

**XVI.—A Stoic Aspect of Senecan Drama: Portraiture**

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This study is concerned with the descriptions of personal appearance in the characters of Seneca's plays. His use of portraiture seems to stem specifically from a strong Stoic interest in the relation of the features of a man to his inner nature; an interest which is also common to the Peripatetic school, and is directly connected with the study of the principles of physiognomy. In Seneca's essays and letters extensive comments on the subject appear, ranging from the definition of rhetorical terms which are used for descriptions of personal appearance to an analysis of different physical types of men. The descriptions of various types of people in the dramas, both permanent, detailed portraits, and brief delineations of momentary inner feeling, reflected on the countenance, are, I believe, related in part to the Stoic attention given to the theories of the physiognomists, and in part to the strong preoccupation in this period with related rhetorical, stylistic devices, such as *χαρακτηρισμός* and *είκονισμός*. It is the purpose of this paper to examine the descriptions of Medea and Phaedra from this point of view as well as Seneca's method of indicating the physical reaction of a person to some event or speech.

Interest in the relation of the features of a man to his inner character is no modern development. The vogue of Lavater in the eighteenth century and the reflection of his doctrines in the literature of the time is but a repetition of a similar vogue existing in Greece and Rome at certain periods, where, under the influence of the Peripatetic and Stoic schools, careful study was given to the significance of every aspect of the body, and to the comparison of men and animals in the matter of physique and nature.

The Pseudo-Aristotelian manual on physiognomy analyzes three methods used in this "science."<sup>1</sup> The third of these methods,

<sup>1</sup> 805 (after T. Loveday and E. S. Forster). The first method assumes as a basis for physiognomical inferences various kinds of animals, and for each kind a particular mental character, and then argues that if a man resembles one kind in form, he must resemble it also in soul. The second method confines itself to human beings, but distinguishes various races of men, and by studying differences of appearance and

admittedly defective in more than one way, takes as its basis the characteristic facial expressions which are observed to accompany different conditions of mind, such as anger or fear. In this method it must be granted that a morose person, for example, may spend a happy day now and then, and will change his expression accordingly. But it is, nevertheless, by this third means of study that analysis of the proper appearance of the orator while speaking, and the theoretical material on *actio* and *pronuntiatio* in the *ars rhetorica* have their closest relation with the principles of physiognomy.

In an earlier study of descriptions of personal appearance in Roman history and biography,<sup>2</sup> three principal types were found to be used repeatedly in the authors. First, there is the method of description where the body is mentioned in general terms, in expressions such as *forma eximia*, *corpus ingens*, consisting in general of descriptions of the permanent appearance of a man, or some aspect of that appearance. Secondly, occurs the type where the emotion of the individual registered on the body or the countenance is indicated by such phrases as *laeto vultu*, *truci vultu*. This type is to be found especially in the historians and the orators in (1) panegyrics or in vituperative attacks on enemies, and (2) in expressions in which the momentary appearance of a man is depicted, i.e., in phrases which indicate the reaction of a person to some event or speech as it is reflected for a brief space upon the countenance. In the Roman historians, for example, this latter device of description reaches its highest development in Tacitus by the second century A.D. Thirdly, there is the type where the whole body is photographically described, as in the *Lives* of Suetonius, where it can be demonstrated that the tenets of the ancient physiognomists, mentioned above, on the interpretation of character from the physique have left their direct mark in the detailed descriptions of the emperors. It is to be noted that the Greek historians of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. make no such use of any description of personal

character, arrives at certain physiognomical conclusions for each race. For Stoic interest in the principles of physiognomy see R. Förster, *Scriptores Physiognomonici* (Leipzig 1893) 1.lxx-lxxi (Prolegomena). For significant use by the Epicureans of descriptions of physical appearance in discussions of the emotions see R. Philippson, "Papyrus Herculanensis 831," *AJP* 64 (1943) 149-151. On the relation of the appearance of the orator while speaking and the tenets of the physiognomists, see Seneca's discussion on the blush of modesty, *Ep.* 11.1-7.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. E. C. Evans, "Descriptions of Personal Appearance in Roman History and Biography," *HSCP* 46 (1935) 44-47.

appearance as a device of characterization. Expressions, for example, depicting the momentary appearance of an individual, which are so much a part of the "art of innuendo"<sup>3</sup> in Tacitus, have almost no place in the stylistic techniques of Herodotus, or Thucydides, or Xenophon.<sup>4</sup> Similarly it may be said of the Attic orators of the same period that there is little concern for the eulogy of the appearance, permanent or momentary, of an individual, or for attack by vituperative description of opponents.<sup>5</sup> They clearly become part of the rhetorical technique of historiography and oratory at a later period. The question then presents itself as to how and when these devices of description did appear markedly in prose, and that investigation must form the subject of another study.

But it is also pertinent to inquire how far such descriptions are part of the art of poetry in Greece and Rome. In this connection the present study is concerned primarily with the second type of description, i.e., "registering reaction," as an aspect or device of characterization in Roman tragedy, used repeatedly to suggest the nature of an individual from his personal appearance. But, as in the case of epic,<sup>6</sup> there is inevitably associated with this type significant use of the first or more general method as well, and occasionally certain iconistic descriptions of the third type occur. In such a study the material from Seneca deserves careful consideration. Following the Stoic interest in physiognomy he comments extensively on that subject in various letters and essays in two ways.

