus et verborum velocitatem gestus adsequitur.*<sup>13</sup>

It is noticeable how Seneca tends to describe emotions or states of mind in terms of the bodily symptoms and physical sensations which they produce, perhaps to stress the loss

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<sup>12</sup> Lucian, *De Saltatione* 67; epigram in the *Latin Anthology* 100.

<sup>13</sup> We know that the Stoic Seneca was extremely interested in the effects of the passions on a human being, since he explored them in his philosophical works, especially the *De Ira*.

of dignity and composure produced by uncontrolled passion. This technique seems clearly to strive for a physical externalisation of passions and a visualization of the outward manifestation of an inner state of mind. The extensive presence of body parts contained in the passages is strongly suggestive of a poet producing verse with gestural and choreographic accompaniment in mind: the special emphasis on the movements of the eyes recalls the similar emphasis ancient writers gave to the highly expressive and fundamental role of the dancer's gaze (in particular Apuleius' statement that the pantomime could dance with his very eyes alone). For example, in the passage dealing with Cassandra's prophetic frenzy, eye movements are described at length.<sup>14</sup> The eye movements may have been suggested by emphatic movements of the head to which a vivid expression of the eyes may have provided emotional intensity and the words of the libretto more specific explanatory or descriptive information.

Philosophically, the emphasis on the eyes seems to point to the belief that the eyes are windows to one's internal condition and recalls Quintilian's statement about the relevance of the gaze for the orator (*Inst.* 11, 3, 75: *Sed in ipso vultu plurimum valent oculi, per quos maxime animus elucet*).

The descriptions of emotions and states of minds in the running commentaries are heavily stereotyped to the point that Seneca employs the same or very similar formulas and attributes to portray each characteristic passion, such as anger, love, or grief. If we compare the descriptions discussed above, the recurrences of similar patterns of behaviour are evident: the characters all move with hasty or agitated movements and are affected by a constant change of attitude: (*Med* 385 *talis recursat huc et huc motu effero*; 862 *huc fert pedes et illuc*; *HO* 247 *incurrit, errat*; *Phae* 372-73 *semper impatiens sui/mutatur habitus*; *HO* 250 *nec unus habitus durat*); their eyes are flashing and turning: (*Phae* 364 *erumpit oculis ignis*; 380 *oculi nihil gentile nec patrium micant*;

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<sup>14</sup> 714-15 *incerta nutant lumina et versi retro/ torquentur oculi, rursus immoti rigent*.

*Oed* 958 *ardent minaces igne truculento genae*; *Ag* 714-15 *incerta nutant lumina et versi retro/torquentur oculi, rursus immoti rigent*); the colour of their faces is in a state of constant change: (*Phae* 376 *non ora tinguens nitida purpureus rubor*; *Med* 387 *flammata facies*; *Med* 858-61 *Flagrant genae rubentes,/pallor fugat ruborem./nullum vagante forma/servat diu colorem*; *HO* 251-52 *nunc inardescunt genae/pallor ruborem pellit*; *Ag* 710-11 *pallor genas...possidet*); they cry and groan: (*Phae* 370 *noctem querelis ducit*; 381-82 *lacrimae cadunt per ora et assiduo genae/rore irrigantur*; *Med* 388 *oculos uberi fletu rigat*; 390 *queritur gemit*; *Oed* 922 *gemitus et altum murmur*; *HO* 249 *fletus insequitur minas*; 253 *queritur implorat gemit*).

Interestingly, even the range of comparison used in the descriptions is limited and recurs especially in the adoption of a set of similar epic similes: comparison with a wild animal (*Med* 863-65 *ut tigris orba natis/cursu furente lustrat/ Gangeticum nemus*; *Oed* 919-20 *qualis per arva Libycus insanit leo,/fulvam minaci fronte concutiens iubam*; *HO* 241-42 *feta ut Armenia iacens/sub rupe tigris hoste conspecto exilit*). Another pattern recurs in comparisons with a maenad: (*Med* 382-83 *Incerta qualis entheos gressus tulit/cum iam recepto maenas insanit deo/ Pindi nivalis vertice aut Nysae iugis*; 849-51 *Quonam cruenta maenas/ praeceps amore saevo/ rapitur*; *HO* 243-44 *aut iussa thyrsum quatere conceptum ferens/Maenas Lyaeum dubia quo gressus agat*; *Ag* 719 *maenas impatiens dei*).

The use, therefore, of the same standard repertoire of either behaviour or expressions used in the descriptions seems to suggest that Seneca did not aim at variation or nuanced portrayal of different emotions and characters; on the contrary, running commentaries seem to offer standardised and rather predictable descriptions of stock exhibitions of emotional disturbance by the characters. Moreover, the same apparatus of gestures, attitudes, and symptoms is then expressed by a sort of formulaic vocabulary constituted by a set repertoire of imagery (especially similes). It is tempting to suppose

that this formulaic vocabulary reflects the parallel formulaic vocabulary of movements and gestures which most probably constituted the alphabet of the dancers.<sup>15</sup>

Because of this stylised characterisation, Seneca's characters appear to be types or even archetypes rather than individuals.<sup>16</sup> Schlegel defined them as "gigantic puppets" and, similarly, T.S. Eliot claimed that Seneca's "characters all seem to speak with the same voice and at the top of it".<sup>17</sup>

Such an impression of stylisation is further enhanced by the fact that Seneca's characters are invariably presented at the acme of emotional intensity which makes them appear much larger than life in the intensity of their feelings. For example, Clytemnestra affirms that her conflicting emotions (love for Aegisthus, outrage for Agamemnon's infidelities) are so enormous that she cannot endure delays (*Ag* 131 *Maiora cruciant quam ut moras possim pati*); Oedipus claims that he has made the heaven sinful and that all of him is guilty (*Oed* 36 *fecimus caelum nocens*; *Phoe* 158 *totus nocens sum*); usually, the enormity of the characters' passions are measured against their sinful family background (usually mythical predecessors) or their past actions, which are usually outdone by the fierceness of the present emotional condition: for instance, Phaedra's love for Hippolytus is said to outdo Pasiphae's love for the bull (*Phae* 142-43 *...quid domum infamem aggravas/superasque matrem? maius est monstro nefas*); Medea's rage is said to grow monstrously, renew its past violence and prepare a monstrosity bigger than the past ones she has committed (*Med* 671-72 *immane quantum*

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<sup>15</sup> See Lada-Richards (2004) 31 and n. 59 p. 44; she rightly claims that a "very significant amount of stylisation in the bodily enactment of particular motifs or types or stories" must have featured; as evidence of this, she refers to a passage in Lucian (80), in which he says that a dancer, depicting the tecnophagy of Cronus, went off in presenting that of Thyestes; the mistake which occurred was probably due to the fact that "tecnophagy was conveyed by a set choreographic pattern, making it quite easy for a pantomime to confuse the stories of Cronus and Thyestes".

<sup>16</sup> Canter (1925) 14 and Bonner (1949) 162 think that the characterisation in Seneca's tragedies was directly inspired by the rhetorical practise of impersonation (*ethopoeia*); Jung (1963) 180 states that "archetypes speak the language of high rhetoric, even of bombast".

<sup>17</sup> Schlegel (1809-11): "[Seneca's] characters are neither ideal nor real beings, but misshapen gigantic puppets, who are set in motion at one time by the string of an unnatural heroism, and at another by that of a passion equally unnatural..." (as translated into English in Schlegel [1846] 211); Eliot (1951) 68.

*augescit et semet dolor/accendit ipse vimque praeteritam integrat; 674-75 ...maius his, maius parat/Medea monstrum*); Clytemnestra's betrayal of her husband Agamemnon must be an outrage greater than that of Helen against Menelaus (*Ag 123-24 quid timida loqueris furta et exilium et fugas?/soror ista fecit; te decet maius nefas*). The climax in the outdoing of predecessors or past actions is to be found in the *Thyestes*, in which Atreus's thirst for revenge moves on a cosmic scale since it is said even to transcend human limits (*Thy 267-70 Nescioquid animo maius et solito amplius/supraque fines moris humani tumet/ instatque pigris manibus. haud quid sit scio,/sed grande quiddam est!*).<sup>18</sup>

The excessive nature of Seneca's characters may be a further sign of the influence of the aesthetics of pantomime. As Lada-Richards has put it, pantomimic *personae* were primarily "emotional landscapes, whose innermost recesses his dancing sought to illuminate", and the marked, emphatic, and sometimes excessive emotionalism arguably was an outstanding feature of pantomimic performances.<sup>19</sup>

In the following sections, I will provide an analysis of the features of running commentaries that I have singled out as belonging to pantomime in this introduction.

### **3.2.1 *Medea* 380-96: nurse on *Medea***

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<sup>18</sup> See also *Thy* 252-54 and 273-75.

<sup>19</sup> Lada-Richards (2007) 115.

In Seneca's *Medea* we can identify two on-stage running commentaries. The first occurs at lines 380-96 (iambic trimeters) where the nurse describes Medea; the second at lines 849-878 (anacreontics with three intercalated galliambics) where the chorus describes the protagonist again.

Lines 380-96:

Alumna, celerem quo rapis tectis pedem?	380
resiste et iras comprime ac retine impetum.	
Incerta qualis entheos gressus tulit	
cum iam recepto maenas insanit deo	
Pindi nivalis vertice aut Nysae iugis,	
talis recursat huc et huc motu effero,	385
furoris ore signa lymphati gerens.	
flammata facies, spiritum ex alto citat,	
proclamat, oculos uberi fletu rigat,	
renidet; omnis specimen affectus capit.	
haeret minatur aestuat queritur gemit.	390
quo pondus animi verget? ubi ponet minas?	
ubi se iste fluctus franget? exundat furor.	
non facile secum versat aut medium scelus:	
se vincet. irae novimus veteris notas.	
magnum aliquid instat, efferum immane impium.	395
vultum Furoris cerno. di fallant metum!	

The nurse's description of Medea opens the third act of the play; the nurse addresses the protagonist in the first two lines and provides the clue that Medea is coming out from the house in a haste (380 *Alumna, celerem quo rapis tectis pedem?*); the following part of the speech delivered by the nurse describes Medea in the third person and is an account of the symptoms produced by anger by which Medea is taken hold of: Medea keeps moving here and there (385 *talis recursat huc et huc motu effero*) and

the nurse compares this attitude with that of a frenzied maenad (382 *Incerta qualis entheos gressus tulit/cum iam recepto maenas insanit deo/Pindi nivalis vertice aut Nysae iugis*);<sup>20</sup> it is worth noting that Seneca uses two vivid expressions *recursat huc et huc motu effero* and *entheos gressus tulit* (taking erratic steps) to convey the image of Medea rushing around. Medea bears in her expression the signs of frenzied rage (386 *furoris ore signa lymphati gerens*); her face is blazing (387 *flammata facies*); she draws deep breaths (387 *spiritum ex alto citat*); she shouts (388 *proclamat*); she wets her eyes with tears (388 *oculos uberi fletu rigat*); she beams with joy (389 *renidet*); she shows evidence of each emotion (389 *omnis specimen affectus capit*); she hesitates (390 *haeret*); she threatens (390 *minatur*); she rages (390 *aestuat*); she laments (390 *queritur*); she groans (390 *gemit*). Then the nurse asks herself where the weight of Medea's mind will come down (391 *quo pondus animi verget?*), where she will place her threats (391 *ubi ponet minas?*), and where the wave of her anger will break (392 *ubi se iste fluctus franget?*); she then goes back to Medea and concludes the section with the image of Medea's rage overflowing (392 *exundat furor*). It is remarkable that each emotion is described as an active agent with almost an independent life of its own which, in turn, possesses Medea's body. The metaphor of the wave of emotion begins at line 392 (*ubi se iste fluctus franget*) and reaches its climax in the same line with the image of rage that overflows and implies an externalising movement of the feeling from the inside to the outside.<sup>21</sup>

It is worth noting that the passage features a small amount of connectives and it

<sup>20</sup> The passage seems to expand on Ovid's *Medea: feror huc illuc ut plena deo*.

