

MAXIMA VIRTUS IN SENECA'S *HERCULES FURENS**

ANNA LYDIA MOTTO and JOHN R. CLARK

I

The *Hercules* plays (the *Hercules Furens* and the doubtful *Hercules Oetaeus*) differ signally from Seneca's other dramas and certainly deserve attention by themselves in a special place.¹ For one thing, Hercules is an honorable hero, one enshrined in the Stoic pantheon; he is a demigod who literally experiences apotheosis. Thus, Senecan plays concerned with him do not merely conclude in a blaze of horror and with a spurt of climactic passion. In a special sense that is never for a moment true of Agamemnon or Medea or Phaedra or Oedipus or Atreus, Hercules "endures." Indeed, he does more: Hercules transcends and superscribes his tragic action and prevails. And, particularly in the *Hercules Furens*, the Herculean triumph is accomplished in human terms; his achievement is realized, not as a god, but as a man.

Yet, when we turn to the reception and reputation of the *Hercules Furens*, we encounter difficulties among the critics in comprehending Seneca's plays because of a chronic tendency to look for analogies and similarities to classic Greek theater and for adherence to doctrines laid down in terms of Aristotelian poetics. Simply put, Hercules' madness appears to a great number of interpreters as being caused by his *hamartia* or "tragic flaw." Thus, R. W. Tobin asserts that "the hero's folly is presented as an extension of his ambition and pride, his drive to carve a place for himself among the gods."² We ought, of course, to take exception to Tobin's employment of the word "folly," for surely Hercules' ravaging, rampaging madness constitutes behavior that drastically exceeds "foolishness" or mere uncomprehending, clownish, idiot imbecility. Nevertheless, Tobin's central thesis is clear: Hercules' aspirations to godhood, to scale the skies, constitute an out-and-out case of hubris that the gods justifiably punish; from such a perspective, his madness is a piece of appropriate poetic justice.

* Regarding Megara's "Iniqua raro maximis virtutibus / fortuna parcit" (*HF* 325-26). The authors wish to make grateful acknowledgment to the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton for inviting them to spend the summer of 1979 in residence, where the present paper was completed.

1. Although there has been heated controversy, it is now usually acknowledged that the *Hercules Oetaeus* is not Seneca's, but rather attributable to a Senecan imitator. The play is rambling and diffuse—almost twice as long as other genuinely Senecan plays. But whether by Seneca or an admirer, its purport is similar to the *Hercules Furens*: to dramatize a heroic Hercules facing a tremendous labor. In this Oetaean play, Hercules is actually translated, apotheosized, deified. It is far different in tone and intention from the Sophoclean *Trachiniae*, where Hercules' filial relationship to Zeus is in question, and there is no suggestion whatever of any apotheosis of the hero.

2. "A Hero for All Seasons: Hercules in French Classical Drama," *Comparative Drama* 1 (1967-68): 290. Tobin elsewhere confirms this view, finding the Senecan Hercules "proud, boastful, cold," inclined to excessive "self-love and ambition"; "Tragedy and Catastrophe in Seneca's Theater," *CJ* 62 (1966): 64.

Distressingly, this conception of Hercules is confirmed by a chorus of modern interpreters. J. D. Bishop urges that Hercules has violated the *ordo mundi*, is a tyrant, and must be punished.³ W. H. Owen, after vacillating for a time, perceives Hercules as an "overreacher."⁴ J. Shelton similarly believes that Hercules' "pride" is a "personal disorder"; he precipitates his own madness and downfall by "overreaching."⁵ G. K. Galinsky likewise finds "continuity" between Hercules mad and Hercules sane, noting that the Herculean valor is an "obsession" and stressing this character's "ambition" and "hybris."⁶ Even N. T. Pratt, who is dedicated to finding Stoic models, Stoic teachings, and Stoic lessons in the plays, nonetheless discerns un-Stoic activities in the *Hercules Furens*; in Hercules' courage he detects "weakness" and "excess."⁷

Nowhere is the portrayal of the flawed Hercules more energetically propounded than in the study by B. Walker and D. Henry. These critics are utterly unimpressed by what they take to be Hercules' "pride," "arrogance," "boastfulness," and "bravado." "At no point in the play," Walker and Henry insist, "does Hercules reveal heroic or impressive qualities of character; he does not reveal even real strength." But, unlike the other critics we have mentioned, Walker and Henry go many strides farther. For them, the "moral feebleness" of Hercules is ultimately "ludicrous." For them, such a Hercules, trotting about the planet's surface with the triple-

3. "Seneca's *Hercules Furens*: Tragedy from *Modus Vitae*," *C&M* 27 (1966): 216-24.

4. "Commonplace and Dramatic Symbol in Seneca's Tragedies," *TAPA* 99 (1968): 302-8. The seminal study of this kind of hubris is H. Levin, *The Overreacher: A Study of Christopher Marlowe* (Cambridge, Mass., 1952). More generally on classic ideas of *hamartia* and *nemesis*, consult P. Wheelwright, *The Burning Fountain: A Study in the Language of Symbolism* (Bloomington, Ind., 1954), pp. 193-202, and W. C. Greene, *Moirai: Fate, Good, and Evil in Greek Thought* (Cambridge, Mass., 1944).

5. "Problems of Time in Seneca's *Hercules Furens* and *Thyestes*," *CSCA* 8 (1975): 261, 263. "Hercules," Shelton tells us, "upset the order of the universe when he returned from the Underworld. Later he sent his family there, perhaps in his place" (p. 269, n. 27). Similar views are propounded in Shelton's *Seneca's "Hercules Furens": Theme, Structure and Style* (Göttingen, 1978), pp. 21, 22, 58, 63-64. G. Braden, "The Rhetoric and Psychology of Power in the Dramas of Seneca," *Arion* 9 (1970): 23-25, similarly claims that Hercules' "savior-complex" leads him to overreaching, attempting to storm and conquer the heavens. Such "expansive imperialism" applies as a warning, Braden believes, to the Roman Empire itself. On the dangers of such Roman aggression as perceived by Seneca, see also H. J. Mette, "Die Funktion des Löwengleichnisses in Senecas *Hercules Furens*," *WS* 79 (1966): 477-89.

6. *The Herakles Theme: The Adaptations of the Hero in Literature from Homer to the Twentieth Century* (Totowa, N.J., 1972), pp. 168-70.

