

SENECA'S *OEDIPUS*: THE DRAMA IN THE WORD

DONALD J. MASTRONARDE

"In the plays of Seneca, the drama is all in the word. . . ." So writes T. S. Eliot in an often-quoted essay on Senecan tragedy.¹ The present study is intended to demonstrate one possible application of this phrase through an analysis of selected words and motifs which, by their repetition and interplay, by their associated moods and emotions, unify and give meaning to Seneca's *Oedipus*. Prime attention will be given to the verbal aspect of the composition, for in general Seneca himself, a highly self-conscious stylist in prose and poetry, seems to have laid prime emphasis just there, and only secondarily attended to more conventional considerations of dramatic art. Indeed, one might argue that a fuller understanding of Seneca's peculiar qualities as a Latin poet is to be attained by ignoring the usual questions (as to sources, dramatic unity, number of acts, characterization, moral didacticism or Stoic influence, stage-drama or recitation-drama, etc.) and instead treating his works merely as poems—not portrayals of action, but verbal paintings of almost static situations well known to the reader, but depicted in ever fuller detail as the work progresses.²

¹ "Seneca in Elizabethan Translation" (1927), reprinted in *Essays on Elizabethan Drama* (New York 1956) 3 ff. The sentence quoted appears on pp. 6-7.

² Older bibliography may be found in L. Hermann, *Le théâtre de Sénèque* (Paris 1924) 5-30, and in the useful report for 1922-55 by M. Coffey, *Lustrum* 2 (1957) 113-86. For a selection of more recent works, cf. the articles listed later in this note, to which may be added W. H. Owen, "Commonplace and Dramatic Symbol in Seneca's Tragedies," *TAPA* 99 (1968) 291-313 (unfortunately not available to me in time to be used in this study), with some further references in Owen's notes, 1-3. My own approach to Seneca via verbal analysis owes much to N. T. Pratt, Jr., *Dramatic Suspense in Seneca and his Greek Precursors* (Princeton 1939) (henceforth cited as Pratt, *Dram. Susp.*) and "Major Systems of Figurative Language in Senecan Melodrama," *TAPA* 94 (1963) 199-234 (henceforth, Pratt, "Major Systems"); and to a series of articles by D. Henry and B. Walker in *CP* 58 (1963) 1-10; 60 (1965) 11-22; 62 (1967) 169-81, and in *G & R* 13 (1966) 223-39. The metaphor of painting is expounded in C. J. Herington, "Senecan Tragedy," *Arion* 5 (1966) 422-71, esp. 436, 442-43; it is a development (like so much of

Seneca's prologues are normally of great importance for setting forth both the mood of the poem and the key-words associated with it,³ and the *Oedipus* is no exception. Just as in the *Phaedra*, the hunt prologue lays before the reader the verbal and emotional ingredients of Hippolytus' idyllic vision of primitive, natural, innocent life (hills, woods, water, wind, and the chase),⁴ or as in the *Troades*, Hecuba's monologue embodies the grief, fiery destruction, and unnatural cruelty featured throughout the play, so in the *Oedipus* Seneca gives not only a physical description of plague-stricken Thebes, but a mental-emotional description of Oedipus (1-81). Guilt and crime are foremost in his mind, and he already senses that he is to blame for the horrors of the plague—*fecimus caelum nocens* (36). The first five lines evoke an imaginary world consonant with his state of mind and so introduce several key-words:⁵

Iam nocte Titan dubius expulsa redit	1
et nube maestum squalida exoritur iubar,	
lumenque flamma triste luctifica gerens	
prospiciet avida peste solatas domos,	
stragemque quam nox fecit ostendet dies.	5

modern Senecan interpretation) of an idea in the valuable essay of O. Regenbogen, "Schmerz und Tod in den Tragödien Senecas," *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg* 7 (1927-28) 167-218, esp. 208. The *Index verborum* of Oldfather, Pease, and Canter (*Univ. of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature* 4 (1918) 63-332) is also essential.