<sup>21</sup> The passage dealing with Medea's *furor* recalls closely Seneca's description of this destructive emotion in the *De Ira* (1, 1, 3-4): *nam ut furentium certa indicia sunt audax et minax vultus, tristis frons, torva facies, citatus gradus, inquietae manus, color versus, crebra et vehementius acta suspiria, ita irascentium eadem signa sunt: flagrant ac micant oculi, multus ore toto rubor exaestuante ab imis praecordiis sanguine, labra quatiuntur, dentes comprimuntur, horrent ac surriguntur capilli, spiritus coactus ac stridens, articulorum se ipsos torquentium sonus, gemitus mugitusque et parum explanatis vocibus sermo praeruptus et conplosae saepius manus et pulsata humus pedibus et totum concitum corpus magnasque irae minas agens, foeda visu et horrenda facies depravantium se atque intumescantium.*



nullum vagante forma           860  
 servat diu colorem.  
 huc fert pedes et illuc,  
 ut tigris orba natis  
 cursu furente lustrat  
                   Gangeticum nemus.   865

Frenare nescit iras  
 Medea, non amores;  
 nunc ira amorque causam  
 iunxere: quid sequetur?  
 quando efferet Pelasgis       870  
 nefanda Colchis arvis  
 gressum, metuque solvet  
 regnum simulque reges?  
 Nunc, Phoebe, mitte currus  
 nullo morante loro,           875  
 nox condat alma lucem,  
 mergat diem timendum  
                   dux noctis Hesperus.

The fourth chorus of the play deals with a second description of Medea's frenzied behaviour and recasts the symptoms previously described by the nurse. Medea is here compared to a maenad driven by a savage love (849-51 *Quonam cruenta maenas/praeceps amore saevo/rapitur?*). Then the account moves to describing the physical symptoms produced by anger: first there is a striking juxtaposition between violent movement (853 *citatus*) and immobility (854 *riget*): her face driven by anger sets (853-54 *vultus citatus ira/riget*); then she tosses her hair with violent movements and she threatens the king (854-56 *et caput feroci/quatiens superba motu/regi minatur ultro*). The chorus then describes at length Medea's burning face and emphasises the swift alternation between red and pale complexion, which was interpreted as a

common sign of distress: her reddened cheeks are inflamed, but pallor displaces redness (858-59 *Flagrant genae rubentes,/pallor fugat ruborem*), and she does not keep any colour for long in her shifting appearance (860-61 *nullum vagante forma/servat diu colorem*).<sup>25</sup>

Lines 862-65 recast the comparison of Medea with a maenad pacing to and fro (*huc fert pedes et illuc,/ut tigris orba natis/cursu furente lustrat/Gangeticum nemus*) which has been already employed in the opening of the chorus and reiterates with slight variations the similar comparison between Medea and a maenad made by the nurse in the previous passage (382-85 *Incerta qualis entheos gressus tulit/cum iam recepto maenas insanit deo/...talis recursat huc et huc motu effero*).<sup>26</sup> The chorus then states that Medea is unable to rein in her feelings either of love or anger and provides the image of the protagonist pulled in different directions by these two opposite emotions (866-67 *Frenare nescit iras/Medea, non amores*). The chorus concludes its song with an invocation to Phoebus to let the night come and hide Medea's evil projects.

The fourth chorus of the *Medea* has a peculiar metrical pattern. Scholars have long debated the issue and reached different conclusions. Costa and Zwierlein interpret the metrical structure of the chorus as a system of catalectic iambic dimeters with three lines one syllable shorter 857, 865, 878.<sup>27</sup> The difficulty in regarding the lines as iambs is the atypical and consistent presence of a short syllable in the fifth element of the foot.<sup>28</sup> Leo already felt the difficulty and considered the lines as anacreontics with sporadic substitutions of the two short syllables with a long one and interspersed with

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<sup>25</sup> Compare Ovid, *Met.* 8, 465-6 about Althaea: *saepe metu sceleris pallebant ora futuri,/saepe suum fervens oculis dabat ira ruborem*.

<sup>26</sup> The simile is borrowed from Ovid, *Met.* 13, 547-49: *utque furi catulo lactente orbata leaena/signaque nacta pedum sequitur, quem non videt, hostem; Met.* 6, 636-37: *nec mora, traxit Ityn, veluti Gangetica cervae/lactentem fetum per silvas tigris opacas*.

<sup>27</sup> Costa (1973) 148; Zwierlein (1986) 464.

<sup>28</sup> Häuptli (2002) 316-17.

catalectic clauses.<sup>29</sup> More recently, Bruno Häuptli has suggested that this choral part is composed by anacreontics intercalated with three galliambics; more specifically the galliambics would be line 856-57 *regi minatur ultro./quis credat exulem*, line 864-65 *cursu furente lustrat/Gangeticum nemus* and line 877-78 *mergat diem timendum/dux noctis Hesperus*.<sup>30</sup>

This metrical structure, with the presence of ionic meters, is inferred on the basis of the analogy with line 73 of Catullus poem 63 *iam iam dolet, quod egi,/iam iamque paenitet*. While solving the metrical problems of the chorus, Häuptli's proposal also opens a new question as to the reasons for such a singular metrical choice and prompts us to wonder about the special dramatic and scenic effect Seneca was trying to obtain. Now ionic verses have an "oriental" character and they are usually linked to a Dionysiac context. In fact we find them very predominantly in Aeschylus' *Persians* (694-96; 700-02) as well as in Euripides' *Bacchae* (parodos 64-169, first 370-401 and second *stasimon* 519-71 are extensively ionic). For instance, in the parodos of the *Bacchae* the oriental character of the procession of the worshippers is emphasised by the fact that "asiatic associations are repeatedly stressed", "the cult of Dionysus is linked with those of Cybele", and the singers play the *tympanum* (tambourine) which, together with the flute, was the characteristic instruments of orgiastic cults.<sup>31</sup>

The metrician Terenzianus Maurus links the rhythm of the ionic verse to another orgiastic and oriental context, that of the *Galli*, who were the priests of the Goddess Cybele and who practiced ritual emasculation.<sup>32</sup> For instance, galliambics feature in

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<sup>29</sup> Leo (1878) 136.

<sup>30</sup> Häuptli (2002) 313-17.

<sup>31</sup> See Dodds (1960) 72.

<sup>32</sup> Terenzianus Maurus, *De Litteris, De Syllabis, De Metris*, lines 2899-2900: *Sonat hoc subinde metro Cybeleium nemus,/ nomemque galliambis memorantur hinc datum,/ tremulos quod esse Gallis habiles putant modos,/ adeo ut frequenter illum prope ab ultimo pedem,/ mage quo sonus uibretur, student dare tribrachium./ Anapaestus esse primus, spondeus aut solet,/ duo post erunt iambi, tribrachysue subicitur,/ linquitque comma primum catalecticam breuem./ Pariambus et trochaei duo comma posterum/ tribachysue continebunt, superatque semipes./ Seruasse quae Catullus probat ipse tibi Liber:/ super alta uectus Attis celeri rate maria.*

one of Varro's Menippean satires, the *Eumenides* (of which 49 fragments survive), which contains a Cybele episode.<sup>33</sup>

The ionic metre was a traditional cult metre used in the songs sung during the orgiastic ritual ceremonies of Dionysus and Cybele, whose cults were often associated with one another.<sup>34</sup> For example, the Greek metrician Hephaestion explicitly affirms that the galliambic metre was used for hymns to Cybele.<sup>35</sup> As Häuptli also underlines, the metrical structure of the ionic verse, especially of galliambics, is particularly suitable for the orgiastic intonation of several short syllables in close sequence; the rhythm of the short syllables in close sequence suggests in a very appropriate mimetic way the cadence of the tambourine (*tympanum*) accompanying convulsive movements of the *Galli* reaching in procession the temple of Cybele.<sup>36</sup>

In poem 63, Catullus describes Attis' self-castration, his participation in the ritual procession and, at the end, his contrition for what he has done. The ionic verse is apparently used in specific relationship to the theme (the ritual ceremony of the cult of Cybele); this would also explain why many attempts to assign poem 63 to other codified genres have been so unsatisfactory.

Although the apparent lack of relation to any recognized metrical and poetic form leaves the question still open, it has been suggested by Morisi that the poem has a well recognizable dramatic structure because the story is not told and experienced by a narrator or in the third person, but it is told by the protagonist himself, who translates his feelings and his actions in scenic gesture.<sup>37</sup> Newman ascribes poem 63 to a tragic

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<sup>33</sup> See Cèbe (1977) vol. 4; see Wiseman (1985b) 269-272. Fragment 139 is a galliambic: *Phrygius per ossa cornus liquida canit anima*; fragment 140 contains 3 galliambics: *tibi typana non inanis sonitus Matri'deum/tonimus <chorus> tibi nos; tibi nunc semiviri/teretem comam volantem iactant, <domine> tibi/galli.*

<sup>34</sup> See Dodds (1960) 72-74; 118; 142; and West (1982) 22.

<sup>35</sup> Hephaestion, 12.3 (Westphal 39). In Rome, the cult of Cybele was instituted in 204 BC and a temple for her was dedicated in 191 on the Palatine. Annual celebrations in her honour were held during the Megalensia (4-9 April) and included stage-performances, chariot-racing, and beast-hunts.

<sup>36</sup> See Kirby (1989) for a detailed metrical analysis of the galliambics in Catullus 63.

<sup>37</sup> Morisi (1999) 33.

pantomime;<sup>38</sup> he argues that Catullus, relying on an Alexandrian model, could have been influenced in composing 63. In support of this view, we can also rely on the fact that the Attis self-castration was a very popular subject for pantomime performances, as demonstrated by the many *oscilla* featuring an Attis mask, although belonging to a later period.<sup>39</sup>

Catullus' Attis has been analysed in detail in Chapter 1;<sup>40</sup> here it is enough to underline the dramatic texture of the poem, which is interesting in relation to the metrical parallels of it found in the *Medea*. Overall, then, it seems likely that the fourth chorus of *Medea*, in which the chorus sings its song describing Medea's gesture at the acme of her *furor*, has strong affiliation with tragic pantomime.

### 3.2.3 *Agamemnon* 710-19: chorus on Cassandra

Silet repente Phoebas et pallor genas                    710  
creberque totum possidet corpus tremor;  
stetere vittae, mollis horrescit coma,  
anhela corda murmure incluso fremunt,  
incerta nutant lumina et versi retro  
torquentur oculi, rursus immoti rigent.                715  
nunc levat in auras altior solito caput  
graditurque celsa, nunc reluctantes parat  
reserare fauces, verba nunc clauso male  
custodit ore, maenas impatiens dei.

The fourth act of the *Agamemnon* features a confrontation between Cassandra and the

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<sup>38</sup> Newman (1990) 343-66.

<sup>39</sup> See Chapter 1 p. 45.

<sup>40</sup> See Chapter 1 pp. 42-49.

chorus, which, from a dramaturgical point of view, does not involve a significant advancement of the plot. Basically, the act is given to Cassandra, who either describes the approaching of her prophetic state with her own words or is described by the chorus in the third person. Thus, in the act, there are several sudden shifts from third-person description to first-person speech.