7. "The Stoic Base of Senecan Drama," *TAPA* 79 (1948): 8. One psychoanalytic critic, R. J. Kaufmann, goes farther; he contends that Juno's opposition to Zeus is virtually "Manichaean" and that the Stoic idealization of Hercules represents a fundamental ambivalence in Stoicism itself: for Hercules is "the archetypal Stoic hero who subdues, endures, labours and controls, as he strives to realize godhead out of his human estate. But the energetic power that makes him Hercules makes the problem of self-control the more difficult, the results of failure the more potentially tragic." Thus, for Kaufmann, Seneca is not alone among the Stoics in being unable to regulate the meaning and significance of the Herculean story; "The Seneca Perspective and the Shakespearean Poetic," *Comparative Drama* 1 (1967-68): 189.

J. Kott agrees that Seneca and the late Middle Ages and Renaissance perceive Hercules ambivalently—as hero and as failure. Even so, Kott appears to discern more of the dark side of the picture in Seneca's two Hercules plays, for he considers that Hercules there is portrayed essentially as a "tyrant," one filled with "misdeeds, poses, and rhetoric"; see *The Eating of the Gods: An Interpretation of Greek Tragedy*, trans. B. Taborski and E. J. Czerwinski (New York, 1973), pp. 109-85, esp. 117.

headed Cerberus on display, is preeminently a "circus impresario"; his militant pride is, to their minds, deliberately treated as absurd, his speech and conduct "mock-rhetorical and comic."⁸

Surely it is more complacent opinion than demonstrable fact that Seneca, as Walker and Henry propose, implacably dislikes strong men like Hercules or that he disapproves of Hercules because the Hercules of the burlesquing *Apocolocyntosis* is trifling and comical (together with everything else in that work's pages).⁹ Further, it is an unusual—and questionable—criticism that discovers in the *Hercules Furens* tragedy a predominant strain of comedy and satire where it had never been detected before. The present study takes a hard second look at the *Hercules Furens*, hoping to discern tragic meanings that transcend mere comedy and buffoonery and that sharply question a prevalent vein of recent criticism that so readily surrenders Hercules to a patent hubris, blameworthiness, and guilt.

II

Unlike most of Seneca's other dramas, as we have noted, the Hercules plays do not conclude with the central character's explosive fury and ire (as is the case with Medea in the *Medea*, Atreus in the *Thyestes*, Phaedra in the *Hippolytus*, Aegisthus and Clytemnestra in the *Agamemnon*, and the murderous Greeks in the *Troades*).¹⁰ Nor is Hercules, like Oedipus, the wavering, weak, and "devoted" sacrifice to fate.¹¹ On the contrary, the Hercules plays present an ultimate active transcendence of disorder and a consciously willed resolution to terminate upheaval, rather than continued explosiveness and excessive emotion—in Milton's phrase, "calm of mind, all passion spent."¹² Since Hercules is quintessentially a man of Labor and

8. "The Futility of Action: A Study of Seneca's *Hercules Furens*," *CP* 60 (1965): 11–22. Galinsky, *The Herakles Theme*, p. 183, n. 8, finds this article "stimulating"; Owen, "Commonplace and Dramatic Symbol," p. 302, labels it "astute."

9. Consult the argument of Henry and Walker, "The Futility of Action," p. 12. It strikes us as being argumentatively irresponsible and unsound entirely to determine Seneca's opinion of Hercules merely by scant references to Hercules in the *Apocolocyntosis* and to wrestlers at large (*Epist.* 15. 2, 80. 2–3), particularly since these authors silently pass over Seneca's frequent and favorable references to Hercules throughout his prose writings (*Ben.* 4. 8. 1, where he is identified with God; *Constant.* 2. 1, where he is listed among the official Stoic wise men; *Tranq.* 16. 4, where he is included among the suffering patriot-heroes; and *Ben.* 1. 13. 1–3, where he is accounted a benefactor of humanity; as well as the choral celebration of Hercules in the *Agamemnon* 808–66). One would think it a commonplace that Hercules had long been an official emblem and avatar for the Cynic and Stoic schools. Repeatedly throughout Seneca's own prose, the hero's name recurs (*ut* or *ac mehercules*) as a standard interjection, signifying an oath or solemn avowal. Logically, the point is that we can determine Seneca's opinion of Hercules in the *Hercules Furens* neither from the *Apocolocyntosis* nor from his philosophical writings; we must obtain an interpretation of the play's protagonist from the play itself.

10. C. J. Herington, "Senecan Tragedy," *Arion* 5 (1966): 455–56, notes that the *Hercules Furens* and the *Oedipus* alone among the authentic Senecan plays do not reveal "the defeat of Reason by Passion taking place before our eyes." Quite rightly, we believe, he adds that "Hercules, one of the nearest approaches to an ideal Stoic sage that the world has yet beheld, could not be brought on stage dickering with his passions . . . Seneca, therefore . . . has the passion violently injected from the outside . . ." (i.e., by Juno).

11. Consult the study of A. L. Motto and J. R. Clark, "*Violenta Fata*: The Tenor of Seneca's *Oedipus*," *CB* 50 (1974): 81–87.

12. *Samson Agonistes* 1758.

Action, since he is the hero par excellence engaged in Tasks, his must be an aggressive *effort* to sustain and to triumph over suffering, and not to be overwhelmed by it. Particularly is this the case in the *Hercules Furens*, where he must not succumb and be overborne by an excess of passions that would conclude in absolute despair and self-destruction.

Admittedly, many preconceptions about this play have been generated by its use of numerous key structural patternings from the Euripidean *Heracles*. In both plays, Hercules first appears as having triumphantly completed his "last," his most superhuman, task, for he has conquered the Underworld of Pluto and returned to tell the tale. In a second major action, the Euripidean and the Senecan Hercules must both, upon their return, set their own houses in order (the thematic arrangement here seems to echo and is related poignantly to Odysseus' Return in the *Odyssey*), and the tyrant Lycus is dispatched. Thus, by midplay, we have witnessed the climactic, sensational, worldly victories of the penultimate Hercules. Such a buildup is precisely the context sought by Euripides "the irrationalist,"¹³ for his is a play—like his *Medea* and *Bacchae*—overarchingly suggestive of "fortune's" cruel and senseless reversals. Just at such a peak, the deities Iris and Lyssa (Madness) unaccountably appear (*HF* 822–74) and initiate Hercules' insanity. Thus, the shock is all the more telling because of the juxtapositions: the hero-savior at the heights suddenly becomes the lunatic villain plunged to the depths; the family he has "labored" so recently to rekindle is instantaneously snuffed out.¹⁴ In the face of such external "interference," Hercules is brought low without himself being the contributor to his peripety. This event in Euripides is the greatest instance of the *deus ex machina* in drama and brings with it destruction without evidence of the protagonist's *hamartia* or fatal flaw. What we witness is a systematic, god-arranged destruction of justice. For these reasons, the conclusion of the Euripidean *Heracles* is shocking and incomprehensible; "one hears at most fragmentary, broken harmonies, and the end is muted more by despair than by true resolution."¹⁵ For, after three great scenes of action—the emergence from the Underworld, the defeat of the tyrant Lycus, and the mad scene that entails the butchering of Megara and the children—the fourth scene of action obviously, by contrast, appears helpless, muted, debilitated. The quiet and desperate debate at the close, in Euripides' drama, among Amphitryon, Theseus, and Heracles, impresses us as being broken and benumbed. Heracles' decision to remain among the living and to travel with Theseus is obviously low-key and discomfiting: *ἡμεῖς δ' ἀναλώσαντες αἰσχύναις δόμον, / Θησεῖ πανώλεις ἐψόμεσθ' ἐφορκίδες* (*HF* 1423–24).