The *Oedipus* as a whole has not received a separate study in English. C. W. Mendell, *Our Seneca* (New Haven 1941), features it to some extent, but with what seems to me the wrong emphasis—e.g., his insistent comparison with Sophocles and attempt to analyze conventional matters of technique, motivation, etc. in his Chapter I, despite his admission that "Seneca was not much interested in the niceties of his technique" (p. 12). More sympathetic are G. Müller, "Senecas Oedipus als Drama," *Hermes* 81 (1953) 447-64 (henceforth cited as Müller) and E. Paratore, "La poesia nell'Oedipus di Seneca," *GLF* 9 (1956) 97-132 (henceforth, Paratore). I have found many details of interpretation resulting from my method of verbal analysis confirmed in their work, particularly in Paratore, 114-32; but I have not noted every point where our views agree or diverge.

I am indebted to Prof. Gilbert Lawall for reading a draft of this paper and making several fruitful suggestions.

³ Among others, Pratt, *Dram. Susp.*, and K. Anliker, *Prologe und Akteinteilung in Senecas Tragödien* (*Noctes Romanae* 9, [Bern 1960]), have devoted special attention to the prologues.

⁴ Cf. Henry/Walker, "Phantasmagoria and Idyll: An Element of Seneca's *Phaedra*," *G & R* 13 (1966) 223-39.

⁵ The text used is (that of) G. C. Giardina, *L. Annaei Senecae Tragoediae* (*Univ. degli Studi di Bologna, facoltà di lettere e filosofia; Studi pubb. dall'istituto di filologia classica* 20, 1966). It should be noted that Giardina's line-numbers occasionally differ from those of older texts and of the *Index verborum*.

The profusion of adjectives of like meaning is characteristic; the cluster of *dubius*, *maestum*, *squalida*, *triste* requires special consideration.

First, the doubt in *Titan dubius* is a projection of Oedipus' doubt over the cause of the plague and over his own god-ordained guilt (the two considerations belong together in his thoughts). In a characteristic way Seneca has shifted the Sophoclean portrayal of a man quickly dissatisfied with ignorance and uncertainty to fit his own guilt-ridden creation. Seneca's Jocasta tries to give Oedipus encouragement on just this point:

regium hoc ipsum reor:	82
adversa capere, quoque sit <i>dubius</i> magis	
status et cadentis imperi moles labet,	
hoc stare certo pressius fortem gradu.	85

The king's attitude toward doubt is evident again later, when he angrily wishes to circumvent it by accepting a hasty conclusion and eliminating the object of doubt:

CR. Quid si innocens sum? OED. <i>Dubia</i> pro certis solent	699
timere reges. CR. Qui pavet vanos metus,	
veros meretur. OED. Quisquis in culpa fuit,	
dimissus odit omne quod <i>dubium</i> putat.	702

These lines, with their repartee of *sententiae*, are not primarily intended to provide clues to the character of a full-bodied dramatic *persona* Oedipus, as such dialogue might do in some Greek tragedies. Rather, they contribute more importantly by revealing the emotional attitude of a less life-like *persona*,⁶ the emotional attitude which pervades the play. *Titan dubius* in the opening line, therefore, implies both a physical obscurity and, in relation to Oedipus, an emotional condition. As the embodiment of Phoebus, moreover, the sun indicates by its dubiety the uncertainty of the oracular god consulted in the play; this sense is assured by the repetitions of the word applied to the Delphic response:

CR. Responsa <i>dubia</i> sorte perplexa iacent.	212
OED. <i>Dubiam</i> salutem qui dat afflictis negat.	
CR. Ambage flexa Delphico mos est deo	
arcana tegere. OED. Fare, sit <i>dubium</i> licet.	215

⁶ Less life-like because Seneca's interests and intentions lay elsewhere, not necessarily through lack of skill or of taste.

