

impiety is irony enough, the further possibility of exploiting the taboo would make the innovation doubly attractive to an author who prized epigrammatic point. The layering of sexual transgression with a peculiar reversal of language, where an extended meaning turns out to have a devastating literal reality, is made yet more complex by the religious violation. In both the sexual and the religious transgressions it is the verbal utterance of these family terms that causes the characteristically Ovidian shudder. Throughout the story Myrrha has avoided the word *pater*, preferring his proper name (e.g., 10.338, 380); even the nurse, who ends two short speeches with the word (10.401, 410), suppresses it once she understands: “‘vive’ ait haec, ‘potiere tuo’—et non ausa ‘parente’ / dicere conticuit” (10.429–30). Myrrha finally does utter the word when it violates not one but two taboos.

An important objection should be met: that the effect depends on specialized knowledge. The secondary reference is not necessary to appreciate Ovid’s wit, but enhances it once recognized. Sufficient horror is created by the story as told; the further transgression gilds the lily. Moreover, a veiled allusion to *arcana sacra* is particularly appropriate to a story narrated by the *vates* Orpheus (10.143), who could be expected to know such things. He opens the story with a perversion of sacral language: 10.300 *procul hinc natae, procul este parentes*.⁶ On my interpretation, mention of fathers and daughters again perverts religious language at the story’s climax, making a ring with Orpheus’ opening words. In Ovid’s hands Orpheus is a *vates* who pushes the limits of both language and religious knowledge, rather like Ovid himself.⁷

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6. On *procul hinc*, see Bömer, “*Metamorphosen*,” on 300; P. E. Knox, “Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and the Tradition of Augustan Poetry,” *PCPS* 11 (1986): 54–55; Anderson, “*Metamorphoses*,” on 300–303: “Ovid seems to be talking as ‘priest’ of a perverse ceremony, warning away the pure in heart.” It is rather Orpheus who is the “priest.” On the ironic tension between Orpheus’ moral stance and his perversity, see B. R. Nagle, “Byblis and Myrrha: Two Incest Narratives in the *Metamorphoses*,” *CJ* 78 (1983): 301–15.

7. I thank R. J. Tarrant and *CP*’s anonymous readers for their helpful advice. An earlier version of this paper was given at a graduate student colloquium at Harvard, February 1988.

PARVIS OR PATRIIS? A NOTE ON SENECA PHAEDRA 899

Quod facinus, heu me, cerno? quod monstrum intuo?
regale patriis asperum signis ebur 899
capulo refulget, gentis Actaeae decus.
sed ipse quonam evasit?

This is the moment at which Theseus recognizes his son Hippolytus as the supposed ravisher of Phaedra by the sword he sees in her hands. In O. Zwierlein’s critical edition,¹ the MSS reading *parvis* has been emended to *patriis* on the

1. L. Annaei Senecae Tragoediae. Incertorum auctorum Hercules [Oetaeus] Octavia² (Oxford, 1988). The emendation has also been adopted by M. Coffey and R. Mayer, eds., *Seneca “Phaedra”* (Oxford, 1990).

evidence of the recognition scene in Ovid *Metamorphoses* 7.422–23 “cum pater in capulo gladii cognovit eburno / signa sui generis.”² As Aegeus was about to offer Theseus a cup of poisoned wine he recognized his son in the nick of time by the distinctive family marks on his sword-hilt.³ The emendation *patriis . . . signis* is intended to remedy Seneca’s text by closely reproducing Ovid’s *signa sui generis* in combination with the mention of *pater*.

Using the reading *parvis*, C. Segal recently laid special emphasis on the “small signs” on the sword-hilt with a useful observation concerning Seneca’s adaptation of the Ovidian passage. In Segal’s view, Seneca “stresses the dramatic concreteness and tactile qualities” of the object that affects the recognition and intensifies “the almost tangible horror of receiving the fateful *signa*” by elaborating Ovid’s bare verb *cognovit* with the details of light (*refulget*) and touch (*asperum . . . ebur*), and by adding the qualifying *parva* to Ovid’s *signa*.⁴