13. See the seminal article by E. R. Dodds, "Euripides the Irrationalist," *CR* 43 (1929): 97–104.

14. W. Arrowsmith rightly observes that the discontinuity of the two parts of the play (orderly return from Orcus and the slaying of Lycus vs. the madness) are typical of the Euripidean bifurcation of plot, which dramatizes irrationality: "Thus the *propter hoc* structure required by Aristotelian drama is in Euripides everywhere annulled by *created* disorder and formal violence"; see "A Greek Theater of Ideas," *Ideas in the Drama: Selected Papers from the English Institute*, ed. John Gassner (New York and London, 1964), p. 9.

15. C. H. Whitman, *Euripides and the Full Circle of Myth* (Cambridge, Mass., 1974), p. 135.

Such a finale, some critics contend, "from the artistic point of view [is] a weak and flat anticlimax."¹⁶

In the Senecan play, however, there are significant alterations and differences. Juno pronounces and preordains in the prologue her intention to infect Hercules with madness; consequently, the hero's onset of madness never comes as a sudden surprise, nor does it so much implicate the other deities, who in Euripides partially appear to have abandoned righteousness and who at least meekly tolerate and obey unjust commands.¹⁷ Moreover, the Senecan Hercules contests not with a Theseus on grounds of "friendship" and *philia*, but with his father over the concepts of kinship, responsibility, honor, and duty. Seneca's Hercules is not the old, aristocratic Ajax of Sophocles, who, "caught in new and antiheroic circumstances which degrade him and make him ludicrous . . . consistently prefers suicide to a life of absurdity in an alien time."¹⁸ Rather, his is ultimately the heroic commitment to survive, to protect, to endure. But it is no determination readily arrived at, easily won. Consequently, his *agon* and self-debate are more intense and prolonged, less easily concluded; Amphitryon must, sword in hand, threaten his own suicide before Hercules is mollified and subdued. No, the final scene, far from being anticlimactic, is tense, terrific, convulsive: there is every reason to believe, in a play overcrowded with "labors"—the ascent from Hell, the slaying of Lycus, the rampaging murders of his family—that this concluding scene is the most difficult "labor" of all, for Hercules must learn to curb and control Hercules himself.¹⁹ That is what he does.

III

On the other hand, too many critics simply assume that Seneca himself favored suicide and hence would condone that outlet as the most manly road for a better-adjusted Hercules to select. Psychological critics, like M. D. Faber, assume that Seneca himself was attracted to and even wanted to commit suicide.²⁰ And far too many scholars, like J. M. Rist, presume

16. V. Ehrenberg, "Tragic Heracles," *Aspects of the Ancient World: Essays and Reviews* (New York, 1973), p. 161.

17. It is significant, however, in Euripides that, although the gods will tolerate Hercules' murdering of his wife and children, they nonetheless directly interfere to save Amphitryon, as Pallas specifically does, *HF* 1001–6. The gods' sense of proper "boundaries" and "limitations" to injustice is precise, but their principles and reasons must strike the human spectator as unfathomable.

18. Arrowsmith, "A Greek Theater of Ideas," p. 3.

19. Nor should the Herculean decision to live, to suffer, and to aid other human beings be surprising to critics, for that is precisely what Prodicus' story of the Choice of Hercules (Xen. *Mem.* 2. 1. 20–34) is about, i.e., one who elects to perform difficult and noble deeds. As one scholar reminds us, Hercules early became the symbol of public "service," one "devoting himself altruistically to the service of humanity" with "toil and suffering"; A. R. Anderson, "Heracles and His Successors: A Study of the Heroic Ideal and the Recurrence of a Heroic Type," *HSCP* 39 (1928): 9–10.

Since Homeric times and over the centuries Heracles has become altered, from one exalted for possessing mere *agathos* and *arete* as successful private upper-class power and prowess, to one who has acquired social amenities and assumed interpersonal responsibilities, an *agathos politēs*. Consult the discussion of the evolution of such values in A. W. H. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility* (Oxford, 1960).

20. "The Son-Father Slays the Father-Son," *A New Anatomy of Melancholy: Patterns of Self-Aggression among Authors. University of Hartford Studies in Literature* 10 (1978): 14–30.

that Seneca's is a downright "obsession" with suicide that is atypical, even among Stoic philosophers.²¹

The actuality of Senecan teaching is far otherwise. True enough, Seneca did indeed write frequently about suicide and *meditatio mortis*,²² self-murder had always been one of Stoicism's major considerations, as it sought to offset fear of death and to encourage *apatheia*. Furthermore, in the brutal Neronian age, when life expectancy among the upper classes and the intellectuals was tenuous at its best, Seneca had good practical reasons for reflecting upon such a subject, the importance of which his own final death sentence served to confirm. Yet beyond these pragmatic reasonings lay the matter of principle. Seneca always insisted that the wise man needed actively to exercise his virtue: "Opus est et sapienti agitatione virtutum" (*Epist.* 109. 2). The sane life expressed itself in terms of activity: "Extendamus vitam; huius et officium et argumentum actus est" (*Epist.* 122. 3). And, indeed, life's contests and adversities merely serve to sustain virtue, that without exertions would languish (*Prov.* 2. 4). These ideas are, in fact, upheld by the central characters in the Hercules play. "Imperia dura tolle—quid virtus erit?" (433), Megara inquires of the tyrant Lycus; and at the crucial moment of climax in the play, when Hercules has been considering self-destruction, Theseus urges him to action and self-control (1274–77):

surge et adversa impetu
perfringe solito. nunc tuum nulli imparem
animum malo resume, nunc magna tibi
virtute agendum est . . .