First of all, he analyzes in some detail the rhetorical terms used for iconistic and physiognomical descriptions.<sup>7</sup> *Charaktêrismos* is a description of behavior, and sometimes equated with *eikonismos*, wherein properly only the physique of people is delineated. He

<sup>3</sup> See the excellent treatment of this subject by I. S. Ryberg, "Tacitus' Art of Innuendo," *TAPA* 73 (1942) 383-404.

<sup>4</sup> Xenophon offers some notable exceptions to this statement, e.g.: *An.* 2.6.8-9 (Clearchus); *Symp.* 5.6 (Socrates); 8.3; *Ap.* 27 (Hermogenes); *Cyr.* 8.3.14 (Cyrus); *Mem.* 2.1.21-22 (Virtue and Vice at the Crossroads); 3.10.4-5 (Socrates to Parrhasius the Painter on the subject of facial expression reflecting the character); *Ages.* 11.2.

<sup>5</sup> It is important to remember that careful training in *pronuntiatio* had been neglected in Aristotle's opinion even in his own time, and that Theophrastus was thought to have been the first man to treat the subject systematically. That fact may serve to explain in part why we note an almost complete absence of description of facial expression or gesture in the Attic orators as against Cicero who introduced them frequently into his speeches (*HSCP* 46 [1935] 74-76).

<sup>6</sup> E. C. Evans, "Literary Portraiture in Ancient Epic," *HSCP* 58-59 (1948) 189-217.

<sup>7</sup> *Ep.* 95.65-69.

seems, however, to consider the two terms interchangeable and quotes as his Stoic master in the matter, Posidonius:<sup>8</sup> "It will be useful," he says, "to illustrate each particular virtue; this science Posidonius calls ethology (*ethologia*), while others call it characterization (*charactêrismos*). It gives the 'signs and marks' of each virtue and vice, so that distinctions may be understood between similar things. These illustrations, or to use a commercial term (i.e. of the *publicani*) *eikonismos*, I confess have a certain utility; just put them up for exhibition well recommended, and you will find men to copy them." He cites as an example Virgil's iconistic description of a high bred horse:<sup>9</sup> *ardua cervix, argutum caput, brevis alvus, obesa terga, toris animosum pectus*, and comments that Virgil's description, "though referring to something else, might perfectly well be the portrayal of a brave man; at any rate I myself should select no other simile for a hero. If I had to describe Cato, who was unterrified amid the din of civil war . . . this is exactly the sort of expression and attitude which I should give him (*non alium vultum, non alium habitum*)."

Secondly, he points to the close connections between the general tenets of the physiognomists and various treatments of physical appearance in the *Epistulae Morales*, where he describes certain types of men. The letter to Lucilius<sup>10</sup> on the choosing of teachers indicates how the lecherous man is revealed by his gait, by the touching of his head with a finger, by the shifting of his gaze; the scamp is marked by his laugh, the madman<sup>11</sup> by his face and general appearance. In another letter to Lucilius Seneca reports a conversation with Claranus, his former schoolmate, on various aspects

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* (trans. R. M. Gummere).

<sup>9</sup> See G. Misener, "Iconistic Portraiture," *CP* 19 (1924) 97-99, and Virgil, *G.* 3.75-85.

<sup>10</sup> *Ep.* 52.12. Cf. 11.1-7; 30.3; 66.4-5; 74.31; 83.21; 95.65-73; 103.2; 104.28; 106.5-7; 108.6-7; 114.3-4, 20-21; 115.3-4; *De Ira* 1.1.3-5; 1.18.2; 1.19.2; 2.3.2-4; 2.5.3; 2.19; 2.35-36.1-3; 3.4; 3.13.1-3; cf. also *Constant.* 16.3-18.1; *Ben.* 1.1.5; 1.3.6; 2.2; *Clem.* 1.13.4; 1.19.2-3; 2.5.5; *Consol. ad Polyb.* 5.5-6.1-2; *Tranq.* 4.6-7. See Förster, *Scriptores Physiognomonici* 2.326-327, 352.

<sup>11</sup> See also *De Ira* 1.1.3-5. Signs of the angry man: *flagrant ac micant oculi, multus ore toto rubor, exaestuante ab imis praecordiis sanguine, labra quatuntur, dentes comprimuntur, horrent ac surriguntur capilli, spiritus coactus ac stridens, articularum se ipsos torquentium sonus, gemitus mugitusque et parum explanatis vocibus sermo praeruptus et complosae saepius manus et pulsata humus pedibus et totum concitum corpus magnasque irae minas agens . . .*; cf. 2.35.3-5 and 3.4.1-5 for similar discussions of the hideous appearance of anger.

of virtue.<sup>12</sup> There are, he maintains, three kinds of goods:<sup>13</sup> those which are primary, such as joy or peace; those which are secondary, such as endurance of suffering; and a third variety, such as a modest gait, a calm and honest countenance, and a bearing that suits the man of wisdom: *tamquam modestus incessus et conpositus ac probus vultus et conveniens prudenti viro gestus*. "Nature," Seneca asserts, "produces certain men, who, though hampered in their bodies, none the less break through the obstruction." Thus the assumption is clearly maintained that a relation exists between the inner and the outward appearance, and that *incessus*, *vultus*, and *gestus* reflect the true character of the soul, or might ideally be said to do so in the man of wisdom.