Again, uncertainty in the god is inferred by Tiresias (328–30) when Manto reports confusing signs for his interpretations; indeed, the adjective *dubius* appears again only to describe the slaughtered bull in the *extispicium* (340–44):

TIR. Quid fari queam	328
inter tumultus mentis attonitae vagus?	
quidnam loquar? sunt dira, sed in alto mala	330
TIR. Unone terram vulnere afflicti petunt?	340
MAN. Iuvenca ferro semet imposito induit	
et vulnere uno cecidit, at taurus duos	
perpressus ictus huc et huc <i>dubius</i> ruit	
animamque fessus vix reluctantem exprimit.	344

In the allegory of the *extispicium*, the bull is to be identified with Oedipus (the two blows and struggle prefiguring his self-blinding and drawn-out life),⁷ and thus the use of *dubius* in 343 is entirely apt, both to Oedipus and to the divination. The adjective, first introduced in verse 1, occurs in a set of coherent repetitions which contribute to the verbal and emotional texture of the play.

The other three adjectives, *maestum*, *squalida*, and *triste*, which first appear with *dubius*, similarly recur in significant ways. The same image and mood are in Seneca's mind in *maestum* . . . *iubar* and *lumen triste*, but the terms are naturally varied in a passage which exhibits a rhetorical fulness or effusion frequent in Senecan description. In similar conditions of effusive description with variation, the same pair is repeated:

longus ad manes properatur ordo	127
agminis <i>maesti</i> , seriesque <i>tristis</i>	
haeret et turbae tumulos petenti	
non satis septem patuere portae.	130

Such a recurrence shows not only the workings of a rhetorical vocabulary, but a uniformity of mood—a gloomy feeling which connects the two passages. In like manner, the pair of *squalida* and *maestrum* in

⁷ Pratt, *Dram. Susp.*, 93 ff., gives a full account of the allegory in the whole scene, many details of which were first commented upon by Thomas Farnaby in the 17th century. On the importance of such identifications with animals, cf. pp. 310–12 below.

verse 2 is recalled when Tiresias, interpreter of Phoebus (cf. *Titan dubius*) and interlocutor with the dead (cf. *agminis maesti*), is described:

ipse funesto integit	551
vates amictu corpus et frondem quatit.	
lugubris imos palla perfundit pedes,	
<i>squalente</i> cultu <i>maestus</i> ingreditur senex,	
mortifera canam taxus adstringit comam	555

The description is again effusive, as *funesto*, *lugubris*, and *mortifera* compound the effect of *squalente* and *maestus*. And the gloom of *maestus* returns in the echoes of the *necromantia* (*ter valles cavae sonuere maestum*, 569 f.) and in the visage of the servant who reports Oedipus' self-blinding (912). Squalor is again emphasized in the appearance of Laius (*paedore foedo squalidam obtentus comam*, 625). The whole scene of the *necromantia* is linked with the prologue by these and other evocative words: e.g., *tristis* in 3, 45, and 545.⁸ Likewise in Laius' speech, *luctificus Auster* (632) picks up the idea of heat, dryness, and plague introduced in *flamma . . . luctifica* (4) and elaborated in 37-43 and 49-51. These words of gloom and sorrow draw together sections of the play and aspects of its imaginary world—Oedipus' state of mind, the condition of the heavens, the dead, the necromancer and his contact Laius.