Amphitryon had made the same appeal: "Nunc Hercule opus est; perfer hanc molem mali" (1239). Their argument is, primarily, that for Hercules to slay himself in a moment of pique, despair, and passion would prove an abrogation of courage and self-restraint.

In addition, the Underworld of the dead constitutes a realm devoted to the opposite of action, for it is an endless darkened tract of eternal sloth: "et foeda tellus torpet aeterno situ" (702), as Theseus reports to Amphitryon. And tellingly might we recollect Virgil's lines concerning the inert suicides in Hades:²³

proxima deinde tenent maesti loca, qui sibi letum
insontes peperere manu, lucemque perosi
proicere animas. quam vellent aethere in alto
nunc et pauperiem et duros perferre labores!
fas obstat, tristisque palus inamabilis undae
alligat, et novies Styx interfusa coerces.

21. *Stoic Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1969), pp. 246–51. An exemplar of this "clinical" approach is the essay finding Seneca wholly "neurotic" and the victim of "spasmodic" writing, himself typifying "paranoic abnormality"; see E. P. Barker, s.v. "Seneca," *OCD*, pp. 827–28.

22. See the discussion of these topics in A. L. Motto, *Seneca* (New York, 1973), pp. 68–77.

23. *Aen.* 6. 434–39. Cf. also, in the *Hercules Furens*, Theseus' recounting of the journey to this selfsame sluggish nether world (650–829). Theseus' narrative has often been denigrated as a useless digression; on the contrary, throughout the play, the contrast between suicide and life, passivity and action, is absolutely crucial to the drama's central *agon*, motif, and resolution.

In the pages of Homer, serving almost as an inverse archetype of the living Hercules, the dead Achilles in the Underworld had stated that, rather than even be King of the Land of the Dead, he would much prefer the most ignominious life as an impoverished slave or thrall behind a plough (*Od.* 11. 488–91).

Finally, beyond death's bitter stupor and curtailment of vital activity, there remains the ethical question of one's responsibility. A man, Seneca held, should not elect suicide so long as he may be of service to others; he may only indulge in self-murder "si nemo iam uti eo poterit."²⁴ Elsewhere, Seneca is even more overt about one's duties and responsibilities to others (*Epist.* 104. 3):

Indulendum est enim honestis adfectibus; et interdum, etiam si premunt causae, spiritus in honorem suorum vel cum tormento revocandus et in ipso ore retinendus est, cum bono viro vivendum sit non quamdiu iuvat sed quamdiu oportet. Ille, qui non uxorem, non amicum tanti putat, ut diutius in vita commoretur, qui perseverabit mori, delicatus est.

And, most pertinently, Seneca himself in his younger years had been suffering so severely from tuberculosis that he had seriously contemplated suicide (*Epist.* 78. 2):

Saepe impetum cepi abrumpendae vitae; patris me indulgentissimi senectus retinuit. Cogitavi enim non quam fortiter ego mori possem, sed quam ille fortiter desiderare non posset. Itaque imperavi mihi, ut viverem. Aliquando enim et vivere fortiter facere est.

Seneca refrained from suicide for the sake of his father. One cannot help but feel that the Herculean decision—so different from that in the Euripidean play—at the climax of the *Hercules Furens*, where Hercules elects to survive for the sake of his earthly "father" Amphitryon, is potently illuminated by its convergence with an intense Senecan autobiographical moment.

D. Knight has attempted to define the central concerns, the imperative essence, of "the heroic tradition." These are, he postulates, the hero's quest for "the proper life to lead in the face of inevitable death, and the fit relation between men in a society." Heroic man must learn, magnanimously, to "act beyond the demands of prudence," even to act beyond any concern for his own life or death. "The man who fully accepts this realization is accepting along with it a responsibility for other men. He is devoted beyond his own powers to the facing of danger, and also beyond his own needs." For, if the hero, beyond other men, is an archetypal and ideal Self, nevertheless, paradoxically he must realize himself by transcending Self; he must, in Knight's words, make of his life a pattern, "a pattern based upon devotion of the self rather than to the self."²⁵ Such a heroic

24. Above all, Seneca counsels, one should not rush headlong into suicide without serious reflection (*Epist.* 24. 24–25).

25. *Pope and the Heroic Tradition: A Critical Study of His "Iliad"* (New Haven, 1951), pp. 82–84. Similarly, primitive traditions of ontology and cosmology in mysticism have perennially accentuated this selfsame transcendence of selfhood and individuation (see Wheelwright, *The Burning Fountain*, pp. 200–201). This ideal submerging of the One into the Many has been applied to meta-

man must attain to selfless generosity, rendering "a final offering to his people." This is the chief recognition of the heroes, Knight reminds us, of *Beowulf*, *The Song of Roland*, and the *Iliad*. We must add that it is the final discovery and essential victory of Hercules, a Hercules embroiled in the *Hercules Furens* in his greatest Labor. For Hercules must defeat the Self, and remain preserved in life for his father, for the people of Greece, and to be sure for mankind at large. It is a victory he tardily but mightily labors for and ultimately enforces upon himself.

IV

Nevertheless, numerous critics will not acknowledge this play's latest labor nor concede that Hercules' is any sort of triumph over Self—or that his is any victory at all. For a great many of them, Hercules reveals in this play little other than a "dangerous" might and powerfulness, an "Übergrösse."²⁶ For such critics, as for some who study the Euripidean *Heracles*, the hero's "very strength becomes dangerous." "The 'moral' of the *Heracles*, if we may use such a term, is the proneness of great and violent natures, subjected to the chances of life, to run amuck with consequences beyond their calculation or comprehension."²⁷ Given the superhuman and high-powered protagonist of the *Hercules Furens*, too many can perceive only "l'eccesso" and "il tracotante orgoglio,"²⁸ an overarching "grandezza" that leaves "sua mente annebbriata dall'*hybris*."²⁹ Such critics appear inclined to debunk *any* Hercules; perhaps they have contracted an automatic bias against brute strength; certainly our society is familiar with archetypal figures of this unpleasant kind—brawn without brains, bull in a china closet, the childlike Samson tricked into getting a haircut, the murderous cretin Lennie in Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, the victimized stoker Yank of O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*, nay, even the befuddled romantic monster of *King Kong*. And perhaps, too, our own era is experiencing a massive reaction, a change in taste, for unlike the period that stretched from Carlyle to Nietzsche to Hitler—what Eric Bentley termed a century of hero worship—we no longer dotingly admire the *Übermensch*.