For another kind of illustration of types we may turn in contrast to the *De Ira*, where the angry man is elaborately described;<sup>14</sup> with this portrait is combined the fearful picture of the mad man: *audax et minax vultus, tristis frons, torva facies, citatus gradus, inquietae manus, color versus, crebra et vehementius acta suspiria*. If we look in Seneca for a concrete description of such a mad man, a remarkable example is to be found in the philosopher's bitter invective on the ugliness of the physical appearance of the Emperor Caligula:<sup>15</sup> "He himself was a most fruitful source of ridicule, such was the ugliness of his pale face bespeaking his madness, such the wildness of his eyes lurking beneath the brow of an old hag, such the hideousness of his bald head with its sprinkling of beggarly hairs. And he had, besides, a neck overgrown with bristles, spindle shanks, and enormous feet." Every detail of this picture is in exact accord with the photographic description of the hated Emperor in the *Lives* of Suetonius, and the physiognomical significance of these features<sup>16</sup> I have dealt with elsewhere.

This attention to the general tenets of the physiognomists manifests itself in the tragedies in a different fashion.<sup>17</sup> These

<sup>12</sup> *Ep.* 66.1-5.

<sup>13</sup> Actually here, as Prof. Gummere points out, he is speaking of "three sorts of circumstances under which the good can manifest itself" (*Ep.* 66.5-6, note *ad loc.*, Loeb Class. Lib.). Elsewhere (66.36) he declares only the first two classes are real goods: "Certain goods are indifferent: these are no more according to nature than contrary to nature, as, for example, a discreet gait and a sedate posture in a chair" (*tamquam prudentes ambulare, composite sedere*). Trans. Gummere.

<sup>14</sup> See note 11, and *De Ira* 1.1.3.

<sup>15</sup> *Constant*. 18.1 (trans. J. W. Basore). Cf. *De Ira* 1.20.8-9; 3.19.1-2.

<sup>16</sup> *HSCP* 46 (1935) 67-68.

<sup>17</sup> While the discussion of the angry man is an example of Seneca's interest in certain physiognomical types, it is important to notice that the physical appearance

plays, though based directly on Greek dramas, are by and large more concerned with the use of facial and bodily expression, and the material found here would conform most closely to the third method of studying physiognomy discussed in the Pseudo-Aristotelian handbook, i.e. characteristic facial expressions that are observed to accompany different conditions of mind.

In a recent article Professor Berthe Marti<sup>18</sup> has suggested that the order of the plays of Seneca preserved in manuscript E (Codex Etruscus, Laurentianus 37, 13) was planned by the Roman playwright to illustrate certain Stoic ideas closely related to the philosophical concepts found in his essays and letters. She argues, for example, that Seneca's characterizations of Medea and Phaedra, when viewed in connection with the *De Ira*, point to concrete examples of one of the harmful passions deplored by the Stoic philosophers. She would maintain, furthermore, that the physical descriptions of the two heroines of their respective tragedies, presented in some detail, would fit exactly into this pattern of Seneca's purpose in writing his dramas, that of presenting a sequence of themes allied to the ideas discussed in his philosophical works. While I believe that there is great significance in Miss Marti's interpretation of the

of such a man is combined with a discussion of similar characteristics in animals. In other words this particular example might be said to illustrate the first method of studying the principles of physiognomy, analyzed in the Pseudo-Aristotelian handbook. The doctrine of the humors finds expression likewise in the *De Ira* 2.19, where Seneca, following an earlier Stoic source, undoubtedly Posidonius, discusses the mixture of the elements which causes differences of regions, animals, physique and character. Cf. Galen who quotes Posidonius on this subject, *De Plac. Hipp. et Plat.* 5.5 (5.463–464 Kühn). This would be associated with the second method of studying physiognomy described in the Pseudo-Aristotelian handbook. The Greek tragedians, as we have already indicated, are not concerned with bodily or facial expression to a marked degree. For illustrations from Aeschylus and Sophocles see notes 32 and 35 and appendix. Euripides, who is more partial to such delineation, uses it to describe effectively Medea and Phaedra (see below), and likewise devotes himself from time to time to momentary descriptions of incisive power. See appendix for examples, which, *in proportion*, are less frequent than in Seneca.

<sup>18</sup> Berthe Marti, "Seneca's Tragedies. A New Interpretation," *TAPA* 76 (1945) 216–245, esp. 230–234. While recognizing the importance of Miss Marti's thesis, Professor Norman T. Pratt, Jr. ("The Stoic Base of Senecan Drama," *TAPA* 79 [1948] 1–11, esp. 1–2) has been inclined to dissent from her interpretation in some respects. "Beyond the mechanical difficulty involved in attaching such exact significance to manuscript sequence," he says, ". . . there seems to be some lack of clarity in the sequence of the themes which she finds in the plays." He believes that Stoicism, and by this he means neo-Stoicism, "shaped the nature of this drama both in superficial and in fundamental ways. The influence of philosophy is much deeper than any simple correspondence between the themes of the two genres" (pp. 10–11).

relationship of the thought of the essays and the plays, I think that she has not taken account of all of the factors involved.