Yet another link between Oedipus and the plague and death results from the consistent application of the adjective *avidus* to the horribly insistent grabbing of death and of its agent, the plague:

prospiciet <i>avida</i> peste solatas domos	4
Mors atra <i>avidos</i> oris hiatus	164
pandit et omnes explicat alas	165
vultu sidereo discute nubila	410
et tristes Erebi minas	
<i>avidumque</i> fatum	411bis
<i>avidumque</i> populi Pestis Ogygii malum	589

This association of the word with the grasping force of death has appropriate ramifications in its final use near the end of the play. Oedipus gives himself a strange death-sentence in *morere, sed citra patrem* (951). Its fulfillment is described by the messenger; *avidus*, because of the other uses behind it, emphasizes Oedipus' relation to the

⁸ For the description of the forest in 530-47, see pp. 313-14 below.

plague and the aspect of death in this execution which leaves the criminal alive:

scrutatur *avidus* manibus uncis lumina, 965
radice ab ima funditus vulsos simul
evolvit orbes. 967

One of the most conspicuous systems of recurring imagery in most Senecan dramas is that of fire-words,⁹ and the *Oedipus* makes full use of this group of words. The scorching fire of the sun (Phoebus' active participation, as it were, in the punishment of Thebes) is first mentioned in verse 3. This image is picked up again in 37-40, embracing both the fever of disease (*anhela flammis corda*), and the heat of the heavens (*ignes auget aestiferi canis Titan*): then spreading in 41-3 to the resulting dryness of the earth. *Vapor* (47) continues the heat-group. The sterile grain of 49-51 re-emphasizes dryness (*arente culmo sterilis*). With a characteristic flourish, Seneca suggests an equation of natural and human phenomena as people's eyes, like the rivers, are "dried out" (*siccavit*, 58) and human tears, along with crops and animals, also "die" (*periere lacrimae*, 59). At the same time, the fire-motif shifts to associations with the funeral pyre (55, 59-68). The several connotations of the fire- and dryness-words¹⁰ form a chain, from the pestilential heavens to the suffering humans and scorched earth, to the funeral pyres. Other occurrences of words in this group extend the complex of imagery and ultimately bring it back to *Oedipus*.

In all, there are 24 instances of the principal fire-words, *ignis* (*igneus*) and *flamma* (*flammeus*), to which may be added 12 instances of more specialized words (*ardere*, *cremare*, *fax*, *rogus*). Their significance for the poem may best be seen by grouping them according to their associations. For instance, one set may refer to the fire of the sun or stars: 3, 39, 122 (cf. 505, of the moon). Three instances convey the sense of the plague's fever—as suggested above, there is a metaphorical transfer from the heavens to the bodies of the victims: 38, 185, 187. From there the transfer continues to the funeral pyre, with reinforce-

⁹ Cf. Pratt, "Major Systems."

¹⁰ The three remaining uses of *siccus* and *areo* are consistent with the prologue, again referring to the noxious dryness of the plague (*perdidit pestem latebrosa serpens: / aret et sicco moritur veneno*, 152-53; *satiata tellus halitu sicco nocet*, 633). On the counter-motifs of moisture, etc. see pages 305-306 below.

ment by several minor fire-words: 60, 64, 65; 67 (*ardere*); 55, 64 (*cremare*); 61, 68, 550, 874 (*rogus*); 55 (*fax*). Furthermore, as a destructive force, fire is not only a property of the plague and pyre, but also an instrument of punishment, both divine and human:

Rupere Erebi claustra profundi	160
turba sororum <i>face</i> Tartarea	161
telum deposuit Iuppiter <i>igneum</i>	501
oditque Baccho veniente fulmen	502

OED. Quid quaeris ultra? fata iam accedunt prope. 860
 quis fuerit infans edoce. PHOR. Prohibet fides.