In accord with this latest fashion, we tend to interpret Herculean strength—Hercules' very self—as excess, *hamartia*, hubris, possibly even pollution and sacrilege. Hence it is truly awesome to discern so many critics faulting this demigod for failing to be altogether human: for not

physics and to politics (concerning the polis) as well; "the primacy of the whole" is stressed; individuals "not only were *dependent* on the whole for their being but also *maintained* that whole with their being . . ." (H. Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* [Boston, 1963], pp. 247–49). Indeed, concepts of "the citizen of the world (or universe)" and Stoic ethics and Stoic pantheism in the Hellenistic and Roman periods continued to endorse just this same part/whole interrelationship; consult H. C. Baldry, *The Unity of Mankind in Greek Thought* (Cambridge, 1965).

26. C. Zintzen, "*Alle virtus animosa cadit*. Gedanken zur Darstellung des Tragischen in Senecas 'Hercules furens,'" *Senecas Tragödien*, ed. E. Lefèvre (Darmstadt, 1972), p. 154.

27. Greene, *Moirai*, p. 186.

28. E. Paratore, "Il prologo dello 'Hercules Furens' di Seneca e l' 'Eracle' di Euripide," *Quad. della RCCM* 9 (1966): 34.

29. E. Pettine, *Studio dei caratteri e poesia nelle tragedie di Seneca* (Salerno, 1974), pp. 77–78.

being amiable, domestic, hubby-like with his spouse. Similarly, he is chastized for revealing melodramatic heroism, boastfulness, and pride. He is considered outrageous when he asserts of the Underworld, "morte contempta redi" (612), or when he tauntingly inquires, "quae vinci iubes?" (615). And when he pronounces, "Ipse concipiam preces / Iove meque dignas" (926-27), he is credited with sacrilege and blasphemy. Perhaps critics find him at his worst when, his hands still gory with the blood of the slaughtered Lycus, he commences to offer ablutions and sacrifice to the gods without purifying his hands (918-24). Here is the essence of the *impium* and the *profanum*, and Hercules appears to be shockingly vile—taboo, polluted, defiled.

Yet there are perfectly understandable answers to critics' objections to Hercules' conduct. He simply is not intended for nor cast in the mold of domestic comedy, nor is the Hercules in the *Alcestis* or the characters in an *Ion* suitable to the more heroic occasion dramatized in Seneca's play. *Decorum personae* and suitability of style are commonplaces of classical rhetorical and literary tradition. "It was a fundamental tenet of this tradition that each style level or literary genre must deal with a corresponding level of subject matter. . . . The style levels are particularly evident in the ancient theater; in comedy persons and events of daily life are treated in the low, and occasionally in the intermediate, style; in tragedy legendary figures, princes, and heroes in extraordinary situations are made to speak with lofty dignity."³⁰ Such tragic elevation is particularly appropriate in the *Hercules Furens*, where the protagonist is Greece's greatest hero, a son of Zeus, and himself virtually a god. His has been a life of superhuman tests and tasks, a life of superhuman feats and accomplishment, and, accordingly, his life is pitched at the level of monstrous and godly challenges and deeds.

Even hubris is difficult to ascribe to Hercules meaningfully. As M. P. Nilsson notes, hubris indicates "haughtiness in word and deed," conduct that might be construed *hyper moron*, beyond man's fate or lot, "beyond the allotted portion."³¹ But Hercules with his strength and his status and his divine inheritance is par excellence and by nature beyond the human norm. He is of the Thunderer's tribe, and apt to thunder as well as any. What might appear brazen or sacrilegious in another is merely natural in himself.

Perhaps the most serious charge is the one adjudging Hercules guilty of impiety and possible contamination. Hercules proffers a sacrifice to the gods subsequent to the murder of Lycus without washing his bloodstained hands. In most primitive societies, rites of purification and cleanliness are rigorously prescribed; particularly, all over the world, there were tribal

30. E. Auerbach, *Literary Language and Its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages*, trans. R. Manheim (New York, 1965), pp. 37-38. An apt discussion of the three levels of style is conducted in Cic. *Orat.* 69-101.

31. *Greek Piety* (Oxford, 1948), p. 52. Indeed, he adds, "under *hybris* was included the mere fact of good fortune itself . . ." (p. 54); any man above the average, by such a standard, routinely possesses hubris.

regulations concerning lustrations prior to religious offerings³²—and particularly was purification necessary after acquiring the taint of contact with blood, with a dead body, with manslaughter.³³ Such taboos did indeed apply in the ancient ritual practices of Greece and Rome. Cicero reminds us that the gods are to be approached by purified devotees (*De leg.* 2. 19, 2. 24; cf. *Tib.* 2. 1. 5–6), and Hesiod severely cautions against pouring libations with unwashed hands (*Erga* 724–26). After the slaying of men, such purification is especially necessary, and we note how careful Odysseus is to cleanse his house with water and fire after the destruction of the suitors and their paramours (*Od.* 22. 438–39, 481–82, 493–94; his men also cleanse themselves, 22. 478–79); elsewhere, Hector will not perform sacrifices with bloodstained hands from battle (*Il.* 6. 253–68), nor will Aeneas in this condition touch the sacred objects of the household gods (*Aen.* 2. 717–20).

Against this background, Hercules' conduct is seemingly impious. But it must be remembered that Hercules functions partially as a god;³⁴ his sacrifice is to Zeus—and to himself! To this extent, he is the dispenser of fate and of justice, and the direct sacrifice of Lycus himself is a ceremony of justice, of righting an imbalance. In this case, it must be remembered that Hercules is considered as more than mortal, as one among a number of contending gods; he is not simply to be judged as a man. Pertinently, a number of tales have come down to us wherein Hercules commits apparently impious acts—but does so, often with impunity, as one more than mortal. One story is told, for instance, of his slaying of Cygnus, son of Mars; that god seeks revenge, but Jupiter's thunderbolt separates the two contenders (*Hyg. Fab.* 31). On another occasion, when Hercules has travelled to the Palatine with Geryon's cattle that he has recovered from Cacus, his thirst prompts him to shatter a door, break into the shrine of a grove sacred to a feminine deity, and to gulp down the holy waters.³⁵ On another occasion, it is related that, when Apollo refused to grant Hercules an oracle at Delphi, the strong man savaged the shrine, carrying off Apollo's tripod;

32. See E. A. Westermarck, *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*², 2 vols. (London, 1912–17), 2:352–54. See also W. Warde Fowler, *The Religious Experience of the Roman People* (London, 1911), pp. 169–80.