Cassandra's prophetic *furor* is described by the chorus step by step and has its climax in her mute performance at lines (710-19). The portrayal of Cassandra's behaviour starts with the ripping of the bands (693 *Sed cur sacratas deripis capiti infulas?*), increases with her acting as a maenad possessed by the god (710-19) and culminates with her clairvoyant speech (720-74 the striving for tension is confirmed by the shift from the iambic trimeter to the iambic dimeter within Cassandra's speech). Cassandra's tense speech ends with her fainting, described again by the chorus (775-778).

The running commentary made by the chorus at lines 710-19 describes the outward symptoms of Cassandra's prophetic frenzy and is heavily modelled on Virgil's description of the Cumean Sybil, even though Seneca adds some new details (as, for example, the emphasis on the movement of Cassandra's eyes): she is suddenly silent (710 *Silet repente Phoebas*); pallor spreads over her cheeks (710-11 *pallor genas...possidet*);<sup>41</sup> two signs of fear are then described: a continual tremble that takes hold of her whole body (711 *creberque totum possidet corpus tremor*), the standing out of her holy ribbons and of her hair (712 *stetere vittae, mollis horrescit coma*). Then it is the turn of the signs of possession: her panting breasts resound with an enclosed murmur (713 *anhela corda murmure incluso fremunt*);<sup>42</sup> her eyes are unsteady, roll backwards, and then become fixed and rigid again (714-15 *incerta nutant lumina et*

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<sup>41</sup> Compare the alternation of complexion in the *Medea* 858-61.

<sup>42</sup> The description of an emotion buried within the character and striving to come out is used by Seneca over and over again: compare e.g. *Phaedra* (362-63): *torretur aestu tacito et inclusus quoque./quamvis tegatur, proditur vultu furor*.

*versi retro/torquentur oculi, rursus immoti rigent*);<sup>43</sup> she then raises her head higher than usual and walks tall (716-17 *nunc levat in auras altior solito caput/graditurque celsa*);<sup>44</sup> then Cassandra is described as caught in the struggle between two contrasting forces: on the one hand, she is ready to open her reluctant mouth, but, on the other, she tries in vain to hold her words behind her closed mouth (717-19 *nunc reluctantes parat/reserare fauces, verba nunc clauso male/custodit ore*); the description is closed by the comparison of Cassandra with a maenad (719 *maenas impatiens dei*) and recalls closely Virgil's *at Phoebi nondum patiens* (6, 77). The word *maenad* was generally applied to any woman who behaved as possessed; in Euripides' *Trojan Women* (173) Cassandra is so called. It is interesting that Seneca stresses Cassandra's similitude with a maenad, although adapting closely a Virgilian passage in which the maenad simile is not present. It is remarkable that, in running commentaries, the comparison with a maenad is a favoured one which Seneca widely employs.<sup>45</sup> In the already mentioned anonymous epigram in praise of the art of the pantomimic dancer, the maenad performing frenzied movements (*bacchatur*) is among the most performed pantomimic show.

In terms of verse construction, it is helpful to explore what the influence of a pantomime aesthetic might have had on a conventional scene-type when turned into a Senecan 'running commentary'. This can be done by looking more closely at the description of Cassandra delivered by the chorus in *Agamemnon*, by comparing it with its literary model, the description of the effects of the prophetic frenzy on the Cumean Sybil in the *Aeneid*:

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<sup>43</sup> The symptom described was typical of an ecstatic and paranormal mental state: see Euripides' *Bacchae* (1122-3) and *Medea* (1173-74).

<sup>44</sup> The lines expand Virgil's *maiorque videri* (*Aen.* 6, 49).

<sup>45</sup> For example, in the *Medea* where the nurse and the chorus use it to describe Medea (382-83 and 849-50); in the *Trojan Women* where Andromache uses the simile to describe herself (373-76); in the *Hercules Oetaeus* where the nurse uses it to describe Deianira (243-45).

Silet repente Phoebas et pallor **genas**  
 creberque totum possidet **corpus** tremor;  
 stetero vittae, mollis horrescit **coma**,  
 anhela **corda** murmure incluso fremunt,  
 incerta nutant **lumina** et versi retro  
 torquentur **oculi**, rursus immoti rigent.  
 nunc levat in auras altior solito **caput**  
 graditurque celsa, nunc reluctantes parat  
 reserare **fauces**, verba nunc clauso male  
 custodit **ore**, maenas impatiens dei.

...cui talia fanti  
 ante fores subito non **vultus**, non color unus,  
 non comptae mansere **comae**; sed **pectus** anhelum,  
 et rabie fera **corda** tument, maiorque videri  
 nec mortale sonans, adflata est numine quando  
 iam propiore dei.

Stylistically, the Senecan passage adopts a staccato mode which sharply contrasts with the flowing mode of the Virgilian description. Seneca thus tends to present the image of Cassandra in clipped segments rather than as a continuous sequence, so that a single image is self-contained within a line or two. The staccato mode is achieved by a heavy use of end-stopped lines and a sparing use of enjambment which usually runs just over two lines. In fact, in the Senecan passage end-stopped lines are intercalated with enjambed lines, while the Virgilian one is heavily enjambed. The presence of end-stopped lines creates breaks and pause in the flow of the rhythm of the verse. Furthermore, the syntax of the passage moves predominantly in staccato phrases; connectives are used seldom, the style is mostly paratactic, asyndetic constructions are favoured, and there are few subordinate clauses. This syntactical device lends the passage a restless rhythm which matches the feverish inner state of the protagonist. The visualisation of the actions performed is facilitated by the use of parallel statements, which describe the character's movements in a very simple and arguably unpoetic way. In conclusion, these stylistic devices combine to produce an image that would be not only easy to visualise, but also to convey physically, by means of gestures.

As to the metrical patterns of running commentaries, we have seen that they can occur in connection with dialogue or lyric metre; therefore the metrical shift may claim a different musical accompaniment; otherwise, the portrayal of specific emotions may be related to the peculiar metrical pattern employed; concerning this point, the application

of the principle, according to which “certain meters can convey certain attitudes”, can provide a deeper insight into the meaning implied in Seneca’s dramatic technique.<sup>46</sup> Finally, the different metrical patterns may be a sign of the necessity of a different range of movements and gesture.

### 3.2.4 *Hercules furens* 895-1053: Amphitryon on Hercules

Hercules’ attack of insanity is described by Amphitryon in a lengthy running commentary. Fitch has noticed that “basically, act IV represents a translation into stage action of the Euripidean messenger-speech describing Hercules’ madness and the murder of his family”.<sup>47</sup> He then continues that “this is quite in keeping with Seneca’s tendency to dramatise rather than narrate tragic violence”. Fitch believes that Seneca borrowed the dramatisation of Hercules’ madness from an unknown dramatist where the scene was enacted on stage. Since there is no evidence of a play of such a kind, I would suggest, instead, that Seneca’s dramatisation of Hercules’ madness betokens the influence of pantomime; in fact, there is evidence from Lucian (41) and Macrobius (*Saturnalia* 2, 7, 16) that Hercules’ madness featured in pantomimic performance.<sup>48</sup>

It is worth analysing how this dramatisation takes place.

The scene as described by the dialogue is quite confusing and that is the reason why scholars have given different interpretations of it.

At line 987 Hercules sees one of his sons (whom he believes to be Lycus’ son) trying to hide and kill him with an arrow; Amphitryon describes Hercules’ action (991-95): *Quo*

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<sup>46</sup> The principle in relation to Senecan tragedy was first stated by Marx (1932) and later resumed by Bishop (1968).

<sup>47</sup> Fitch (1987a) 350.

<sup>48</sup> Lucian (42) attests that the theme of madness was generally extremely popular in pantomime. Macrobius’ passage is interesting in relation to the Senecan mad-scene, for which it may provide a source; Macrobius describes a performance of the famous dancer Pylades dancing the role of Hercules *furens* thus: *cum in Herculem furentem prodisset et non nullis incessum histrioni convenientem non servare videretur, deposita persona ridentes increpuit: μωροί, μαινόμενον ὀρχοῦμαι. hac fabula et sagittas iecit in populum. eandem personam cum iussu Augusti in triclinio ageret, et intendit arcum et spicula immisit. nec indignatus est Caesar eodem se loco Pyladi quo populum Romanum fuisse.*

*se caecus impegit furor?/vastum coactis flexit arcum cornibus/pharetramque solvit,  
stridet emissa impetu/harundo; medio spiculum collo fugit/vulnere relicto.*

Immediately after Amphitryon's intervention, we hear again Hercules who wants to "drag out" the whole of Lycus' offspring and "tear open" their hiding places; Amphitryon describes for us how Hercules attacks the palace, breaks down the doors (999-1001 *huc eat et illuc valva deiecto obice/rumpatque postes; columen impulsum labet./perlucet omnis regia*) and sees one of his own sons who is hidden there (1001-02 *hic video abditum/ natum scelesti patris*). He thus enters the palace and kills the second son. Again, the killing is described by Amphitryon (1002-07): *En blandas manus/ad genua tendens voce miseranda rogat./scelus nefandum, triste et aspectu horridum!./dextra precantem rapuit et circa furens/bis ter rotatum misit; ast illi caput/sonuit, cerebro tecta disperso madent.* Immediately afterward, Amphitryon describes Megara escaping from her hiding place with the third child (1008-09: *at misera, parvum protegens natum sinu./ Megara furenti similis e latebris fugit*). Where was Megara hiding before rushing out? In the palace? If so, she runs out from the palace and comes onstage. Hercules follows her (1010-11 *Licet Tonantis profuga condaris sinu./ petet undecumque temet haec dextra et feret*); Megara prays to Hercules to recognise that she is his wife and not Juno and that the small child who stretches his hands towards him is his. Hercules cannot be persuaded by Megara's words and spurs her to follow him (1018 *sequere*); does this verb imply that they go offstage again? Again from Amphitryon's words we know that Hercules is actually killing his third son and his wife 1022-26: *pavefactus infans igneo vultu patris/perit ante vulnus, spiritum eripuit timor./in coniugem nunc clava libratur gravis:/perfregit ossa, corpori trunco caput/abest nec usquam est.*

Now that the murders are accomplished, Hercules' father calls for his son's rage to strike him as well. Hercules does not reply to Amphitryon's plea, so we have to infer

that he is still offstage and comes back only at line 1035 where he expresses his satisfaction at the accomplishment of the murderous deed (*Bene habet, pudendi regis excisa est domus*). Amphitryon offers again himself as the final victim remaining to be killed, but Hercules just faints, and his father's words describe the coma into which he falls (1142-1148).

Fitch and Sutton envisage the scene as such:

- 1) Killing of the first son: Fitch proposes that Hercules may exit at 990 f. to make the shot or, if he is on stage, he "may shoot from the stage at a target unseen by the audience"; Sutton thinks, instead, that the first child is killed onstage.
- 2) killing of the second son: Hercules enters the palace at 1001-2 and kills the second son;
- 3) killing of Megara and the third son: after the killing of the second son, Megara rushes onstage from the palace, pursued by Hercules (1008-09). Hercules catches and spurs her to follow him. They exit again (1018 *sequere*) and Hercules kills his wife and his son offstage.
- 4) Hercules re-enters onstage at line 1035 and there collapses (as can be inferred by lines 1143 ff.).

Then, since Amphitryon describes the killings, Fitch and Sutton suggest that he can see them through the ruined doorway. Mackay, instead, proposes a different reading; he suggests that the whole scene takes place offstage but that the audience, through the open door, "catches glimpses" of the actions taking place there, while the rest, i.e. the action that could not plausibly be performed, is described by Amphitryon's words.<sup>49</sup>

From the analysis proposed above, it is clear that the different interpretations of the scene are due to the fact that the dialogue is ambiguous and does not make the action

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<sup>49</sup> MacKay (1975) 151.

completely clear and evident. I would say that the stage directions implied in the character's words do not allow us to establish, for example, if the first child is killed onstage or offstage; even the setting of the scene is quite fluid.