OED. Huc aliquis *ignem!* *flamma* iam excutiet fidem. 862

The plague itself is, in a sense, a punishment by fire. Thus it is appropriate that when Oedipus recognizes his guilt, he calls for, among other methods, punishment by fire, and the punitive fire is purposely related to the fire of the pyre:

me petat ferro parens,	872
me gnatus, in me coniuges arment manus	
fratresque, et aeger populus ereptos <i>rogis</i>	
iaculetur <i>ignes</i> .	875

As suggested above, the condition of the heavens seems to be a projection of Oedipus' state of mind. Thus the fire of the sun somehow derives from Oedipus, and the fire-imagery as a whole implies that all types of fire—celestial, of the plague and pyre, punitive—are one, all manifestations of the universe's feeling for Oedipus. Indeed, as the *nuntius* describes the scene, the punitive fire called for in 875 is finally brought back to the beginning of the cycle and internalized in Oedipus—the imagery of his fury brings the fulfillment of his call:

dixit atque ira furit:	957
<i>ardent</i> minaces <i>igne</i> truculento genae	958

Yet the extent of the fire-imagery is wider still. Allusion is made to the torch of marriage with regard to Jocasta and Merope (21, 272), and the marriage-connotation is linked with the funeral-connotation by the use of *fax* in juxtaposition with *thalamos* in 55:¹¹

¹¹ A play upon these two senses of *fax* is fairly common and often more explicit: e.g. Prop. 4.3.13-14, 4.11.45-46; Ovid Ep. 2.120, 6.42, 11.101-4, 20.172, Met. 6.430; Sen. Contr. 6.6.1.

iuvenesque senibus iungit et gnatis patres	54
funesta pestis, una fax thalamos cremat	55

Finally, there is a set of fire-words related to sacrifice in the *extispicium* (307, 309, 314, 321, 383) and *necromantia* (551, 557, 558), linking those important scenes (in fact, essential to Seneca's play) to the rest of the fire-image complex. The sacrificial flames are also explicitly linked to the funeral pyres (*rapti rogis . . . ignes*, 550–51; cf. 874–75). More important, these fires are involved in the ascertaining of Phoebus' will; like *Titan dubius* and Oedipus' own doubt, the flames also prove uncertain (309–20, esp. *incertus viae*, 312, and *dubites*, 318). Finally, the fire in the *extispicium* has allegorical significance, alluding to the rise and fall of Oedipus (308), to his confused kinship (314–20), to the discord in his family, especially between his sons (321–23), and to his blindness (320; 325–27).¹² The sacrificial fire, like all other types, has a meaningful connection with the Oedipus-situation. As a whole, the group of fire-words is among the most important systems in Seneca's *Oedipus*. Their pervading presence and their transmutations from one association to another draw together elements of the play and suggest a unity of all types of fire as manifestations of one peculiar situation. In their interplay the words almost gain a life of their own and enact their own drama of connotations—what might be termed “the drama in the word.”

Words of crime form another system with a consistent range of applications unifying the play as poetry. The crimes of Oedipus are the slaying of his father and his marriage with his mother, and the reference in the word *scelus* in the play is primarily to these acts and no others (in 11 of 16 uses).¹³ Of the five instances not applying specifically to these acts, two gain special irony in that in one case Oedipus does not realize that the *scelus* is his (247), while in the other he vainly asserts his innocence (791). Later, when Oedipus calls Mt. Cithaeron *scelerum capax* (930), he alludes to his own criminal existence and

¹² Cf. Pratt, *Dram. Susp.*, 93 ff.; again many details go back to Farnaby's notes. Of the changing colors (314–20), Pratt says only that they are “ominous.” I suggest a more precise reference because of the allegorical context and the imagery of doubt and confusion (note the ambiguity of brightness and beauty giving way to darkness and blood, and the language itself—*implicat*, *varios*, *dubites*, *oberravit*).