33. For taboos concerning physical contact with blood and death, consult J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion*, 2 vols. (London, 1890), 1:117, 185–87, 258–59, 272, 276, 2:250. On manslaughter and its resultant impurities, see Westermarck, *Moral Ideas*, 1:225, 232–33, 375–82; see also M. P. Nilsson, *A History of Greek Religion*, trans. F. J. Fielden (Oxford, 1949), pp. 82–88. Such taboos were particularly prescribed by Apollo (idem, *Greek Piety*, p. 42).

34. J. Dingel, *Seneca und die Dichtung* (Heidelberg, 1974), p. 113, observes that Hercules cannot be faulted with hubris since he *is* Jupiter's son. Yet Dingel goes perhaps too far: in a book that denies any Stoic meanings in the plays, the author also claims that Hercules at play's end reveals no "victory" or Stoic heroism; the plays, for Dingel, stress the irrational, the negative, the despairing, and in fact run counter to Seneca's philosophical teachings.

35. Prop. 4. 9; Macrobian *Sat.* 1. 12. 28; and Sir J. G. Frazer, *P. Ovidii Nasonis "Fastorum" libri sex*, 5 vols. (London, 1929), 2:215 (ad 1. 581). For a thorough review of scholarship on the Hercules-Cacus myth at Rome and the Roman treatment of Hercules as *victor*, see J. G. Winter, "The Myth of Hercules at Rome," *Roman History and Mythology*, ed. H. A. Sanders (New York, 1910), pp. 171–273.

once again, the contest is abbreviated by one of Zeus' thunderbolts, and Apollo required to provide the desired oracle.³⁶

We are not encountering in such situations the uneven combat of mortal with immortal, but contests among peers. As K. Kerényi observes, "In the form that these stories have usually taken since Homer and Hesiod, the heroine who conceived a child of Zeus was only a king's daughter or a queen. . . . Herakles, it is true, finally achieved immortality. But he was certainly not a mortal hero in the original form of the story. . . ."³⁷ The Hercules we encounter in so many myths and in the Senecan tragedy is clearly more than mortal, almost a god; and he can hardly be weighed and measured in terms of human *hamartia* and quotidian flaws.

In any event, it is noteworthy that the Senecan Hercules is not punished for his supposedly defective and tainted offerings to Zeus, Athena, Bacchus, Apollo, Diana, and so forth (900-908), nor is he in any way discountenanced or penalized by these deities. Rather, he is, as usual, persecuted by Juno—and persecuted by her for what he is, not for what he does. It is the function of Juno's prologue to the play to make their relationship patently obvious prior to the events of the play. Hence this deific and triumphant Herculean story in the *Hercules Furens* is nothing less (and nothing other) than the story of deliberately oppressed and maligned greatness.

Admittedly, this superhuman Hercules is blind to the fate of madness that awaits him and ironically ignorant of that madness' aftermath, his most brutal and exacerbating "task." But contrary to a host of critics, we believe, he certainly is not guilty of a sacrilegious and excessive hubris. In this play he patently is the son of Jupiter, and he has—all his life—been ordered to perform fantastic feats of strength. Like any hero, he is mindful of his honor, his valor, his accomplishments, and his capabilities, and he pronounces his mind on such topics, just as many a hero had done before engaging in hand-to-hand combat with an enemy in, say, the *Iliad*. Beyond that, his confidence and assurance are still more appropriately decorous, since he is the son of the first among the gods. As such, he is no empty braggart or miscreant. For this Hercules did not enter the Underworld unlawfully; he was ordered to go there. He is dutiful to the gods and regularly sacrifices to them. And at no time when he is sane does he suggest that he will invade the skies or scale the heavens to seize the reins of power. On the contrary, this is Juno's furious premonition and delirious vision (64), which is later echoed by the maddened Hercules infected by Juno's own disease (957-73). Indeed, unlike the Sophoclean *Trachiniae*, where Heracles' suffering and death are unrelieved by any suggestion that he will attain apotheosis or deification, the Senecan Hercules remains confident throughout of his superhuman power and lineage.

Given this overall context for the action of the *Hercules Furens*, it is diffi-

36. Apollod. *Bibl.* 2. 6. 2; Hyg. *Fab.* 32. It should be remembered that Zeus frequently sides overtly with Hercules. Recall particularly the passage (*Il.* 15. 14-30) where Zeus recounts how he had aided "godlike Heracles" and severely punished Hera, suspending her in the skies by a rope and attaching anvils to her feet.

37. *The Gods of the Greeks* (London and New York, 1951), p. 108.

cult to comprehend critics who attach too much significance to Hercules' supposed hubris, or who even propose that his insanity is a "natural" occurrence—perhaps, as one critic suggests, induced by his "excitability" after the slaying of Lycus—as if Hercules were some species of tiger or wildcat, once tamed, but now overborne by the smell of flesh and blood, and a bestial reversion to primal instincts.³⁸

The Senecan Hercules does not suffer from a fatalistic hubris. All of his life he has been tested and commanded, and he has performed his tasks heroically. Now he is challenged to perform the greatest feat, self-control. His sudden fury against himself in this play after awakening from his Goyesque and nightmarish "sleep of reason" represents his strongest temptation. Such a test is all the more pathetic and infuriating, for it comes at the supposed "end" of his labors and is, as a result, powerfully situated and motivated.

But suicide at this juncture, in a moment of pique, passion, and despair, would not stipulate or engender greatness. As Seneca often noted in his philosophic works, rashness frequently resembles greatness—but it is merely resemblance (*Epist.* 45. 7, 85. 28, 120. 8). The very essence of anger is lack of self-control, Seneca tells us; it is the desire to inflict excessive punishment (*De ira* 1. 3. 1–3, 1. 5. 3), whereas the administering of any penalty or discipline requires judgment and rational control (*De ira* 1. 6. 1, 3–4, 1. 15. 1–3, 1. 16. 1–7, 1. 17. 7, 1. 18. 1–6, 1. 19. 1–8, 2. 27. 3–4). Moreover, such self-murder would not be wholly just. In the rude awakening to the fact of this heinous crime, the natural human reaction is at first to blame the self. But had Hercules persisted in this passion and been unable and unwilling to temper this self-accusation, he would have been guilty of frailty indeed.