She contends<sup>19</sup> that "Seneca did not intend to write plays after the manner of the Greek dramatists but that he adapted the technique of drama to the teaching of philosophy." The group of *Medea* and *Phaedra*,<sup>20</sup> she suggests, "illustrate the most significant contribution of the Stoics to psychology, the analysis of the effect of emotional impulses upon the struggle between vice and virtue. They provide *exempla* for a Treatise of the Passions." I should submit that "they had become *exempla* of the most annihilating effects of anger" through a specific Stoic interest on the part of Seneca in the ideas of the physiognomists. They represent, furthermore, an attempt to relate physiognomical theory to rhetorical devices such as *charaktêrismos*, popular in his day, and to certain techniques in drama. Thus the *Medea*, as a play steeped in the fury and revenge of the heroine, provides an excellent example of detailed physical description of intense anger. This kind of description, however, is clearly of the second type, the indication of the momentary expression upon the physique or countenance. It does not attempt the iconistic portrait found in the likeness of Caligula, or the concentrated description of the angry man in the *De Ira*. The cumulative effect, however, of these momentary descriptions is precisely Seneca's words:<sup>21</sup> *Ut scias autem non esse sanos quos ira possedit, ipsum illorum habitum intueri.* Thus Creon immediately recognizes the threatening character of Medea's face, as he watches her approach:

Fert gradum contra ferox  
minaxque nostros propius affatus petit (186-187).

Two words, *ferox* and *minax*, convey the total impression of Medea's bearing. Likewise the nurse observes Medea hurrying from the house distraught, bent on brutal vengeance because of the desertion of Jason, and as she draws near, prays that she may curb her wild passion:<sup>22</sup> "As a maenad . . . she runs, now here, now there, marks of distracted passion in her face" (*furoris ore signa lymphati gerens*). "Her cheeks aflame, she pants with deep sobs for breath, shouts aloud, weeps floods of tears, beams with joy; she assumes the proof

<sup>19</sup> *Op. cit.* 219.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* 222, 229. In this paper *Hippolytus* is used instead of *Phaedra*.

<sup>21</sup> *De Ira* 1.1.3.

<sup>22</sup> 380-396 *passim* (trans. F. J. Miller throughout). Cf. 675-676.

of every passion" (. . . vultum furoris cerno. di fallant metum). Jason, in turn, with a kind of amazed and dull misapprehension, is anxious to approach her anger with prayers, but at her entrance exclaims (445-446): "And see, at the sight of me she starts up, bursts into passion, displays her hate; all her anguish is in her face" (totus in vultu est dolor). The chorus, too, as the children bear the fatal gifts to the palace of the bride, watches Medea move in the opposite direction (849-861): "Whither is this bloodstained maenad borne headlong by mad passion? What crime with reckless fury is she preparing? Her distraught face is hard set with anger:

vultus citatus ira  
riget . . .

Her cheeks blaze red, pallor puts red to flight; no colour in her changing aspect does she keep long."

To understand fully how repeatedly Seneca dwells on *ira*, we may turn to Euripides' *Medea* for comparison. Much the same type of delineation is to be found, but with a different emphasis. Certainly our attention is not directed constantly to the expression of anger. The nurse, first of all, tells of Medea's utter despair:<sup>23</sup> "never lifting her eye nor raising her face from off the ground." Then almost immediately the intensity of her angry brooding is reflected in the nurse's comment to the children's attendant: "For ere this have I seen her eyeing them (the children) savagely (εἶδον ὄμμα νιν ταυρομένην | τοῖσδ'), as though she were minded to do them some hurt" (92-93). At the begging of the chorus the nurse agrees to bring Medea outside, "although she glares upon her servants" (ἀποταυροῦται) as "with the look of a lioness with cubs" (187-189). When Creon confronts her, he bids her take her sullen face out of the land (τὴν σκυθρωπὸν, 271). Yet when Jason faces her, there is no reference to her angry bearing; we hear only her cruel taunts on his dastardliness: "O Zeus, why hast thou granted unto man clear signs to know the sham in gold, while on man's brow no brand is stamped whereby to gauge the villain's heart?"

οὐδεὶς χαρακτήρ ἐμπέφυκε σώματι (516-519).

Aegeus sees a downcast eye and wasted cheek, not anger on the face (689), and Jason,<sup>24</sup> in his second encounter, perceives only

<sup>23</sup> 24-33, esp. 27-28 (trans. E. P. Coleridge throughout).

<sup>24</sup> 922-923; cf. 1012.



fresh tears and a wan cheek as she dissembles her true plans. Finally her soliloquy as she steels herself for the murder of her sons is poignant with anguish, not anger of revenge, at the sight of the laughing eyes of her children.<sup>25</sup> Seneca, we must remind ourselves, emphasizes, too, the turmoil of soul in this scene:

variamque nunc huc ira, nunc illuc amor  
diducit (938-939);

but he directs our attention to Medea's fury, as he has throughout the play, and in this passage *ira* is the keynote word.

In the *Hippolytus* the concentration of Seneca on physique is again apparent in the description of the heroine, Phaedra, but the handling of this description is somewhat different. Instead of constant reiteration on *ira* in terms of the bearing of Medea as she appears to various people in the play at given points, our attention here is focused on a long description of the love-maddened queen. *Proditur vultu furor* (363) is the theme of the passage, and through the eyes of the nurse the total physical effect of her disordered mind is vividly presented to the chorus. It is a matter of some significance to note that this is the only important passage of description of Phaedra. Though she is possessed by a *tacito aestu*,<sup>26</sup> an

<sup>25</sup> 1038-1043; cf. 1071-1075.