In addition to this, if it is true that Hercules' madness is dramatised on stage and the whole scene strives for visual effects, why then, does Amphitryon describe Hercules' action in the third person instead of addressing his son directly or, even more importantly, why does he not try to stop him? From the point of view of concern for dramatic illusion, Amphitryon's objective and detached description in such a situation of crisis is quite implausible; we have to imagine that while he witnesses the killings of his own nephews he narrates the terrible events to the audience instead of making an attempt at stopping Hercules. In my opinion, the implausibility can only be explained if we take into account that a sort of dramatic convention is at play here. To put it more clearly, it seems that Seneca could handle the scene so implausibly, because such a handling had become conventional. In my opinion, Amphitryon assumes here a similar function to that which the messengers have in Seneca's tragedies; he becomes a sort of external narrator much like the "speaking voice" to which a pantomime dancer danced and which remained aloof from the action.

### **3.2.5 *Trojan Women* 705-35: Andromache on Astyanax**

The third act of the *Trojan Women* is devoted to Andromache's attempt to conceal her little child in a safe place, after she had the dream in which Hector warned her of the danger Astyanax was about to incur because of the Greeks. The act is divided into three scenes: the first scene features a long dialogue between Andromache and an old man about the need to hide the child and the choice of Hector's tomb as the hiding place. The second one features Andromache's confrontation with Ulysses who came to collect the little child who is sentenced to death. Andromache tries to convince Ulysses that the

child is dead, but Ulysses discovers she is deceiving him and finds the child. The act ends with Andromache's lyric monody in which she begs and makes her son beg for pity and life.

Andromache's lyric monologue (705-35) is the climax of her desperate attempt to rescue her child. The climax is achieved by the building up of a progressive and increasing crescendo which starts at lines 672-75:

qualis Argolicas ferox  
turmas Amazon stravit, aut qualis deo  
percussa Maenas entheo silvas gradu  
armata thyrso terret atque expers sui                    675  
vulnus dedit nec sensit, in medios ruam  
tumuloque cineris socia defenso cadam.

The simile that compares Andromache to a maenad (which recalls directly *Medea* 382-86 where the nurse describes the protagonist thus) is used to underline that desperation and anger are driving her mad and furious. The shifting into madness goes on at lines 683-85 where she has a vision of Hector brandishing his arms: *arma concussit manu, iaculatur ignes! cernitis, Danai, Hectorem?/an sola video?*; Fantham parallels this passage with *Medea* (961-62) and *Agamemnon* (765) where Medea and Cassandra respectively undergo a similar kind of hallucinatory experience.<sup>50</sup>

Andromache's excited state of mind is visually conveyed, as suggested by Calder, by the fact that she strikes her breast (681 *Me, me sternite hic ferro prius*) and seems to reach its end when she falls at Ulysses' knees (691-3 *Ad genua accido/supplex, Ulixee, quamque nullius pedes/novere dextram pedibus admoveo tuis*).<sup>51</sup> Afterwards she delivers ten lines in iambs (694-704) where she more calmly tries to move Ulysses to

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<sup>50</sup> Fantham (1982a) 306.

<sup>51</sup> Calder (1984) 225.

pity; once she realises that her attempts are void, she breaks through in a lyric monody (705-35) in anapaests.

The peculiar feature of this lyric monody, which one would expect to be a surrendering lament of a mother in front of the cruel destiny of her son with a pronounced sorrowful and intimate tone, is its descriptiveness. Actually, Andromache's words describe the mute performance of Astyanax who acts out a supplication. Fantham describes the passage thus: "By composing these lines as an anapaestic monody, Seneca marks the movement of the child's surrender and raises Andromache's appeal above the emotional level of the dialogue surrounding it in a way without parallel in his other tragedies".<sup>52</sup> The emotional tone of the passage is given its high by the metrical patterns adopted which underline and emphasise the acts performed by the child. In relation to this, it is necessary to go into a brief discussion of the controversial colometry of the passage due to the divergence of the two traditions, E and A. The manuscripts of the A family write a sequence of anapaestic dimeters closed by a trimeter (line 734-35), while the *Etruscus* writes a sequence of anapaestic dimeters closed by a monometer.<sup>53</sup> I give below the two different colometry arrangements of lines 705-735 as given by Zwierlein and Fitch respectively:

Huc e latebris procede tuis,  
flebile matris furtum miserae.  
Hic est, hic est terror, Vlixē,  
**mille carinis.**  
Submitte manus dominique pedes  
supplice dextra stratus adora  
nec turpe puta quidquid miseros  
**Fortuna iubet.**  
pone ex animo reges ataus

Huc e latebris procede tuis,  
flebile matris furtum miserae.  
Hic est, hic est terror, Ulixē,  
**mille carinis.**  
**Summitte manus,**  
**dominique pedes**  
supplice dextra stratus adora,  
**nec turpe puta**  
quidquid miseros Fortuna iubet.

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<sup>52</sup> Fantham (1982a) 309.

<sup>53</sup> Zwierlein (1986) 78.

magnique senis iura per omnis  
incluta terras, excidat Hector,  
gere captivum positoque genu-  
si tua nondum funera sentis-  
matris fletus imitare tuae.  
Vidit pueri regis lacrimas  
et Troia prior, parvusque minas  
trucis Alcidae flexit Priamus.  
Ille, ille ferox, cuius vastis  
uiribus omnes cessere ferae,  
qui perfracto limine Ditis  
caecum retro patefecit iter,  
hostis parvi uictus lacrimis  
“suscipe” dixit “rector habenas  
patrioque sede celsus solio;  
sed sceptrum fide meliore tene”:  
hoc fuit illo uictore capi.  
Discite mites Herculis iras-  
an sola placent Herculis arma?  
iacet ante pedes non minor illo  
supplice supplex uitam petit-  
regnum Troiae quocumque uolet  
**Fortuna ferat.**

(Zwierlein, 1986)

pone ex animo reges atavos  
**magnique senis**  
iura per omnes incluta terras,  
excidat Hector, gere captivum,  
**positoque genu-**  
si tua nondum funera sentis-  
matris fletus imitare tuae.  
Vidit pueri regis lacrimas  
**et Troia prior,**  
parvusque minas trucis Alcidae  
**flexit Priamus.**  
Ille, ille ferox,  
cuius vastis viribus omnes  
**cessere ferae,**  
qui perfracto limine Ditis  
caecum retro patefecit iter,  
hostis parvi uictus lacrimis  
“suscipe” dixit “rector habenas,  
patrioque sede celsus solio;  
sed sceptrum fide meliore tene”.  
hoc fuit illo uictore capi.  
discite mites Herculis iras-  
an sola placent Herculis arma?  
**iacet ante pedes**  
non minor illo supplice supplex  
**uitamque petit;**  
regnum Troiae quocumque uolet  
**Fortuna ferat.**

(Fitch, 2002-2004)

Fitch's colometry, which has been developed on a statistical analysis based on Richter's

principle of sense-correspondence, identifies more monometers than Zwierlein<sup>54</sup>. From a general point of view, Fitch explains that “monometers coincide with heightened emotion, marked by apostrophe” and their occurrence creates a broken rhythm which is in contrast with the more controlled rhythm created by the sequence of dimeters; in the specific case of Andromache’s monody, he affirms that the “frequent monometers match the pathos of her address to Astyanax, but give way to consecutive dimeters in a more objective passage expounding the *exemplum* of Hercules’ clemency”.<sup>55</sup> If we consider the visual impact, Fitch’s arrangement is the one which underlines more vividly Astyanax’s movements. Since Andromache’s apostrophes imply Astyanax’ movements, Fitch’s arrangement of colometry restores the coincidence of the occurrence of monometer and movement, the latter being then emphasised by the metrical structure and possibly by the related musical accompaniment. Of the twelve monometers written by Fitch, six of them imply movements: *summitte manus* (hold out your arms); *dominique pedes* (at your master’s feet); *positoque genu* (on bended knee); *flexit Priamus* (Priam turned aside)<sup>56</sup>; *iacet ante pedes* (there lies at your feet); *vitamque petit* (asking for life).

The broken rhythm created by monometers slows down the flow of the anapaests and creates pauses required by the kinds of movements implied by the words: Astyanax holds out his arms, bends at Ulysses’ feet and touches them asking for life.

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<sup>54</sup> Richter (1899) 32-47 postulated that “in the majority of Seneca’s anapaests, metrical units coincide with units of sense, syntax and style”; Fitch’s colometry has been judged too radical by some scholars such as Wilson (1990) 189-94 and Boyle (1994) 237. In my opinion, since the corruption of the manuscript tradition is well established in regard to the colometry of anapaests and is then quite unreliable, I think that his arrangement is the only one which restores the poetic colour of the lines.

<sup>55</sup> Fitch (1987b) 75.

<sup>56</sup> I include this monometer as one implying movement, because of the simile between the young Priam and the young Astyanax present here. Due to the association between the two, Astyanax could well perform the role of young Priam, which requires the same kinds of movements acted out by Astyanax just few lines above. In relation to this, the presence of the verb *flectere* is particularly indicative; the verb *flectere* (with the meaning of *flectere animus*) is used to describe Priam’s successful attempt to move Hercules’ *animus*. The verb has also the meaning of bending the limbs (*flectere membra*) which is the physical action performed by Astyanax to act as a suppliant. According to this, the use of *flectere* in the Priam’s passage recalls the action performed by Astyanax and, in my opinion, allows the possibility to make Astyanax perform a bending movement as if in the role of Priam.

Later on in the act, Astyanax, who is mute until now, speaks his only line in the whole tragedy (792 *Miserere, mater*), which is the emotional response to Andromache's emotional farewell (790-91 *Troia te expectat tua:/i, vade liber, liberos Troas vide*); right afterwards Andromache's words (in iambs this time) describe again the child's gesture at lines 793-94 (*Quid meos retines sinus/manusque matris, cassa praesidia, occupas?*). The farewell scene between mother and son, which begins at line 793 and ends at line 812, shows to what extent Seneca exploited this highly pathetic and melodramatic moment of the parting of the two. Andromache's lyric monody, then, calls for performance; its sophisticated interplay of metre, music, and description of movement would be lost in the recitation of a single voice and the composition of such a passage would not make any sense but with performance in mind.

### **3.2.6 Trojan Women 883-85; 845-48; 925-26; 965-68: Helen and Andromache on Polyxena**

In the fourth act of the *Trojan Women* there are three speaking characters (Helen, Andromache, and Hecuba) and two mute ones (Polyxena and Pyrrhus). This act presents the description of various mute performances (occurring here in iambs rather than in lyric metres) played by Polyxena (lines 883-85; 925-26; 945-48; 965-68), Hecuba (lines 949-54), and Pyrrhus (lines 999-1003 where he enters on stage at the end of the act, performs his mute role and exits with the young Trojan girl).<sup>57</sup> The mute role played by Polyxena, which is described by various speaking characters, is central to the act- just as the role of Astyanax in the previous one. Fitch observed that Astyanax' and Polyxena's destiny provides the structural framework and is the unifying factor of the

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<sup>57</sup> See Owen (1969) 136-37: he states that the fourth act "demands some visual component, perhaps pantomime, in order to affect clearly its multiple levels for an audience".

play itself;<sup>58</sup> in fact, in the second act the destiny of the two Trojan captives is announced; in the third one Astyanax' capture is displayed and in the fourth Polyxena's; the last act features the deaths of both of them. This being the case, it is absolutely remarkable that both Astyanax and Polyxena only have a mute role in the play. If the silent role of Astyanax can possibly be explained by his very young age, Polyxena's muteness is more striking. Yet, as Boyle suggests, "the silence of Polyxena throughout this act is a major aspect of the act's dramatic power".<sup>59</sup>

The first appearance of Polyxena occurs at lines 883-85 when Helen addresses and spurs her on to abandon her sad state of mind, wear festive clothes, and comb her hair (*depone cultus squalidos, festos cape,/dedisce captam; deprime horrentes comas,/crinemque docta patere distingui manu*). That Polyxena is reluctant to do what Helen suggests is made clear by Helen's apostrophe calling for Andromache's attempt to convince Polyxena at lines 924-25 (*Nunc hanc luctibus paulum tuis,/Andromacha, omissis flecte*).