When all impetuosity, irrationality, and fury in Hercules are allayed, at play's end, we gain the distinct impression of the action's being stabilized by a newfound "calm." Hercules, to be sure, is no less tormented, miserable, and oppressed at the close; but he is resigned, decisive, steady. No place, he bitterly concludes, can "conceal" him—not even the nether world (1335–41). His actions, whatever they have been, have taken place on the great stage of the world, and are forever visible, forever known. Hercules must, at length, consent to such visibility, just as he must acknowledge irrevocable events. But, with knowledge, acceptance, and control, Hercules has finally acquired, together with his great body, what Cicero calls magnanimity or greatness of soul (*De off.* 1. 66):

The altogether brave and great soul is particularly recognized by two features, one of which consists in the scorning of externals after the soul has been persuaded that man should neither marvel at, long for, nor seek after anything but the honorable and

38. See R. Soellner, "The Madness of Hercules and the Elizabethans," *CL* 10 (1958): 110, 113, and others who conjecture that Hercules' madness is a "natural" occurrence: L. Herrmann, *Le théâtre de Sénèque* (Paris, 1924), p. 260; R. M. Haywood, "Note on Seneca's *Hercules Furens*," *CJ* 37 (1941–42): 422; and Shelton, "Problems of Time in Seneca's *Hercules Furens* and *Thyestes*," p. 261. The assertion that the fresh slaughter of humans may have "inspired" Hercules' frenzy is originally framed by Amphitryon in the form of a question in Eur. *HF* 966–67.

the suitable, and that it should succumb neither to any human being nor to any mental disturbance nor to fortune. The other feature is that when you have so mastered your spirit, as I mentioned above, you perform those deeds that are truly great and especially useful but that are also vehemently arduous and full of labors (*res plenas laborum*) and dangers not only to life but to everything relevant to it.

Cicero's pointed reference to “*res plenas laborum*” strongly suggests that he had Hercules in mind in this passage. But, howsoever that may be, it is certain that Cicero's words amply apply to the Hercules of Seneca's drama. For such a Hercules has, after great conflict, succeeded by the play's conclusion in embracing both the honorable and the suitable as well as in performing his most vehemently arduous deed.

V

Naturally enough, therefore, because the *Hercules Furens* is a grim and bloody journey to self-conquest, it is a play fraught with brooding, humorless, and pressing ironies; such intense ironies only serve to heighten the tension that pervades the play—suggesting as it does a universe of morally indifferent or even of riotously lunatic deities who manipulate man's prison-house life and its brutish environment.

The play is set in full sunlight; it commences, as the Chorus observes, with the breaking of a beautiful dawn. (Later, of course, this new day is to be associated with Alcides' victory in his latest and possibly last labor.) Still, this initial tone suggesting renaissance and renewal insidiously alters and reverses itself (see *Amphitryon*'s “*nulla lux umquam mihi / securafulsit*” at 207–8). And the Chorus comes to recognize that all new days initiate the constant round of time's passing and the daily cares: “*labor exoritur durus et omnes / agitat curas aperitque domos*” (137–38). The point is that, although the common man seems to the Chorus better off than those more elevated in fortune (for they are the more visible and accessible targets of fate), nevertheless all mankind serves as time's chattel, and like the kid totters “*cursu levis incerto*” (144); and all men, like the sailor, are *dubii* (152) about life, and must perform their labors and tasks. Yet life drives dangerously, irrevocably along for all men, propelling them toward death (178–85):

properat cursu
vita citato volucrique die
rota praecipitis vertitur anni;
durae peragunt pensa sorores
nec sua retro fila revolvunt.
at gens hominum flatur rapidis
obvia fati incerta sui;
Stygias ultro quaerimus undas.

Every man is a laboring Hercules in miniature and yet mere fodder for all-consuming death (870–72):

tibi crescit omne,
et quod occasus videt et quod ortus
—parce venturis—tibi, mors, paramur.

Hence the passing of time, the bright driving of the sun, is anything but cause for gladness in this play; it is a sure sign of earth's labors and of the hastening doom that besets all men.

Like the rising sun, Alcides himself merely stands out above all others: at night, while other mortals are sleeping, he has labored in the Underworld; indeed, all of his life has been one labor succeeded by another; and worse, he has labored as a servant or slave to Eurystheus. As if to accentuate his terrific busyness, the largest part of the play is concerned with his ongoing activities: his conquest of and return from Hell, his overthrowing of the tyrant Lycus, his struggles in the toils of madness. Yet in consenting to "go to Hell" he appears merely to be courting his own death, hastening his own dire end. His activities, in short, can be perceived as a means of hastening his ultimate torpor and *quies*. And Thebes' joyful day (875), which the Chorus had anticipated, becomes the darkened world of insanity. Hercules, the one sure slayer of monsters, has become himself a monster. At the apex of misery, the Chorus, which had celebrated sanity and civilization, conclude by praying that the maddened Hercules remain mad—to sustain his ignorance of his crimes (1094–99). Truly, by the cruel irony of this play have all things been driven to embrace their opposites.

Paradoxically, no one seems more aware of ironies than the "inspired" Juno of the prologue. In her vengeful fury against Hercules, she clearly recognizes her own futility thus far: that by her imposing outlandish labors upon him, she has made possible his heroism and reputation. She goes farther and even recognizes her own ineptitude and nugacity to date (33–34), since Hercules appears to enjoy her wrath! She perceives—and it torments, infuriates, her—that in her own busyness she has labored more than Hercules (41–42), but to no purpose or effect. Consummate ironist that she aspires to be, however, she will attempt in this play to impose the greatest of ironies upon human events and to have the last word, through incessant warfare to obtain the final victory. She will, she announces, induce Hercules to war with himself (84–85), and, being Hercules, he will overcome himself (116–17). Thus, it will finally "profit" Juno that Hercules is Jove's powerful son, since he will be victorious in this final task against himself. Even more ironically, Juno observes, she will for once be able to "help" him in his contest (117–18), and she will be, for perhaps the first and only time, serving on his side (120–21). The toils of an enabling irony could not be more systematically or brutally devised and construed.

Into such a trap Hercules seems eagerly to hurtle himself; he appears a naive and willing victim. Returned from the Underworld, he boasts to the deities (592–617) and even inquires what further tasks Juno might propose for him to accomplish (614–15). Given as we are a direct foreknowledge of heaven's ungodly plans for him, even Hercules' piety appears to us gullible and ironically useless and inept. For immediately upon his return from

Hades, Hercules offers a prayer to Phoebus and Jupiter and the other gods (592–615) and again, immediately after his slaying of the tyrant Lycus, he proffers a sacrifice and prayers to the gods (895–918). Even his well-known prayer for Peace (926–39) is touchingly ignorant, as he requests the fates to prepare any monster that remains to be overcome.