<sup>26</sup> 362-383 *passim*:

torretur aestu tacito et inclusus quoque,  
quamvis tegatur, proditur vultu furor;  
erumpit oculis ignis et lassae genae  
lucem recusant, nil idem dubiae placet  
artusque varie iactat incertus dolor  
nunc ut soluto labitur moriens gradu  
et vix labante sustinet collo caput,  
nunc se quieti reddit et, somni immemor,  
noctem querelis ducit;.....  
..... vadit incerto pede,  
iam viribus defecta. non idem vigor,  
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,  
lacrimae cadunt per ora et assiduo genae  
rore irrigantur .....

Twice later we are reminded by the nurse and by Theseus of her fainting body and deathlike pallor, of her dishevelled hair and *lacerae comae*, and tears (731-734; 886-887), but, so far as physical description is concerned, the rest of the play is directed to Hippolytus and Theseus.

inner consuming fire betrays itself from her eyes, and her weary face turns from the light. Her pain twists her in constantly shifting ways; she trails through the palace with faltering steps, like one dying, and barely holds her head erect upon her bending neck. She longs for rest, but struggles through the night with incessant moaning, and has no power for sleep. Her strength is gone, and all the former brightness of her face. Her steps are aimless, and the tender grace of her once lovely form has slipped away. Her eyes, that once shone like the torches of Phoebus, are dulled, and tears fall endlessly from them.

This is portraiture of the utmost detail. Every aspect of the afflicted body and soul, and the lost beauty of once brilliant eyes are limned in full. Yet in Seneca's essays we can find no description exactly parallel to the type of the love-maddened woman, as we can for the angry man, or the man possessed by madness. Miss Marti<sup>27</sup> maintains that the physical description of Phaedra as well as of Medea fits the concrete descriptions of the symptoms of the harmful passion of anger in Seneca's treatise, *De Ira*, and that Phaedra shows all these "conventional symptoms of a mind disordered by passion" in the passage just cited. That may well be so. But surely Seneca's sources might be found also in Sappho's description<sup>28</sup> of her feelings in the presence of a beloved girl, in Euripides, in Apollonius Rhodius, and in Virgil, so far as the physical description of the heroine is concerned.

Actually it is Apollonius who provides from this point of view the closest parallel in the love story of Medea and Jason. Yet here, too, there is a difference, for the epic poet, in the manner of conventional Alexandrian love poetry, is concerned with the development of Medea's passion for Jason, every phase of which he records in terms of momentary expression on the face, whereas Seneca concentrates on the total effect of all phases of this love madness as it finally possesses the queen. Virgil's description of Dido is concerned with the catastrophe which follows on the destruction of her love for Aeneas, and the havoc wrought by his desertion. In the telling of the growth of her passion there is almost no attention directed to momentary facial expression, for Virgil's mind, so far as portraiture is concerned, is primarily on her disillusionment

<sup>27</sup> *Op. cit.* 233.

<sup>28</sup> For Sappho see C. M. Bowra, *Greek Lyric Poetry* (Oxford 1936) 213.

and the *lacrimae inanes* of her anguish.<sup>29</sup> At the same time it is naturally to be expected that Euripides would contribute to Seneca's portrait a direct basis on which the Roman playwright's far more elaborate description is built. The chorus of the Greek play speaks of Phaedra's weak and wasted form. She herself laments wildly to her nurse, while tears stream from her eyes. In shame she turns her eyes to the couch as she slowly recovers her senses from the madness that has possessed her.<sup>30</sup> All of the physical aspect of that inner torture of spirit is summed up briefly in the nurse's comment to the chorus:<sup>31</sup> "She hides from him (Theseus) her sorrow, and vows she is not ill." To which the leader of the chorus replies: "Can he not guess it from her face?" Beyond that implied description of facial expression, however, Euripides does not go in detail. It is clear that the lavishness of Seneca's portrait is not part of Euripides' technique in the delineation of Phaedra,<sup>32</sup> but rather the contribution of an age given to rhetorical *eikonismos*.

Another type of description, not to be so directly connected with Seneca's definition of *charaktêrismos* and *eikonismos*, yet a significant aspect of Seneca's dramatic technique, is to be found in Seneca's portrait of Hector and of Theseus. The description of Hector is achieved by the device of resemblance between Astyanax and Hector, a device which Homer used with singular effect for the portrait of Odysseus in the *Odyssey*, that is, the repeated comparison of Telemachus with his father, and of the father with the son. In the *Troades* of Seneca Astyanax reminds Andromache too much of Hector. In the child she sees his father, the same features, the same bearing, the same commanding expression:<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> See note 6. Her servants support her fainting form, and lay her on the couch exhausted from her aimless wanderings. She is weary of looking at the sky. At night her pain redoubles, and she finds no rest from torment. *Aen.* 4.391-392; 450-455; 529-532.

<sup>30</sup> *Hipp.* 131-140; 170-270 *passim*.

<sup>31</sup> *Hipp.* 279-280 (trans. E. P. Coleridge).

<sup>32</sup> Another figure, possessed with *furor*, not that of love, but of prophecy inspired by Apollo, is Cassandra rapt in religious frenzy (*Ag.* 710-719). The description is in marked contrast to that in the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus, where such physical delineation is entirely absent. Seneca is as detailed here as in his portraits of Medea and Phaedra, and displays the same preoccupation with the outward manifestations of an inner state of mind. Cf. also 586-588; 788-789. The only notable example of sustained portraiture in Aeschylus is to be found in the figure of Clytemnestra. Cf. *Ag.* 789-798; 1426-1427; *Cho.* 668-671; 737-740. With these passages from Aeschylus should be compared Seneca, *Ag.* 128; 237-238; 949-950.