As Andromache unveils the reason of Polyxena's treacherous wedding with Pyrrhus, the young girl's attitude finally changes; she is now eager to wear the bridal gown because she knows she is about to die. This change is described by the words of Andromache at lines 945-48:

Vide ut animus ingens laetus audierit necem.  
cultus decoros regiae vestis petit  
et admoveri crinibus patitur manum.

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<sup>58</sup> Fitch (2002) 165-66. Some scholars have claimed that the play has a double plot, one dealing with Astyanax, the other with Polyxena. The double plot is unified then in the last act where the deaths of both of them are acted out.

<sup>59</sup> Boyle (1994) 207.



since Helen, who came to fetch Polyxena, could very well have led her away”.<sup>61</sup> If Fantham is right in pointing out that Pyrrhus’ entrance does not have dramaturgic coherence, on the other hand it is not necessarily gratuitous, since the dramatic effect would not be the same if Helen were to lead Polyxena away; from the point of view of dramaturgic coherence, Helen would seem the best candidate to lead the girl away if Seneca’s aim had been to achieve a fluid transition from this act to the next one, where she is not on stage. But Seneca had different priorities and operated within a different aesthetics, creating as he did a silent tableau that features the two partners in a wedding of death.

### **3.3 General features of running commentaries of off-stage actions**

In Senecan tragedies there are several instances of running commentaries of off-stage actions which describe either the symptoms of emotions experienced or the actions performed by different characters. All these running commentaries share, as a peculiar common feature, an extremely fluid handling of time and space; in fact, they usually are supposed to be subsequent reports of events that already happened, but they turn out to describe events as if they took place simultaneously with the narration of them (Oedipus’ self-blinding described by the messenger in the *Oedipus* 915-979; the incantation-scene in the *Medea* described by the nurse 670-751); in other cases, they are supposed to describe actions taking place off-stage simultaneously with the narration, so that the narrator on-stage is meant to see what he describes as he sees it; the narrator usually does not provide information regarding how he is able to see off-stage actions (the description of love sick-Phaedra made by the nurse in the *Phaedra* 362-83 and the murder-scene in the *Agamemnon* described by Cassandra 867-909).

Such a handling of interior scenes is outstanding. A similar dramatic device does not

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<sup>61</sup> Fantham (1982a) 335.

feature in Greek tragedy, even though its development can be traced back to the messenger's *rhexis* reporting facts and actions which occur off-stage. The main points of difference between the messenger's *rhexis* and the Senecan interior scenes are the following:

- 1) the messenger's *rhexis* in Greek tragedy relates facts and actions that happened in the past; in the Senecan interior scene the time at which the actions are taking place is ambiguous (as in the case of the *Phaedra*);
- 2) the messenger's *rhexis* relates facts and actions necessary for the plot to advance; in the Senecan interior scene the actions described are often tangential to the advancement of the plot;
- 3) the messenger's *rhexis* relates facts and actions in a dramatically condensed way, while in the Senecan interior scenes actions of characters are described in detail and at length.

This peculiar handling must then be regarded as an innovative feature of Seneca's dramatic technique, whose function and meaning is worth investigating.

Apart from these, the off-stage running commentaries are similar in tone, content, and stylistic features to the on-stage running commentaries. I list them as follows:

- *Phaedra* 362-83: nurse on Phaedra;
- *Oedipus* 915-79: messenger on Oedipus;
- *Hercules Oetaeus* 233-53: nurse on Deianira;
- *Agamemnon* 867-909: Cassandra on Agamemnon;
- *Medea* 670-751: nurse on Medea;
- *Phoenissae* 427-42: messenger on Jocasta;

### 3.3.1 *Phaedra* 362-83: nurse on Phaedra

torretur aestu tacito et inclusus quoque,  
quamvis tegatur, proditur vultu furor;  
erumpit oculis ignis et lassae genae  
lucem recusant; nil idem dubiae placet, 365  
artusque varie iactat incertus dolor:  
nunc ut soluto labitur marcens gradu  
et vix labante sustinet collo caput,  
nunc se quieti reddit et, somni immemor,  
noctem querelis ducit; attolli iubet 370  
iterumque poni corpus et solvi comas  
rursusque fingi; semper impatiens sui  
mutatur habitus. nulla iam Cereris subit  
cura aut salutis. vadit incerto pede,  
iam viribus defecta: non idem vigor, 375  
non ora tinguens nitida purpureus rubor;  
[populatur artus cura, iam gressus tremunt,  
tenerque nitidi corporis cecidit decor]  
et qui ferebant signa Phoebeae facis  
oculi nihil gentile nec patrium micant. 380  
lacrimae cadunt per ora et assiduo genae  
rore irrigantur, qualiter Tauri iugis  
tepido madescunt imbre percussae nives.

The second act of the play opens with a long description made by the nurse of Phaedra who is tormented by the fierce love she feels for her step-son. The nurse's description of Phaedra comes in reply to the chorus, who asks how the queen feels and whether her passion has found rest. It is remarkable that, from the point of view of dramatic action, the description made by the nurse is superfluous and repetitive, since it does not provide

any additional information about Phaedra's mental and physical condition. For already in the first act, Phaedra herself gives a detailed self-analysis of the fierce symptoms of love she is experiencing (99-112).

What is then the function of the lengthy description? First of all, the actions performed by Phaedra and described by the nurse take place inside the royal palace; in fact, at the end of her speech, the nurse says that the door of the palace opens and Phaedra comes out reclining on a couch (384-86 *Sed en, patescunt regiae fastigia:/reclinis ipsa sedis auratae toro/ solitos amictus mente non sana abnuitt*). It is not then clear whether the nurse is describing Phaedra's behaviour as she sees her in that precise moment or whether she is just relating to the chorus the symptoms which are affecting Phaedra without the implication that she is actually giving an eye-witness account.<sup>62</sup>

In the specific case of the *Phaedra*, the description made by the nurse recalls closely in style and content the descriptions of Medea made by the nurse (380-396) and the chorus in the *Medea* (849-878); in both cases Seneca offers a detailed portrayal of the bodily symptoms produced by destructive feelings (of love in the case of Phaedra and of *furor* in that of Medea); the descriptions of Phaedra and Medea clearly belong to the same category and very plausibly share the same function. Now, since I suggested that the description of Medea bears the sign of the influence of pantomime, I would argue that the description of Phaedra can be interpreted in the same way. The only difference between them is that Phaedra's actions take place off-stage, while Medea's ones are performed on stage. The fact that Phaedra's actions are performed inside and thus are not visible is a difficulty if we envisage the passage as a pantomimic insertion (the difficulty would persist even in the case of a more traditional staging of the play); but

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<sup>62</sup> There is a parallel instance at lines 826-28 where the chorus, at the end of its song, describes Phaedra: *quaerit crine lacerato fidem,/decus omne turbat capitis. umectat genas:/instruitur omni fraude feminea dolus*. The queen must be again inside the palace since later on Theseus (*Reserate clausos regii postes laris* 863) compels the slaves to open the door of the royal house in order to know from Phaedra's own words (it is the nurse who informs Theseus of Phaedra's distraught state) why she wants to die.

since the description of Phaedra's behaviour indulges in providing a very realistic examination of the symptoms of Phaedra's passion, it seems that its visual dimension calls strongly for performance; the effects of love are minutely described thus: her madness is betrayed in her face and the fire of love bursts out from her eyes (363 *proditur vultu furor*; 364 *erumpit oculis ignis*); her eyes cannot bear the daylight (364-65 *lassae genae/lucem recusant*); pain shakes restlessly her limbs (366 *artusque varie iactat incertus dolor*); she collapses and cannot support her head on her neck (367-68 *nunc ut soluto labitur marcens gradu/et vix labante sustinet collo caput*); she can neither sleep or eat (369-70 *somni immemor/noctem querelis ducit*; 373-74 *nulla iam Cereris subit/ cura aut salutis*); she is restless and constantly changing attitude and condition (372-73 *semper impatiens sui/mutatur habitus*). She walks with uncertain steps since she has lost all her strength (374-75 *vadit incerto pede,/iam viribus defecta*); she is weak and pale (375-76 *non idem vigor,/non ora tinguens nitida purpureus rubor*); she cries continuously and abundantly (381-82 *lacrimae cadunt per ora et assiduo genae/rore irrigantur*).

Since the case of Phaedra, as we have said before, is not isolated in the Senecan *corpus*, I would suggest that in pantomimic performances it was an accepted dramatic convention to perform in front of the audience scenes which were meant to happen indoors; in fact, the strict constraints of dramatic illusion necessary in a play would not have been necessary in pantomimic performances.

From a stylistic point of view, the syntax of the passage moves predominantly in staccato phrases; connectives are used seldom, the style is mostly paratactic, and subordination is sparsely used. This choice of syntax gives to the passage a restless rhythm which matches the feverish inner state of the protagonist. The visualisation of the actions performed is made easy by the use of parallel statement describing in a very simple and unpoeticized way Phaedra's movements.

Stylistically, the depiction of Phaedra love-sick contains all the traditional elements found in the description of the effects of love, but it is interesting to consider how Seneca reworked and adapted them. Virgil's description of Dido consumed by love for Aeneas (*Aen.* 4, 1-5; 66-69; 74-89) is heavily echoed in the Senecan passage. Fantham has pointed out the elements borrowed from Virgil: "the flames, the unspoken anguish, the frenzy all repeat elements of *Aen.* 4, 66-9. The account of restless change (365-8) and sleepless night (368-9) match the range of *Aen.* 4, 74-89".<sup>63</sup>

The imagery of fire as a metaphor of the passion of love borrowed from Virgil is appropriated and reshaped; lines 362-63 echo Ovid (*Met.* 4, 64 *quoque magis tegitur, tectus magis aestuat ignis*).

In the Senecan passage, abstract notions such as *furor* 363 or *dolor* 366 are personified and become overwhelming forces which have acquired a life their own. If Dido is wasted with the fire of love, in Seneca it is *furor* itself which burns Phaedra. We could say that in the Senecan passage the passion is so strong that it overcomes the individuality of the speaker.

In addition to this, the language used by Seneca is simple and almost prosaic; compare for example the concrete way of presenting Phaedra's restlessness *artusque varie iactat incertus dolor* with the Virgilian poetic one *uritur infelix Dido totaque vagatur/urbe furens* (*Aen.* 4, 68-69).