I would like to discuss Seneca’s changes in different terms. There is indeed an important difference between Ovid’s and Seneca’s recognition that has a direct bearing on deciding the textual question. In Ovid, Aegeus recognizes the signs on the ivory sword-hilt; in Seneca, Theseus sees with horror that “royal ivory finely engraved gleams on the hilt.”⁵ In Ovid, the signs are singled out for the recognition; in Seneca, the sword-hilt as a whole serves as a token of recognition. Everything about the hilt—the material it is made of, its shining appearance, the fine engravings on it—is vividly familiar to Theseus and strikes him directly as a *monstrum*. In Seneca’s adaptation the *signa* are dissociated from *genus* (*gens*) and thus lose their explicit and exclusive significance as distinctive characteristics; it is the sword-hilt as a whole that Seneca makes into a *signum*. Hence arises the need to define more closely the connection of the sword with Theseus’ family, which is done by means of the epithet *regale* and the expression *gentis Actaeae decus* (“glory of the Attic house [race]”).⁶

In this new context the epithet *parvis* qualifying *signis* is a perfectly acceptable reading complementing *asperum* and *refulget*; *parvis* is a descriptive epithet indicating

and by C. de Meo, *Lucio Anneo Seneca “Phaëdra”* (Bologna, 1990). It should be noted that A. J. Boyle, *Seneca’s “Phaëdra.” Introduction, Text, Translation and Notes* (Liverpool, 1987), wisely chose, here and elsewhere, not to follow several of the new or old emendations adopted by Zwierlein in his Oxford text (see Boyle’s “Appendix III”). Cf. also I. C. Giardina, “Una nuova edizione delle tragedie di Seneca,” *RFIC* 115 (1987): 249; and R. Mayer’s review of Zwierlein, “L. Annaei Senecae tragoediae,” *JRS* 78 (1988): 246, on the issue of Axelson’s emendations.

2. As noted in O. Zwierlein, *Kritischer Kommentar zu den Tragödien Senecas* (Stuttgart, 1986), p. 205, this emendation was proposed by Dan. Heinsius (1611) and later supported by Nic. Heinsius (1742).

3. Ovid’s influence on the Senecan passage is discussed by R. Jakob, *Der Einfluss Ovids auf den Tragiker Seneca* (Berlin and New York, 1988), p. 83, and especially by C. Segal (see n. 4, below). It is curious that in several important discussions of the origin of the sword motif in Seneca’s *Phaëdra* no mention is made of Seneca’s dependence on Ovid, not even in terms of a verbal echo; cf. C. Zintzen, *Analytisches Hypomnema zu Senecas Phaëdra* (Meisenheim am Glan, 1960), p. 104; J. Dingel, “Ἰππόλυτος ζευφυλκός. Zu Senecas Phaëdra und dem ersten Hippolytus des Euripides,” *Hermes* 98 (1970): 44–56; H. Herter, “Phaëdra in griechischer und römischer Gestalt,” *RhM* 114 (1971): 44–77, esp. 71–73; O. Zwierlein, *Senecas Phaëdra und ihre Vorbilder* (Stuttgart, 1987), pp. 27–28.

4. C. Segal, *Language and Desire in Seneca’s “Phaëdra”* (Princeton, 1986), p. 171. Segal dedicates pp. 169–73 and 201–14 to the discussion of the “small signs” on the sword-hilt. Apparently the publication of this monograph on Seneca’s *Phaëdra* preceded, or coincided with, the first edition of Zwierlein’s *Seneca* (1986), for Segal used the texts of P. Grimal, ed., *Sénèque “Phèdre”* (Paris, 1965) and I. C. Giardina, ed., *L. Annaei Senecae Tragoediae* (Bologna, 1966) who adopt the MSS reading *parvis*.

5. The translation is by Boyle, “*Phaëdra*,” p. 103.

6. Or *generis Actaei decus* (the reading of E, with Gronovius’ emendation of *Actaeae* to *Actaei*).

the skill required to engrave the *signa* on the sword-hilt. Their artistic quality is a distinctive feature that serves, along with their content and all the other features, as a token of recognition. The emendation of *parvis* to *patriis* is a typical example of the misuse of linguistic parallels in deciding textual questions.⁷

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7. This issue is discussed at length by J. G. Fitch, "Zwierlein's Seneca and the Editor's Task," *CP* 84 (1989): 236–51, esp. 241–44. I wish to thank the Editor for useful advice in condensing this note so as to make my own contribution stand out more clearly.