<sup>33</sup> *Tro.* 464-468; cf. Homer, *Il.* 22.401-403 (Hector in the dust) and Seneca, *Tro.* 448-450, when Hector bids Andromache wake from sleep to save Astyanax.

nimum patri similis; hos vultus meus  
 habebat Hector, talis incessu fuit  
 habituque talis sic tulit fortes manus,  
 sic celsus umeris, fronte sic torva minax  
 cervice fusam dissipans iacta comam.

Exactly this same method is employed in the *Hippolytus*. The sight of Hippolytus arouses in the queen the reminiscence of Theseus as a youth when he killed the Minotaur.

It is of some importance to observe in this play that, whereas in the *Medea* our attention is focused entirely in terms of physical description on *ira* in the bearing of Medea, here our interest in this respect is divided. While the nurse describes minutely the physical manifestations of Phaedra's torture of love, it is the queen herself who sees in Hippolytus the features of Theseus as a young man (*genitor in te totus*, 658), the same modesty, the same erect head.<sup>34</sup>

Hippolyte, sic est: Thesei vultus amo  
 .....  
 quis tum ille fulsit! presserant vittae comam  
 et ora flavus tenera tinguebat pudor;  
 inerant lacertis mollibus fortes tori;  
 tuaeque Phoebes vultus aut Phoebi mei  
 tuusque potius . . . sic tulit celsum caput.  
 in te magis refulget incomptus decor;  
 est genitor in te totus et torvae tamen  
 pars aliqua matris miscet ex aequo decus;  
 in ore Graio Scythicus apparet rigor.

The concentration on Hippolytus is deliberate, for our concern with the physical suffering of the queen is thereby enhanced as she sees in her stepson the ideal likeness of her husband, Theseus, a likeness that has awakened in her these desperate pangs of love.

The arrival of a character on the scene calls, as in Sophocles, for a brief account of physical appearance. Megara, in the *Hercules Furens*, watches the approach of Lycus, bearing the sceptre of Creon, whose throne he has usurped:<sup>35</sup>

Sed ecce saevus ac minas vultu gerens  
 et qualis animo est talis incessu venit.

<sup>34</sup> *Id.* 646-660. Cf. Theseus' lament over his son's death, 1269-1270.

<sup>35</sup> 329-330. Sophocles, like Aeschylus and Euripides, almost never presents the iconistic likeness of an individual, but more frequently the momentary appearance. So slight, however, is the use of physical description even of this sort that it never

Andromache in the *Troades*<sup>36</sup> catches sight of Odysseus close at hand, et quidem dubio gradu|vultuque, and knows only too well from his facial expression that he is weaving some crafty scheme. In the *Hercules Oetaeus* the appearance of the distraught Deianira is reflected in the question of the chorus who, at the sight of the woman, driven like a maddened Bacchante, asks:<sup>37</sup> sed quid pavido territa vultu| . . . fertur dubio regina gradu?

Again the messenger's speech will provide frequently momentary descriptions of extraordinary power. In the case of Oedipus the messenger reports the instantaneous physical reaction of the king to his own guilt of murder and incest.<sup>38</sup> Here facial expression is set forth in detail far beyond what is to be found in Sophocles in a characterization of a king, impetuous and uncontrolled, driven on unceasingly by the consciousness of his guilt and impending doom. "As over the fields a Libyan lion rages, with threatening front and shaking his tawny mane; so he, his face fierce with passion, with eyes wild staring (vultus furore torvus atque oculi truces) with groans and deep mutterings, limbs with cold sweat streaming, froths and threatens, and his mighty, deep buried anguish overflows. He, raging in soul, plans some monstrous deed to match his destiny." In the *Troades* the main interest of the play lies in the scene where the death of Polyxena and Astyanax is described. Polyxena, brave and fearless as she goes to her death, displays, we are told by the messenger, a radiant face and her beauty is heightened at the moment of sacrifice, yet she moves with a countenance cast down in

really becomes a feature of his art of characterization. Cf. the innuendo in *Ant.* 526-530; 690-691; *OT* 447-448; 528-529; 532-534. One fairly common use made by Sophocles of some aspect of the physique is the brief description given of a new arrival (also found in Aeschylus, e.g. *Ag.* 638-640), who brings news either of himself or others. Cf. *OT* 80-81; *OC* 319-321; *Trach.* 869-870. In two plays, the *Oedipus Coloneus* and the *Philoctetes*, blindness and lameness, physical afflictions indissolubly bound up with the actual plot, are the aspects of the physique emphasized in the heroes concerned to the exclusion of all other physical qualities or facial expression, except such as may be necessarily supplementary to the one feature that is dominant, e.g. *OC* 1; 21; 73; 146-148; 552-553; 555-556; 576-578; 1099-1101; 1256-1261; 1378-1379; 1639-1640 (all of the first type). One noteworthy description, where the device is exactly that of Homer in describing Odysseus, occurs in *OT* 742-743, when Jocasta ironically likens in detail the appearance of Laius to that of Oedipus.

<sup>36</sup> 522-523. Cf. Hecuba in the same play, watching the approach of Pyrrhus, 999-1000.