It is interesting to note the use of the expression *iactare manus*, the technical term used by the Roman writers for the art of the dancer. Furthermore, there is a sudden change in stylistic register from the preceding tone with the insertion of an epic-sounding simile which rounds off the description: *qualiter Tauri iugis/tepido madescunt imbre percussae nives*. The simile recalls the Catullan *tristique imbre madere genae* (68, 56),

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<sup>63</sup> Fantham (1975) 6-7; Virgil, 4, 66-69: *est mollis flamma medullas/interea et tacitum vivit sub pectore vulnus./uritur infelix Dido totaque vagatur/urbe furens*.

and is also reminiscent of two Ovidian passages (*Met.* 2, 852-3: *quippe color nivis est, quam nec vestigia duri/calcare pedis nec solvit aquaticus auster*; and *Am.* 1, 7, 57-8 *suspensaeque diu lacrimae fluxere per ora, qualiter abiecta de nive manat aqua*); the Senecan simile is simple and easy to visualise, the linguistic register is not particularly elevated (with the exception of the inchoative verb *madescere* used in a metaphorical sense). Furthermore, the insertion of the simile is abrupt and it seems to have no other function than to expand on the preceding line. The presence of the verb *iactare* (366 *artusque varie iactat incertus dolor*), which is *vox propria* for pantomime, may be an additional sign of the pantomimic nature of the description.<sup>64</sup>

Love-sick Phaedra was no doubt a very palatable character for the pantomimic dancer; similarly to Dido, whose unfortunate love story is attested by Macrobius to have been very popular in pantomimic performances, Phaedra and her burning passion held sway on the pantomimic stage. Lucian (2) attests that the portrayal of love-sick heroines such as Phaedra, Parthenope and Rhodope constituted the essential ingredient of pantomime.<sup>65</sup>

### 3.3.2 *Oedipus* 915-79: messenger on Oedipus

In the *Oedipus*, we find a running commentary featuring a handling of an interior scene similar to that found in the *Phaedra*, which involves the description of a past event narrated as taking place at the same time as the narration. Oedipus' self-blinding is clearly reported by a messenger's speech as an event which happened off-stage (inside the royal palace): at lines 917-18 the messenger states that Oedipus headed to and

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<sup>64</sup> In relation to the *vox propria iactare*, it is worth quoting a passage in Tacitus in which he blames the orators of his time who praise themselves for the fact that their speeches can be sung and danced (*Dial.* 26, 3): *Quodque vix auditu fas esse debeat, laudis et gloriae et ingenii loco plerique iactant cantari saltarique commentarios suos*; Tacitus employs the verb *iactare*, here with the meaning of boasting, but, given the context, the verb is clearly and purposely chosen for the allusive pantomimic overtones.

<sup>65</sup> Libanius (67): *Φαίδραν ὀρχηστῆς ἐποίησεν ἐρώσαν.*

entered in the palace (*regiam infestus petens/invisa propero tecta penetravit gradu*).<sup>66</sup>

As in the case of the *Phaedra*, the impression of an event taking place coterminously with the messenger's narration is caused by the shift from the past tense used just at the very beginning of the narration (916 *deprendit*, 917 *damnavit*, 918 *penetravit*) to the present (which is then used all the way through, with the exception of 935 *haec fatus*, but right after the present *aptat* is used); *dixit* 957 where again the present is immediately resumed with *furit*; the three perfects *gemuit* 961; *torsit* 962; *steterunt* 963 depict an instantaneous action).<sup>67</sup> In the Sophoclean model (1237-85), where the messenger's *rhexis* narrates both Jocasta's suicide and Oedipus' self-inflicted punishment, the past tense is used all the way through.

In addition to this, the impression of immediacy is further strengthened since the messenger reports extended passages in direct speech, which produces a sort of alternation between the messenger's voice and that of Oedipus:

915-926: the messenger describes Oedipus stricken by pain;

926-34: Oedipus' self-exhortation;

935-36: the messenger describes Oedipus drawing his sword;

936-956: Oedipus' second self-exhortation including a description of himself in the third person;

957-75: the messenger describes the self-blinding;

975-77: Oedipus' supplication to spare his fatherland;

978-79: the messenger describes Oedipus weeping.

The first description of Oedipus made by the messenger (915-926) depicts the

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<sup>66</sup> Compare the similar passage in the *Medea* where the nurse describing Medea rushing to her house employs a similar expression 675-74: *namque ut attonito gradu/evasit et penetrare funestum attigit*.

<sup>67</sup> That the shift is awkward is confirmed by the fact that Fitch translates the messenger's speech in the past and Oedipus' direct speech in the present.



contains a long tirade in which the protagonist disputes whether death is a suitable punishment for his crime and a description of himself in the third person:<sup>68</sup>

Lines (952-57) :

...subitus en vultus gravat  
profusus imber ac rigat fletu genas-  
et flere satis est? hactenus fundent levem  
oculi liquorem: sedibus pulsi suis 955  
lacrimas sequantur. hi maritales statim  
fodiantur oculi!

Then the messenger resumes his narration and describes Oedipus' self-blinding in the most detailed and graphic way possible (957-75):<sup>69</sup>

Dixit atque ira furit:  
ardent minaces igne truculento genae  
oculique vix se sedibus retinent suis;  
violentus audax vultus, iratus ferox 960  
iam iam eruentis. gemuit et dirum fremens  
manus in ora torsit; at contra truces  
oculi steterunt et suam intenti manum  
ultra insequuntur, vulneri occurrunt suo.  
scrutatur avidus manibus uncis lumina, 965  
radice ab ima funditus vulsos simul  
evolvit orbis; haeret in vacuo manus  
et fixa penitus unguibus lacerat cavos  
alte recessus luminum et inanes sinus,  
saevitque frustra plusque quam satis est furit: 970  
tantum est periculum lucis. attollit caput

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<sup>68</sup> See Chapter 4 for a discussion of characters describing themselves in third person. In the specific case of Oedipus, we have the extreme case of a messenger reporting a direct speech of a character describing himself in the third person. The voice of the narrator and that of Oedipus basically merge together.

<sup>69</sup> Segal (1983 repr. 2008) 152 has remarked that the language of corporality used in Seneca's description of the self-blinding is totally absent in Sophocles' parallel one.

cavisque lustrans orbibus caeli plagas  
noctem experitur. quidquid effossis male  
dependet oculis rumpit, et victor deos  
conclamat omnes...

975

Few lines later the messenger concludes his report with a final description of Oedipus weeping and bleeding from his head (978-79):

rigat ora foedus imber, et lacerum caput  
largum revulsis sanguinem venis vomit.

Seneca's description of the self-blinding is striking in regard to the amount of gruesome and graphic details included. The description owes very little to the Sophoclean model (1238 ff.); rather the chief inspiring model here is probably Ovid (*Met.* 13, 561-64 the scene between Hecuba and Polymestor): *et digitos in perfida lumina condit/expellitque genis oculos (facit ira potentem)/immergitque manus foedataque sanguine sonti/non lumen (neque enim superest), loca luminis haurit.*

By comparison with his model, it is remarkable that Seneca uses a plethora of different names for eyes as *radix ima*, *orbis*, *cavos recessus luminum*, and *inanes sinus*, whereas Ovid has just *lumina* and *oculi*. The use of the verbs is also more graphic in Seneca than in Ovid: *scrutari*, *vellere*, *evolvere*, and *lacerare*, whereas Ovid has *condere*, *expellere*, *immergere*, and *haurire*. Seneca concludes the description of the self-blinding with a pleonastic amplification (968-69 *cavos alte recessus...inanes sinus*).<sup>70</sup>

As we have seen, Seneca's description of Oedipus' self-blinding is stylistically innovative in the amount of language of corporeality employed; this feature can easily be connected with pantomime in which the language of the body was the means of communication *par excellence*. Moreover, in pantomimic performances, the story of

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<sup>70</sup> See Jakobi (1988) 133-35.

Oedipus was a very popular subject.<sup>71</sup> For instance, Macrobius (*Saturnalia*, 2, 7, 12 ff.) reports that Hylas danced, not very skilfully according to his master Pylades, the blind Oedipus. Such a climactic moment of the story of Oedipus was understandably well suited to pantomime's preference for emotionally charged themes. Suetonius (*Nero* 21) says that the "Blinding of Oedipus" was one of the favourite *arias* of Nero's singing repertoire and it is easily conceivable that such arias could actually function as a background to pantomime.<sup>72</sup>

### 3.3.3 *Hercules Oetaeus* 233-53: nurse on Deianira<sup>73</sup>

The second act of the *Hercules Oetaeus* begins with a long description of Deianira in the grip of jealousy made by the nurse (233-53).

O quam cruentus feminas stimulat furor,  
 cum patuit una paelici et nuptae domus!  
 Scylla et Charybdis Sicula contorquens freta                    235  
 minus est timenda, nulla non melior fera est.  
 namque ut reluxit paelicis captae decus  
 et fulsit Iole qualis innubis dies  
 purisve clarum noctibus sidus micat,  
 stetit furenti similis ac torvum intuens                    240  
 Herculea coniunx, feta ut Armenia iacens  
 sub rupe tigris hoste conspecto exilit,  
 aut iussa thyrsus quater conceptum ferens  
 Maenas Lyaeum dubia quo gressus agat  
 haesit parumper. tum per Herculeos lares                    245

<sup>71</sup> Lucian (41): story of Oedipus.

<sup>72</sup> Suetonius, *Nero*, 21: *Inter cetera cantavit Canacem parturientem, Oresten matricidam, Oedipodem excaecatam, Herculem insanum*. See Chapter 1, n. 32 p. 8.

<sup>73</sup> The *Hercules Oetaeus* is considered spurious by the large majority of scholars. Nonetheless, the play is much indebted in its phrasing and tone to the Senecan ones. The author of the *Hercules Oetaeus* had Seneca's tragedies as his models, thus I draw examples of running commentaries from it, since they do not differ from the Senecan ones.



we find in the *Oetaeus* and which is not so prominent in Sophocles' *Women of Trachis*. Even more importantly, Lucian's phrasing seems to hint at the fact that Deianira's jealousy constituted the most important element in the pantomimic adaptation of this myth.

Differently from the cases discussed in the *Phaedra* and in the *Oedipus*, where the character's actions take place off-stage, in the case of the *Hercules Oetaeus* the action takes place in part on-stage and in part off-stage. In fact, the nurse, after having described Deianira's on-stage actions, remarks that the queen enters into the palace (245-46 *tum per Herculeos lares/attonita fertur*). The most extended and detailed part of the description of Deianira takes place off-stage, while in the previous lines, the nurse just expresses some generalising thoughts about the threat jealous women can be (233-35) and compares Deianira's behaviour to that of a tiger and a maenad (241-45). In relation to the time at which Deianira's actions take place, we find the same ambiguity observed in the *Phaedra* and in the *Oedipus*. The nurse begins her speech in the past (237 *namque ut reluxit*; 238 *fulsit*; 240 *stetit*) and then switches to the present (the simile is all in the present apart from 245 *haesit* and 248 *processit*, which are instantaneous perfect; 246 *fertur*; 247 *incurrit, errat, sistit*; 249 *est, insequitur*; 250 *durat, furit*; 251 *inardescunt*; 252 *pellit*; 252 *errat, queritur, implorat, gemit*).<sup>78</sup>

Deianira's attack of jealousy is provoked by the view of Hercules' new mistress, Iole. Deianira sees Iole in all her beauty and is overwhelmed by *furor* which makes her freeze (240 *stetit*) and glare savagely (240 *torvum intuens*); after the sudden halt, Deianira bursts into undirected movements which are compared to those of a tiger's cub scared by a foe (241-42 *feta ut Armenia iacens/sub rupe tigris hoste conspecto exilit*) and those of an excited maenad who does not know where to direct her steps (243-45

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<sup>78</sup> Here as in the *Phaedra* and *Oedipus*, Fitch (2002-2004) translated all the passage in the past, even where the Latin has the present tense. Again, Fitch must have felt the awkwardness of the shift and the temporal ambiguity of the passage.