¹³ In 17, 35, 629, 631, 765, 879, 916, 937, 941, 1001, 1045.

also makes an important reference to the hereditary crimes of the Theban dynasty.¹⁴ In the two remaining instances of *scelus*, Jocasta uses the word to accept her share of the guilt in the Oedipus-situation (1024, 1030). Thus the noun has a more particular sense than simply "crime," and the shifting realization or ignorance of that particularity comprises the "dramatic" value of the word. Two other nouns of crime, *nefas* and *crimen*, reinforce this effect: of nine uses, four apply to Oedipus' crimes, two more to the Theban line's heritage, and one to the horrible results of the *extispicium*, which have symbolic significance for Oedipus.¹⁵

Adjectives related to the crime-motif also create unifying connections. In the prologue the cluster *infandus*, *dirus*, *incestus*, *impius* (together with the nouns *scelus* and *nefas*) is contained in seven lines (15-21). The two acts mentioned by the oracle are to Oedipus *infanda* (15), and the adjective is naturally transferred to Oedipus himself when the truth is known:

congerite, cives, saxa in <i>infandum</i> caput	871
praedicta postquam fata et <i>infandum</i> genus	915
deprendit ac se <i>scelere</i> convictum Oedipus	
damnavit ipse	917

The two parts of the *infanda* are also described by the related *nefandus*—the father's side when the murder of Laius is termed *nefandum facinus* (274) by an Oedipus as yet ignorant of the word's appropriateness; and the mother's side when Laius accuses his son (*nefandos occupat thalamos patris*, 635). Later the word is used of Oedipus and Jocasta in 1015: *nefandos dividat vastum mare*. Jocasta's acceptance of guilt in her last speech is marked by repetition not only of *scelus*, but of *nefandus* (1031) and *incestus* (1026).

It is not without point, furthermore, that Seneca uses *nefandus* and

¹⁴ Actaeon and Pentheus died on Cithaeron, while Oedipus was exposed and saved there: cf. 435 ff., 626 ff., 709 ff., 930 ff., 1005-7. The importance of the Theban past is discussed below, pp. 309-12.

¹⁵ Oedipus: 18, 661, 875, 1023, Theban heritage: 444, 748; sacrifice: 373. Of the other two uses, *abest pavoris crimen* in 87 may be ironic if we understand it as "The charge of fear at least does not apply, though others do;" and *nam te . . . nefas invisere umbras* in 398 f. may also imply the specific *nefas* of Oedipus facing his murdered father (cf. his horror at facing Jocasta in 1012-23 and Laius' own reluctance to show himself in 619-23).

infandus elsewhere in the play only in reference to the Sphinx, whose connection with the present difficulties is affirmed by Oedipus (106–9) and confirmed by the key-words applied to the monster:

<i>cruentos vatis infandae tuli</i>	93
<i>rictus et albens ossibus sparsis solum</i>	94
<i>nodosa sortis verba et implexos dolos</i>	101
<i>ac triste carmen alitis solvi ferae</i>	102
<i>ille, ille dirus callidi monstri cinis</i>	106
<i>in nos rebellat</i>	107
OED. <i>Pium prohibuit ullus officium metus?</i>	245
CR. <i>Sphinx et nefandi carminis tristes minae.</i>	246

Not only *infandus*, *nefandus*, and *tristis* (cf. esp. *tristes Erebi minas*, 411), but also *cruentus* and *dirus* provide connections with Oedipus and his ills:

<i>thalamos parentis Phoebus et diros toros</i>	20
<i>gnato minatur impia incestos face</i>	21
<i>quidnam loquar? sunt dira, sed in alto mala</i>	330
<i>gemu it et dirum fremens</i>	961
<i>manus in ora torsit</i>	962
<i>sed rex cruentus . . .</i>	634
<i>te, te cruenta sceptrā qui dextra geris</i>	642

As will be shown below, other words, especially imagery of twisted and tangled confusion, contribute even more to the sharing of epithets—the uniform evocations of mood—relating to Oedipus and the Sphinx. As with the heavens, the divination-scene, the descriptions of Laius and Tiresias, there is a metaphorical unity of the Sphinx with Oedipus: the monster is simply another manifestation of Oedipus' peculiar *fatum*, of his personality as Seneca reveals it. It is thus with full force that Laius calls the monster "Oedipus' own" in 641: *magisque monstrum Sphinge perplexum sua*.