<sup>37</sup> 700-702. Cf. Deianira observing her son Hyllus "hurrying with face of fear," 740-741, and *Octavia*, 436-437 (arrival of Nero).

<sup>38</sup> *Oed.* 919-926 (trans. Miller). Oedipus continues, 957-961. Cf. Atreus at altar, *Thyestes* 706.

modesty (deiectos gerit|vultus pudore), though "the dying splendour of her beauty shines beyond its wont" (fulgent genae| . . . splendet extremus decor, 1137-1139).

Finally the end of the *Hercules Oetaeus* presents a picture of the physical appearance of the tortured Hercules at the moment of death, which in its character of exaltation is comparable in mood to that of Oedipus at the conclusion of Sophocles' *Oedipus Coloneus*. His suffering, so intense that control is beyond endurance, gives way to cries to the chorus as he is borne to Oeta:<sup>39</sup> "My face, before unmoved (invictus olim vultus), and never wont to express its woes in tears, at last (oh shame!) has learned to weep." His comment on his own countenance continues:

durior saxo horrido  
et chalybe vultus et vaga Symplegade  
rictus meos infregit et lacrimas expulit (1272-1274).

Yet, when Philoctetes returns from Oeta, bearing on his shoulders the bow and arrows of Hercules, the chorus bids him tell with what countenance the hero bore his death. His answer, actually in substance a messenger's speech, conveys the happiness of apotheosis finally gained:<sup>40</sup> "His gaze was of one who seeks the stars, not fires of earth" (vultus petentis astra, non ignes erat). The climax<sup>41</sup> of the play, death by fire, and ultimate purification, finds expression in absolute calmness of face and majesty and triumph, an emphasis in description completely absent from Sophocles' *Trachiniae*:<sup>42</sup> "But Hercules midst roaring flames upstarting, . . . gazed dauntless round" (intrepidum tuens). The crowd is speechless,<sup>43</sup> tam placida frons est, tanta maiestas viro. The play offers, Miss Marti believes, an interpretation in the form of drama of the most profound Stoic convictions, and is, as it were, an epitome of the Stoics' creed. It is furthermore marked, I should maintain, at its climax by a remarkable richness in the use of momentary facial expression introduced to intensify the glorious triumph of man, the *vir bonus*, over the struggles of life and death.

It is not without significance, perhaps, that while Seneca presents thus the dauntless courage of the Stoic hero Hercules at the

<sup>39</sup> 1266-1267 (trans. Miller).

<sup>40</sup> 1645-1647 (trans. Miller). Cf. 1684-1685. See also description of Philoctetes' face (*laeto venit ecce vultu*, as he returns from Oeta, 1603-1604).

<sup>41</sup> See Marti, *op. cit.* 241-245.

<sup>42</sup> 1736-1737 (trans. Miller).

<sup>43</sup> 1746. Cf. 1753-1755.

moment of death in terms of his appearance, he likewise comments in his definition of *charaktêrismos* and *eikonismos* on very similar courage in the great Republican Stoic Cato, inter fragores bellorum civilium impavidus, who is compared, as we have seen,<sup>44</sup> in physique and nature to Virgil's high bred horse.

It becomes clear, I think, that Seneca adapts his characterizations and portraits from earlier sources to meet the interests of his own philosophy and of his own day. The strong urge of his age to the study of rhetoric, and to the devices used by the rhetoricians, left an indelible mark on all his literary work. Extensive delineation of bodily or facial expression, permanent or momentary, achieved a strong emotional effect in such rhetorical writing, and was closely linked to the increasing interest, apparent in Stoic thought, in the physiognomical analysis of the relation of temperament to outward appearance, an interest observable in the first century, which was to increase decidedly in the second century<sup>45</sup> and gradually to leave a definite imprint on Roman literature as a whole.

#### APPENDIX

This appendix contains noteworthy examples of the descriptions of the first and second type found in the Greek and Roman tragedians. For the sake of convenience the *Octavia* is included under Seneca's dramas.

Descriptions of the FIRST TYPE, showing general characterization of an individual:

Aesch. *Pers.* 323-324; *Sept.* 488.

Soph. *El.* 1177; *OC* 1256-1261; *OT* 740-743.

Eur. *Andr.* 196-198; *Hel.* 160-161; 263-264; 304-305; 577; *Med.* 1071-1072; *Or.* 918; *Supp.* 887-889.

Sen. *HF* 626-627; *Med.* 75-76; 82-83; *OT* 775-776; *Oct.* 554-555.

Descriptions of the SECOND TYPE, showing characterization of the permanent appearance of an individual:

Aesch. *Ag.* 737-742.

Soph. *El.* 663-664; 684-685; *OC* 285-286; 555-556.

Eur. *Andr.* 330-332; *El.* 1062-1064; *Hec.* 379-381; *Med.* 516-519; *Tro.* 835-837.

Sen. *HF* 472-475; 720-727; 764-767; *HO* 391-395; *Hipp.* 646-660; 795-808.

<sup>44</sup> See p. 172, and Misener, *op. cit.* 98. Surely his comment on Cato in this passage links the two heroes together: "It will be helpful not only to state what is the usual quality of good men (*boni viri*) and to outline their figures and lineaments (*formamque eorum et lineamenta*), but also to relate and set forth what men there have been of this kind" (*Ep.* 95.72. Trans. Basore). Compare also in *Ep.* 30.3 the manner in which Seneca describes how Aufidius Bassus, the Epicurean Roman historian, faces death with the boon of philosophy: Hoc facit Bassus noster et eo animo vultuque finem suum spectat, quo alienum spectare nimis securi putares.