*aut iussa thyrsus quatere conceptum ferens/Maenas Lyaeum dubia quo gressus agat/haesit parumper*); she then rushes into the house and there she charges forward (247 *incurrit*), she roams (247 *errat*), she stops (247 *sistit*); all her pain is in her face (247-48 *in vultus dolor/processit omnis*); almost nothing is left hidden in her breast (248-49 *pectori paene intimo/nihil est relictum*); then the nurse describes how her attitude is unstable and constantly changing: tears follow threats (249 *fletus insequitur minas*), a single attitude does not last long (250 *nec unus habitus durat*); the mental changes are paralleled by the alternation of her complexion between pallor and redness: her cheeks are inflamed (251 *nunc inardescunt genae*), pallor expels redness (252 *pallor ruborem pellit*); her pain roams through every possible form (252-53 *formas dolor/errat per omnes*); she laments (253 *queritur*), she begs (253 *implorat*), she groans (253 *gemit*). The last three verbs are used in asyndeton as at line 247 (*incurrit, errat, sistit*); this construction is recurrently employed in running commentaries, since it conveys the impression of speed and immediacy.<sup>79</sup>

### 3.3.4 *Agamemnon* 867-909: Cassandra on Agamemnon

The fourth act of Seneca's *Agamemnon* opens with Cassandra's foreshadowing of Agamemnon's murder at the hands of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus (867-908). The prophetess relates in a detailed and graphic descriptive monologue the clairvoyant vision she is having. It is worth looking at her monologue more closely (867-909) since the handling of the scene as described by her words presents some ambiguities in relation to spatial and temporal location.<sup>80</sup>

As to spatial location, Cassandra's words seem to imply that the vision of Agamemnon's murder takes place inside her mind: 867 *Res agitur intus magna*; the

<sup>79</sup> See this chapter n. 22 p. 140.

<sup>80</sup> Tarrant (1976) 335-36: "it seems quite probable that Cassandra is relating a clairvoyant vision of Agamemnon's death, not describing what she can see by looking into the palace...The only apparent obstacle to this interpretation is *spectemus* (875)".

word *intus* seems to indicate so and this would seem confirmed by the following lines 868-69 (*anime, consurge et cape/premium furoris*) and 872-74 (*tam clara numquam providae mentis furor/ostendit oculis: video et intersum et fruor;/imago visus dubia non fallit meos*). Yet, there is then an obstacle to this interpretation caused by Cassandra's following exclamation at line 875 *spectemus!*

As Boyle has remarked, the verb *spectare* has a specific theatrical connotation, for it is properly used for the viewing of theatrical entertainments by an audience. In addition to this, the *vox propria* usually used to indicate prophetic visions is *cerno*.<sup>81</sup> Because of this, it is not clear whether Cassandra is seeing something going on in her vision, or she is seeing something actually taking place. Tarrant has advanced the hypothesis that Cassandra might be peering through the door of the palace but he does not find tragic parallels for such an action and only one case in New Comedy, in which, however, the character peering from the door is off-stage and only later relates to the characters on stage what he has seen.<sup>82</sup>

Apart from the difficulty of finding a tragic parallel, Tarrant observes that peering through a door is an action suitable for a comic character, but it would be quite ludicrous for a tragic character and even more so for Cassandra, who has the gift of prophecy.

As to temporal location, Cassandra is seeing a vision in her mind which has its fulfilment at the very moment she is having it; the two actions happen simultaneously. This is confirmed by the fact that right after the conclusion of Cassandra's speech, Electra addresses to her brother Orestes words which imply that Agamemnon has been murdered (910 *Fuge, o paternae mortis auxilium unicum*).

The simultaneous narration of actions taking place inside has no antecedents in Greek

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<sup>81</sup> Boyle (2006) 208-218. In addition to this, it is worth noticing that the conventional term used for prophetic visions is *cerno*, as, for example, at *Ag* 730. See also: Virgil, *Aen.* 6, 86-7 and Valerius Flaccus, *Arg.* 1, 226.

<sup>82</sup> Tarrant (1976) 336.

tragedy; the only parallel handling of such a scene is to be found in a papyrus fragment of postclassical tragedy, which involves an account delivered by Cassandra on the wall of Troy about the confrontation between Achilles and Hector.<sup>83</sup> However, there is no parallel for the peculiar ambiguity provided by the Senecan passage which fits the prophetic vision of the killing with the actual killing itself. If this is the case, we can move a step further and propose that Cassandra is actually viewing the performance of the killing, a fact that is strongly suggested by the presence of the word *spectemus* (875); in a way, Cassandra acquires the stance of an external narrator who describes the actions as they unfold.

Noticeable is also the detailed and graphic nature of Cassandra's description, especially if we think that the vision is supposed to happen in her mind; the graphic quality of the passage under discussion emerges even more strikingly when compared with the first clairvoyant vision of Agamemnon's killing that Cassandra has in the previous act; in fact, in this case, even though the killing of the Greek leader is foreseen, it is hinted at only briefly and in a very allusive and metaphoric way, which stylistically matches the clairvoyant nature of the vision (lines 734-40):

Quid ista vecors tela feminea manu  
 dstricta praefert? quem petit dextra virum                    735  
 Lacaena cultu, ferrum Amazonium gerens?  
 quae versat oculos alia nunc facies meos?  
 victor ferarum colla summissus iacet  
 ignobili sub dente Marmarici lupi,  
 morsus cruentos passus audacis leae.                        740

In contrast, in the second occurrence, Cassandra describes realistically the whole setting

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<sup>83</sup> *P. Oxy 2746*: Coles (1968) 110-18 and (1970) 9-11; See Tarrant (1978) 254.

and every single step of the action in detail; the description moves from the depiction of the royal hall in which a banquet has been prepared for Agamemnon (875 *epulae regia instructae domo*), and the portrayal of the king reclining on a red couch dressed with Priam's robe (877-80 *ostro lectus Iliaco nitet/merumque in auro veteris Assaraci trahunt./et ipse picta veste sublimis iacet,/Priami superbas corpore exuvias gerens*), the removal of the enemy's garment (881-83 *Detrahere cultus uxor hostiles iubet,/induere potius coniugis fidae manu/textos amictus*) and the putting on of the treacherous attire which Clytemnestra has woven for him and in whose folds Agamemnon will finally be entangled (887-89 *mortifera vinctum perfidae tradit neci/induta vestis: exitum manibus negant/caputque laxi et invii claudunt sinus*).

As the narration of Cassandra progresses towards the climactic moment of the killing, her words increasingly gain in focus:

She describes the first blow given to Agamemnon by the trembling hand of Aegisthus (890-91 *haurit trementi semivir dextra latus,/nec penitus egit: vulnere in medio stupet*) and his freezing in the middle of the striking; then she lingers on depicting Agamemnon's attempts to free himself from the bindings of the treacherous garment which, instead, tighten the folds more; in describing this, Cassandra resorts to an extended simile which compares the king to a boar caught in a net.<sup>84</sup>

Then Cassandra focuses on Clytemnestra striking the fatal blow and hitting Agamemnon in different parts of the body;<sup>85</sup> also in this case, Cassandra employs an extended simile to describe Clytemnestra's actions comparing her with a *sacerdos* attending a sacrifice.<sup>86</sup> The death of the king is then stylistically framed with the use of

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<sup>84</sup> Lines 892-96: *at ille, ut altis hispidus silvis aper/cum casse vinctus temptat egressus tamen/artatque motu vincla et in cassum furit,/cupit fluentes undique et caecos sinus/dissicere et hostem quaerit implicitus suum.*

<sup>85</sup> Line 897: *armat bipenni Tyndaris dextram furens...900 sic huc et illuc impiam librat manum.*

<sup>86</sup> Lines 898-99: *qualisque ad aras colla taurorum popa/designat oculis antequam ferro petat.*

gladiatorial language *habet, peractum est* (901).<sup>87</sup>

Such a detailed description together with the ambiguous handling of spatial and temporal coordinates prompts the question as to its intended function. The above mentioned features could well have been employed to perform on stage something which is, in fact, just taking place in Cassandra's mind; if this is the case, the scene of Cassandra's vision of the killing of Agamemnon seems suitable to be enacted as a "silent performance" narrated by Cassandra's words. Such a peculiar handling may then reflect the influence of the aesthetics of pantomimic performances, in which the dancer performed silently the story told in the libretto as sang by the chorus or a soloist.<sup>88</sup>

We could define it, by using a modern terminology which increasingly scholars find appropriate for Seneca's tragedy, as a case of metatheatre.<sup>89</sup> Boyle has underlined the pervasively metatheatrical nature of Seneca's plays and how this aspect of Seneca's tragedies was influential on the Renaissance playwrights.<sup>90</sup>

### 3.3.5 *Medea* 670-751: nurse on Medea

The fourth act of the *Medea* is given over to two monologues, one of the nurse (670-751) and the other of Medea. Both speeches involve the description of the preparation of the poison in which Medea will dip the lethal garment for Creusa; basically, the two

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<sup>87</sup> Tarrant (1976) 343.

<sup>88</sup> Lucian (43) attests that Agamemnon's slaughter was a theme of pantomimic performances; Macrobius (*Saturnalia* 2, 7, 12) reports that the dancer Hylas played the role of the Greek king and his impersonation was much criticised by his former tutor, Pylades, the founder of the pantomimic genre.

<sup>89</sup> Curley (1986) 187-17; Boyle (1997) 193-207 and (2006) 208-18; Littlewood (2004); Erasmo (2004) 122-39.

<sup>90</sup> Boyle (1997) 193-207; Ewbank (2005) 45-46 has suggested that the dumb show contained in *The true tragedy of Herod and Antipater* (1622) by Gervase Markham and William Sampson could have been inspired by the above passage in the *Agamemnon*. According to Ewbank, the play "makes use of a telescoped Agamemnon". Similarly to many passages in Seneca's tragedies in which the Furies are invoked in order to produce a maddening effects, Antipater "calls on Furies to come and possess him": the calling of the Furies produces then a "dumb show" representing, in a way quite suggestively reminiscent of the Cassandra's scene in Seneca, Clytemnestra's and Aegisthus' killing of Agamemnon: "Musique: and enter Egystus and Clitemnestra dancing a Curranto, which is broken off by the sound of Trumpets: then, enter Agamemnon, and divers Noblemen in Triumph: Egisthus whispers with Clitemnestra, and delivers her a sleeveless shirt; then slip aside: Clitemnestra imbraces Agamemnon, he dismisses his Traine; she offers him the shirt, he offers to put it on, and being intangled, Egisthus and she kills him; then departs, leaving at Antipaters feete two Scrowles of paper".

speeches duplicate each other.

Additionally, this large expansion into a secondary event which becomes the major focus of the act causes a minimum progression of the main plot. As far as we know, Medea's incantation scene is unique in extant classical tragedy.<sup>91</sup> Seneca must have strongly felt the spectacular appeal that such a scene could provide with its expansion into the supernatural and horrific; Seneca was fond of such elements, as the description of the necromancy and extispicy in the *Oedipus* also confirm.

In relation to dramatic technique, the speech of the nurse describing Medea's preparation of the poison presents the frequently found ambiguity in relation to the place and the time at which it takes place.

We infer from the nurse's words (675-76 *ut attonito gradu/evasit et penetrale funestum attigit*) that the action of Medea's incantation scene takes place inside the innermost part of her house (*penetrable*); as the description of the nurse goes on, it seems that Medea is on stage since the nurse repeatedly uses demonstrative pronouns (686 *hic*; 694 *huc*; 720 *illas*; 721 *has, illa*; 723 *has*; 724 *illas, has*; 728 *haec*; 729 *illius*; 730 *huius*), which seem to point out that Medea is gathering herbs on stage and under the eyes of the nurse. Furthermore, since the nurse uses the past tense at the beginning of her speech, it seems that she is remembering what she saw Medea doing inside the house and is now reporting it to the audience; but soon the nurse switches from the past tense (676 *evasit, attigit*; 677 *effudit*; 705 *evocavit*) to the present tense (678 *promit, explicat*) thus giving the impression of actions taking place at the moment she is speaking.<sup>92</sup> The impression of the nurse's speech being contemporaneous to Medea's actions seems to be confirmed by the presence of the demonstrative pronouns repeatedly used by the nurse. In addition

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<sup>91</sup> Costa (1973) 129 quotes a Virgilian cento of the Medea story which has a messenger describing Medea preparing the magic (in Baehrens *PLM* IV, 232, 321 ff.).