The impiety and shame of Oedipus' crimes also have ramifications in the verbal texture of the play. The adjectives *impius* and *incestus* are first placed side by side in 21; the former recurs in 935 of Oedipus, the latter in 1026 of Jocasta. The same pair appears in Laius' curse,

where the impiety extends to include the future strife of Eteocles and Polyneices (645-46). *Impius* links the past impiety of mythic history (Agave and Pentheus, 436; the Spartae, 731)¹⁶ with the impiety of modern Thebes—the children of Oedipus and Jocasta:

egitque in ortus semet et matri <i>impios</i>	638
fetus regessit, quique vix mos est feris,	
fratres sibi ipse genuit	640

Oedipus is thoroughly obsessed with the threat of the oracle, and so the same motif appears in his curse upon the slayer of Laius in 260: *thalamis pudendis doleat et prole impia*. In this curse *pudendis* as well is related to the shame-motif, introduced in 19 (*eloqui fatum pudet*) and used by Tiresias in interpreting the confused signs (*pudet deos nescio quid*, 334). Laius, through his participation in the whole affair, properly bears a *pudibundum caput* (619 f.); Jocasta taunts her husband-son with *gnatum pudet?* (1010). Thus the shame spreads from Oedipus and reaches Laius and the gods, while Oedipus' impiety is reflected in past and future, embracing the earth itself (*feta tellus impio partu*, 731).

Analyzed in this way, the play emerges more and more as a study of a sick situation which centers around and derives from a sick individual. The words are dramatic vehicles of the basically uniform moods of gloom, horror, and abnormality. As often in Senecan plays, the keynote of many features of the *Oedipus* is *natura versa est* (371): the phrase applies specifically to the aberrant physiology of the sacrificial victim, but the passage is allegorical¹⁷ and thus closely associated with the whole complex of abnormal manifestations (the plague, the Sphinx, *Titan dubius*, etc.), the center of which is Oedipus.

Several other words, images, and moods associated with the central figure need to be discussed. Oedipus' sense of not belonging is first reflected in the use of *profugus* and *exul* in the prologue, where he vainly claims there was freedom and no guilt in his departure from

¹⁶ More on the Theban heritage, pp. 309-12 below.

¹⁷ The use of *utero* in 371 points to an allusion to Jocasta, who bore not only the unnatural children of Oedipus, but also Oedipus, himself an abnormal monster of sorts. Note the word's repetition in 637 (*utero rursus infausto gravis*) and 1039 (*uterum capacem, qui virum et gnatos tulit*). Even in 462 it is related to the dominant association, for there again an unnatural physiological condition is involved (cf. p. 308 below).

Corinth (13, 23). His true attitude is apparent at the close of the prologue, where he calls himself *hospes* and thinks of renewed exile, ironically an exile back to Corinth:

linque lacrimas, funera, 78
 tabifica caeli vitia quae tecum invehis
 infaustus *hospes*, *profuge* iamdudum ocius—
 vel ad parentes 81

The combination *profugus* . . . *hospes* recurs in the oracle in 234 and again in Oedipus' curse (*non hospitalis exulem tellus ferat*, 259), and a few lines later, *per regna iuro quaeque nunc hospes gero*, 264). Laius' imprecation contains *regem* . . . *agite exulem* (647–48), where *exulem* may be legitimately interpreted both as an adjective with *regem* and as a predicate accusative. The hereditary link with Cadmus is suggested by the same guest-motif in 713 (*Sidonio* . . . *hospiti*). Finally, at the close of the play, Oedipus goes into exile again (*profuge*, 1051; *fugio*, 1053). As with so many other motifs,¹⁸ the exile-guest theme has come full circle in the closing speech, as Oedipus really does leave his native land.