<sup>45</sup> E. C. Evans, "The Study of Physiognomy in the Second Century A.D.," *TAPA* 72 (1941) 96-108.

Descriptions of the SECOND TYPE, showing characterization of the momentary appearance of an individual:

- Aesch. *Ag.* 239-241; 270-271; 418-419; 638-640; 788-798; 1427-1428; *Cho.* 96-99; 668-671; 736-740; *Pers.* 81-82; *PV* 358; *Sept.* 536-537; 622-623; *Supp.* 197-199; 1004-1005.
- Soph. *Aj.* 462-465; 1008-1011; *Ant.* 441-442; 526-530; 690-691; 795-796; 801-805; 829-831; 1231-1232; *EL.* 804-807; 1184; 1230-1231; 1285-1287; 1296-1297; 1309-1310; *OC* 244-245; 319-321; 1249-1251; 1709-1710; *OT* 80-81; 447-448; 528-529; 532-535; 1303-1304; 1371-1372; 1384-1385; *Phil.* 215-216; 225-226; 257-259; 278; 367-368; 701-702; 815; 821-822; 865-866; 934-935; *Trach.* 58; 795-797; 869-870.
- Eur. *Alc.* 173-174; 183-184; 205-207; 399-400; 597-600; 763-764; 773-778; 800-801; *Andr.* 130-132; 532-534; 545-546; 629-631; 744-746; 764-767; 826-827; 880-881; 1077-1078; *EL.* 241; 503; 558-559; 830; 947-949; 1074-1079; 1399; *Bacch.* 233-236; 453-456; 606-607; 692-693; 1122-1123; 1165-1167; *Cyc.* 73-74; 210-211; 499-502; *HF* 98-99; 130-132; 449-450; 867-870; 931-935; 990-992; 1199-1201; 1287-1288; *Hec.* 62-66; 342-344; 441-443; 499-500; 568-570; 807-808; 968-972; 1049-1050; *Hel.* 456; 544-545; 1419; 1537-1540; 1570-1572; *Heracl.* 381-382; 633; 684; *Hipp.* 170-175; 203-204; 245-246; 274; 279-280; 289-290; 852-855; 946-947; 1151-1152; *IA* 187-188; 454-455; 581-585; 635-637; 643-644; 648; 681-684; 821-822; 851-852; 993-994; 1122-1123; 1127-1128; 1238-1239; 1417-1418; 1451; 1549-1550; 1577; 1581; *IT* 76; 264-266; 268-269; 832-833; *Ion* 237-240; 582-584; 621-623; 731-732; 925-926; 1261-1263; 1437-1438; *Med.* 24-32; 92-93; 131-136; 187-189; 271-273; 689; 860-862; 903-907; 1006-1007; 1012; 1038-1042; 1118-1120; 1146-1149; 1160-1170; 1197-1199; *Or.* 225-226; 253-254; 387; 389; 456-458; 632-633; 725-726; 893-894; 957-958; 1204-1206; 1261-1266; 1317-1320; 1456-1459; 1504-1505; *Phoen.* 127-128; 145-147; 301-303; 363-364; 452-453; 961; 1307-1309; 1332-1334; 1364; 1370-1371; 1440-1441; 1486-1489; *Rhes.* 710-714; 814-815; *Supp.* 21-22; 95-96; *Tro.* 315-316; 351-352; 654-655; 772-773; 891-893; 987-988; 1022-1024.
- Sen. *Ag.* 49-50; 128; 237-238; 408-409; 586-588; 710-719; 772-774; 788-789; 922-923; 949-950; *HF* 202-205; 216-219; 329-331; 640-642; 953-955; 1022-1023; 1042-1044; 1173-1175; 1178-1179; 1228-1229; *HO* 165-170; 228-230; 240-241; 250-253; 482-483; 700-702; 740-741; 796-798; 808; 833-835; 985-986; 1265-1268; 1272-1274; 1338-1340; 1347-1348; 1603-1604; 1607-1608; 1645-1647; 1684-1685; 1693-1694; 1722-1724; 1736-1737; 1745-1746; 1753-1755; *Hipp.* 360-382; 431-433; 586-587; 731-734; 829-830; 886-887; 915-919; 989-990; 1064-1065; 1168-1169; 1262-1263; 1269-1270; *Med.* 93-94; 97-98; 186-187; 380-381; 385-389; 445-446; 675-676; 738-739; 853-865; 937-939; 1020-1021; *OT* 180-190; 202; 288-290; 480-481; 509-510; 554-555; 567-568; 647-648; 654-657; 819-821; 840-842; 849; 919-924; 952-970; 1003-1007; *Phoen.* 29-30; 473-474; *Thyestes* 330-331; 416; 421-427; 505-507; 705-706; 719; 898-900; 903-906; 935-936; *Tro.* 448-450; 457-459; 464-468; 522-523; 615-617; 631; 647-648; 897; 999-1000; 1024-1025; 1088-1090; 1112-1113; 1137-1138; 1152; *Octavia* 21-22; 73-75; 108-112; 172-173; 436-437; 690-692; 698-700; 703-706; 722-723; 778-779; 840-842.