<sup>92</sup> In relation to this passage, Hine (2000) 177 suggests that the present "may be the vivid present describing past events...but it might be a genuine present tense, as the nurse describes what she sees happening while she speaks."

to this, the description is so lengthy and detailed that it does not seem plausible that the nurse can just remember by heart all the steps in the preparation of the poison as well as Medea's own words reported in direct speech (generally speaking, the extremely learned speech in the mouth of the nurse, punctuated as it is by geographical, mythological, and astronomical catalogues, is strongly implausible). A possible solution for the scene may be to imagine that the nurse sees what Medea is doing inside the house and reports it to the audience, but this would not solve the difficulty of the presence of the many demonstrative pronouns. The whole scene seems simply to be extremely fluid in place and time.<sup>93</sup> The scene makes sense if the nurse describes Medea's actions as taking place just in the background of the stage and this background is meant to be understood as inside the house. Thus, Medea's actions are then actually performed on stage and narrated by the nurse.

The incantation scene is constituted by different phases and actions in the preparation of the poison which the nurse describes at length: first Medea gathers the magical tools she has in stock (677-79) and then those which must be summoned from a distance (680-84): she pours out her magical resources and brings forth everything she has long feared herself (677-78 *totas opes effudit, et quidquid diu/etiam ipsa timuit promit*); she deploys all her evils (678-79 *omnem explicat/turbam malorum*); she makes prayer at the sinister shrine with her left hand 680-81 (*et triste laeva comprecans sacrum manu/pestes vocat*);<sup>94</sup> she summons a scaly throng (685 *squamifera turba*) which then approaches

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<sup>93</sup> Compare this with narrative set-pieces where past events are almost always reported in the present tense; compare also running commentaries for the handling of ambiguous interior actions. I would suggest that the nurse's speech stays in between narrative set-pieces and running commentaries blending the characteristics of the two. In fact, similarly to messengers' speeches, it reports facts which are supposed to take place off-stage; similarly to running commentaries it portrays the detailed actions of a character.

<sup>94</sup> The manuscript tradition is not in agreement on the reading of line 680: the E tradition has *comprecans*, while the A tradition has *complicans*. Both readings have been much discussed by scholars, since they both seem to be unsatisfactory. Zwierlein (1976) 205-206 prints Büchler's conjecture *comparans* and translates "Sie bereitet das magische Opfer *laeua manu* zu". Fitch (2004) 93-94 prints E's reading and translates "Making prayers at the sinister shrine with her left hand". Fitch translates *sacrum* as shrine; for *sacrum* in this sense he quotes a passage in the *Phaedra* 424: *ipsum intuoer sollemne venerantem sacrum*.

(*adest*). The fact that Medea prays with her left hand is worth noticing (there are several instances in the tragedies in which Seneca uses the word *manus*, or more specifically the word *dextra*, but this is the only occurrence of a reference to the left hand), since it is attested that in the ancient world it was customary to pray with both hands and, even more importantly, the use of the left hand was sinister.<sup>95</sup> The use of left hand is, instead, well attested in the preparation of magical sacrifices by magicians.<sup>96</sup> The gesture is thus fully appropriate to Medea since she is making a sinister prayer before attending to the preparation of a magical concoction.

The nurse then describes the snakes called forth by Medea (686-690): she opens the description with the adverb *hic* which points to the fact that the serpent is there; the snake hauls its body (686 *corpus immensum trahit*) and flicks out its three-forked tongue (687 *trifidamque linguam exertat*); as soon as it hears Medea's spell, it is mesmerised and twines its swollen body into folds upon folds and forces it into coils (689-90 *tumidumque nodis corpus aggestis plicat/cogitque in orbes*).

This section is then expanded by Medea's direct speech summoning mythological snakes and constellation (690-704): Draco (the Northern constellation compared to a river 694-5) whose coils are felt by the Greater and Lesser Bear (695-6); Ophiulcus (698-9); Python (700); the Hydra of Lerna (701-2); the Colchian dragon (703-4).

In the subsequent section, the nurse describes Medea gathering herbs for her concoction (705 *congerit*; 719 *attractat manu*). This section is again expanded by a detailed list of plants of which are specified the place from where they come from (707-27) or the

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<sup>95</sup> See Zwierlein (1976) 205-6 where he collects evidence of the fact that the use of the left hand was felt as sinister. See Quintilian *Inst.* 11, 3, 114: *Manus sinistra numquam sola gestum recte facit: dextrae se frequenter accommodat, sive in digitos argumenta digerimus sive aversis in sinistrum palmis abominamur sive obicimus adversis sive in latus utramque distendimus sive satisficientes aut supplicantes (diversi autem sunt hi gestus) summittimus sive adorantes attollimus sive aliqua demonstratione aut invocatione protendimus.*

<sup>96</sup> See Zwierlein (1976) 205-7.

manner of collection (728-30);<sup>97</sup> the section of the list involving the description of the manner of collection of the plants is characterised by a recurrent use of demonstrative pronouns (720 *illas*; 721 *has, illa*; 723 *has*; 724 *illas, has*; 728 *haec*; 729 *illius*; 730 *huius*), as if the nurse were pointing out herbs which are in front of her eyes; as soon as the herbs are gathered, Medea crumbles them (731 *Mortifera carpit gramina*), bleeds the venom from the snakes (731-32 *ac serpentium/saniem exprimit*), and mixes everything with the entrails of different birds (732-34 *miscetque et obscenas aves/maestique cor bubonis et raucae strigis/exsecta vivae viscera*); she then separates the concoction in two parts (734-35 *haec scelerum artifex/discreta ponit*, the sense of the line is obscure), and finally she sings her magical formulae (737 *addit venenis verba*).

### 3.3.6 *Phoenissae* 427-42: messenger on Jocasta

The third act of the *Phoenissae* features an opening monologue of Jocasta (363-86) followed by an intervention of a messenger (387-402) who compels the queen to stop lamenting and act quickly to prevent the impending fight of her two sons (387-89 *Regina, dum tu flebiles questus cies/terisque tempus, saeva nudatis adest/acies in armis*). The messenger then describes in detail the battlefield and the armies ready to attack by actually pointing them to Jocasta (394 *vide*). So the scene must be envisaged as taking place on the battlements of the royal palace, from where the messenger and Jocasta are able to see the off-stage actions.<sup>98</sup> Few lines later, after Antigone's intervention, which includes an appeal to her mother and an additional description of the battle, the messenger (427-42) describes Jocasta leaving for the battlefield (426) and

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<sup>97</sup> Compare Ovid (*Met.* 7, 220-33) where Ovid provides a list of mountains and rivers from which Medea collected herbs and plants to prepare the concoction to rejuvenate Jason. Ovid confines his list to geographical places in Greece, while Seneca's catalogue is far more wide ranging including Sicily (Eryx 707), Caucasus (709), Arabia (710), Media (711), and Germany (712-13).

<sup>98</sup> Tarrant (1978) 252-53 quotes as parallel for such account of off-stage action a passage in the *Rudens* of Plautus (160 ff).

her subsequent off-stage action there (from 427 onwards):

Vadit furenti similis aut etiam furit.  
sagitta qualis Parthica velox **manu**  
excussa fertur, qualis insano ratis  
premente vento rapitur aut qualis cadit 430  
delapsa caelo stella, cum stringens polum  
rectam citatis ignibus rumpit viam,  
attonita cursu fugit et binas statim  
diduxit acies. victa materna prece  
haesere bella, iamque in alternam necem 435  
illinc et hinc miscere cupientes **manus**  
librata **dextra** tela suspensa tenent.  
paci favetur, omnium ferrum latet  
cessatque tectum-vibrat in fratrum **manu**.  
laniata canas mater ostendit comas, 440  
rogat abnuentes, irrigat fletu genas.  
negare matri, qui diu dubitat, potest.

Such a handling of a scene has no antecedent in classical drama and it is also unique within the Senecan *corpus*, since it describes simultaneous on-stage and off-stage actions which require a change of setting;<sup>99</sup> in fact, the setting described as off-stage becomes the actual setting of the scene which follows. As Tarrant has observed “the physical limitations of the ancient theater seem completely left behind”.<sup>100</sup>

Seneca opens the description of Jocasta with a long simile, comparing Jocasta rushing into the middle of the two armies to an arrow (428-29 *sagitta qualis Parthica velox manu/excussa fertur*), to a ship whirled by the wind (429-30 *qualis insano ratis/premente vento rapitur*), and then to a shooting star falling from the sky (430-31

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<sup>99</sup> See Frank (1995) 2 and 39-40: the setting changes from the area around Cithaeron to the walls of Thebes (362) and from the walls of Thebes to the battlefield (443); the last change of scene is particularly troublesome since it happens as the action unfolds, thus Jocasta is supposed to move from the walls of Thebes to the battlefield in the view of the *satelles* and Antigone.

<sup>100</sup> Tarrant (1978) 252.

*qualis cadit/delapsa caelo stella*).<sup>101</sup> Seneca then turns to describe the effect produced by Jocasta's prayer on the armies (434-39) and then back to Jocasta again: she displays and tears her hair (440 *laniata canas mater ostendit comas*), she begs as they shake their heads (441), and she cries (441 *irrigat fletu genas*).<sup>102</sup>

The fluid handling of space in the battlefield scene of the *Phoenissae* is an extreme case in Senecan tragedies. However, Seneca never seems to be much concerned with a realistic handling of time and space.

As a general tendency, off-stage running commentaries show features that are to be found even in narrative set-pieces, a category which will be analysed in the next chapter. Both in the handling of off-stage running commentaries and in narrative set-pieces, Seneca seems to stick to the tragic tradition of messenger's speeches reporting off-stage actions; but, at the same time, he seems to change and adapt the convention to his own dramaturgical goals. Basically, Seneca just maintained the typical and well recognisable building frame of this conventional messenger scene in its more general and distinctive features.

For example, the tendency to begin the descriptions in the past tense and then to shift it to the present as well as the ambiguity between exterior and interior seems to point out that Seneca was well aware of the traditional features of the convention of messenger's speeches, but he reshaped it by setting the narration in the present and moving on-stage what was usually suggested as happening or happened off-stage (the case of Oedipus' self-blinding well illustrates this point). Even more importantly, all the events are extremely spectacular constituting climactic moments of the plot and narrated with a plethora of visual details.

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<sup>101</sup> The simile of the shooting star or meteor is found also in the *Phaedra* to describe Hippolytus' flight (738-40): *ocior cursum rapiente flamma/stella cum ventis agitata longos/porrigit ignes*.

<sup>102</sup> Frank (1995) remarks that Seneca is "the only classical author who uses *inrigo* of *umores corporis* outside a medical context"; see also *Oed* (346): *irrigat plagas cruor*; *Tro* (965): *inrigit fletus genas*; *Phae* 381-2: *genae/rore irrigantur*.

As an overall tendency, this may be explained as a feature borrowed from pantomimic performances, which, as we have discussed in the first chapter, tended to invade the on stage-space with the intense and violent actions which in tragedy were relegated to off-stage space.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> See Lada-Richards (2007) 35 for a discussion of this feature in pantomime.