Like Hercules, the Chorus is tricked and beguiled, for despite its foreboding it unwittingly believes that Hercules upon his return from Hades has completed his greatest feat (832, 891–92) and that nothing lies beyond (or beneath) the underworld, that no greater task can remain to be performed. Ironically again, the Chorus is wrong, for Juno has called upon Furor and the other raging, hellish deities who lie "beneath" the normal realm of Orcus (91–93), and, all unknowing, Hercules repeats this desire to obtain a location beneath Hell when he wishes to lie hidden from all the universe in his shame after the assassination of his wife and children (1223–24).

Yet in this Senecan play (strikingly unlike the Euripidean *Heracles* in this respect), with its ultimate reversal and most pointed of ironies, the dramatist turns all of this irony against Juno herself. In a desperate moment Juno has played her ace, her most fearsome card, and the ploy does not work. Although with difficulty, Hercules wins the contest with himself; he elects to control his passion, his despondency, and his ire, and does not slaughter himself. "Nunc Hercule opus est; perfer hanc molem mali" (1239): his greatest Labor proves to be his self-mastery, his self-control. And by an additional irony, the superhero's hand, that had been intended to be used for self-destruction, is utilized in the labor of self-mastery: "agedum dextra, conare aggredi / ingens opus, labore bis seno amplius" (1281–82).

"Eat ad labores hic quoque Herculeos labor: vivamus" (1316–17). The irony that turns against Juno as a result proves more and more telling: for Juno herself has made possible this greatest conquest, this most significant achievement.³⁹ And she has failed in the single-minded, monolithic goal that she had set for herself at the play's beginning: "Perge, ira, perge et magna meditantem opprime, congregere, manibus ipsa dilacera tuis . . ." (75–76). She has failed, simply, to taint him, to rend him, to prevent his deserving of heaven, to obstruct Jove from countenancing and receiving him. On the contrary, since in madness Hercules has butchered wife and family, the crime lies entirely at Juno's feet.

39. J. Descroix, "Les travaux d'Hercule dans l'*Hercule furieux* de Sénèque," *Humanitas* 2 (1948–49): 302, like many other critics, writes briefly of Hercules' final victory over himself. F. Giancotti, *Saggio sulle tragedie di Seneca* (Rome, 1953), pp. 141–42, notes the "optimistic" conclusion of the *Hercules Furens* and tersely alludes to the final irony, where Juno's words (116) are fully realized, although Hercules' victory had hardly been her goal or intention. Similarly, although she finds fault with Hercules earlier in the play, a delirium of greatness, and a power within himself that pushes him toward insanity, nevertheless A. M. Marcosignori maintains that the play's conclusion presents a broadened, expanded Hercules, one who affirms by his courage to live his own spiritual autonomy; "Il concetto di virtus tragica nel teatro di Seneca," *Aevum* 34 (1960): 217–33. And B. Seidensticker, *Die Gesprächsverdichtung in den Tragödien Senecas* (Heidelberg, 1969), pp. 117–18, stresses Hercules' final struggle with himself, viewing his submission to Amphitryon as an act of piety; the conclusion, therefore, Seidensticker understands as being Hercules' greatest victory.

And the last irony of all: Juno herself is the one who remains perpetually furious, perpetually frustrated, perpetually mad (107–11):

ut possit animo captus Alcides agi,
 magno furore percitus, nobis prius
 insaniendum est—Iuno, cur nondum furis?
 me me, sorores, mente deiectam mea
 versate primam. . . .

The incessant mad “war” Juno had sought rages eternally in her own breast, whereas Hercules and the human characters in the realm of rationality discern at the last, however dejectedly, a modicum of true resolution, *quies*, and repose. If we perceive this work in such a light, we discover that even the play’s title is misleading; for ultimately we do not encounter a lunatic Hercules, but a Hercules in Control, a Hercules Restraining, a Hercules Regained. Such an achievement constitutes more sanity, control, and super-godliness on the part of Hercules than Juno ever dreamt of in her philosophy.

VI

We in the jaded twentieth century are not so hero-minded.⁴⁰ To paraphrase Shakespeare, “we are not in the hero mood today.”⁴¹ In fact, our representations of demigods and supermen are tortured by misgivings, cynicism, imbecility, and doubt. In describing “kitsch”—so called “popular,” vulgar, and aggressively ostentatious bad taste in the arts—G. Highet fondly singles out a choice example of an ancient Titan in silly modern disarray. Referring to the statue of Atlas in Rockefeller Center, New York, as one of his “favorite pieces of bad art,” Highet despairs that the Titan Atlas is represented “as a powerful moron, with a tiny little head . . . instead of supporting the heavens, he is lifting a spherical metal balloon. . . .”⁴² It is certainly true that there are contemporary fashions in abstract expressionism, in action painting, contemporary literary trends—in surrealism, da-da, black humor—that favor silence,⁴³ despair, the anti-hero,⁴⁴ and the absurd. But

40. Typical is John Barth’s essay on contemporary fiction, “The Literature of Exhaustion,” *Atlantic Monthly*, August 1967, pp. 29–34. And consult J. O. Stark, *The Literature of Exhaustion: Borges, Nabokov, and Barth* (Durham, N. C., 1974).

41. Cf. the King’s “I am not in the giving vein today,” *Richard III*, IV.ii.115.

42. *A Clerk of Oxenford: Essays on Literature and Life* (New York, 1954), p. 219.

43. Ever since the Romantic period, many writers have been driven toward silence (Rimbaud, Arnold, Valéry) or madness (Collins, Cowper, Smart, Artaud, Hölderlin, Lowell) or even suicide (Lautréamont, Kleist, Nerval, Hart Crane, Hemingway, Plath, Berryman). Most recently, Beckett’s works almost exalt anti-art, exhaustion, entropy, and near wordlessness. Consult, for instance, J. Barzun, “Romanticism Today,” *Encounter* 17 (Sept. 1961), 26–32; G. Steiner, *Language and Silence* (New York, 1967); I. Hassan, *The Literature of Silence: Henry Miller and Samuel Beckett* (New York, 1967); and S. Sontag, *Styles of Radical Will* (New York, 1969), pp. 3–34.

44. See, for instance, S. O’Faolain, *The Vanishing Hero: Studies of the Hero in the Modern Novel* (Boston, 1956); H. Lubin (ed.), *Heroes and Anti-Heroes* (San Francisco, 1968); and the entire issue of *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 9 (Spring 1976): “The Anti-Hero: His Emergence and Transformation.”

these modern fashions and fancies should not be permitted to isolate us from the great conceptions and creations of the past. The tradition of heroism and its significance should not be allowed to pass beyond our comprehension. And in that vital heritage the Senecan Hercules should stand as he was intended—as an important, piquant, remarkable, and triumphant figure.

University of South Florida