Oedipus is naturally very concerned about his kinship ties because of the threat of the oracle. His fear is evident in the prologue and gives special force to the conclusion *profuge—vel ad parentes*. Thereafter, words like *parens* and *pater* unavoidably awaken special emotion because of the ever-present undertones of crime and horror intimated by the oracle.¹⁹ With this horror in mind, for instance, Oedipus frames the curse upon Laius' murderer (*hic et parentem dextera perimat sua*, 261). The collocation of *parens* and *perimere* here recalls the original statement of the oracle in the prologue. The verb recurs, consistently related to important aspects of Oedipus' situation—the Sphinx, Laius, and Jocasta:

¹⁸ E.g., the *mortifera* . . . *vitia* which Oedipus brought with him (cf. prologue, esp. 79), the monsters loosed by the plague (160 ff.) and by the necromancy (586 ff.), all leave the country with Oedipus (1058–61), as Laius foretold (652–53). Likewise, the *caeli status* is cleared up: cf. pp. 305–6 below.

¹⁹ Of 32 instances of *pater* (*paternus*) and *parens*, I would classify only seven as being emotionally colorless and unconnected with the special ironies and horrors of Oedipus' kinship ties: 12, 54, 59, 266, 328, 596, 872. Even two of these (54, 872) may have an ironic force: cf. p. 313 below. Emotionally charged or ironic uses: 18, 20, 22, 81, 261, 271, 375, 635, 636, 643, 658, 663, 787, 793, 794, 795, 802, 806, 807, 836, 866, 938, 951, 998, 1043.

infanda timeo: ne mea genitor manu	15
<i>perimatur</i> ; hoc me Delphicae laurus monent	16
IOC. laudis hoc pretium tibi	104
sceptrum et <i>peremptae</i> Sphingis haec merces datur.	
OED. Ille, ille dirus callidi monstri cinis	
in nos rebellat, illa nunc Thebas lues	
<i>perempta</i> perdit.	108
OED. Queritur <i>peremptum</i> nemo quem incolumem timet.	243
CR. Curam <i>perempti</i> maior excussit timor.	
OED. Pium prohibuit ullus officium metus?	
CR. Sphinx et nefandi carminis tristes minae	246
CHOR. Iacet <i>perempta</i> . vulneri immoritur manus	1040
OED. Bis parricida plusque quam timui nocens	1044
matrem <i>peremi</i> : scelere confecta est meo.	1045

To these may be added *perdit* in 108, *interemptum Laium* in 218, and *peremptor incluti regis* in 221. It is noteworthy how many words of gloom, horror, and crime appear in the lines just quoted. The key-words tend to act together in creating the unusual verbal texture of Seneca's poetry.

It is, moreover, particularly appropriate that the Sphinx is included by the motif of *perimere*. Other verbal links between the Sphinx and the Oedipus-situation were mentioned above. The Sphinx is another form of the plague, another agent of death. In 107 it is in fact called *lues*, a word elsewhere applied to the pestilence (29, 652) and, significantly, to the infant Oedipus, as if even then he embodied the destruction which his presence has let loose in Thebes (859).²⁰ The imagery of *cruentos . . . rictus* and *aptaret alas* in 93-96 is recalled in 164-65 (*Mors atra avidos oris hiatus pandit et omnes explicat alas*) and further identifies the Sphinx with death. The monster is thus an essential part of the horrible fate of the Labdacids. Its death is parallel to that of Laius: *peremptum* is used in both cases; both seek revenge via the plague (cf. 106-8 and 630 ff.); in both cases, Oedipus has the kingship as *pretium* or *merces* of the slaying (cf. 104-5 and 634-35). Its existence, on the other hand, is closely linked with that of Oedipus, both by its action as a force preventing Laius from evading his ordained

²⁰ Paratore 130 makes this point well.

end and by associated vocabulary. The comparison with an enraged lion (*saevi leonis more conciperet minas*, 97) recurs applied to Oedipus (*qualis per arva Libycus insanit leo*, 919); the Sphinx, Oedipus, and wrath are thus connected to the Bacchic motifs of the poem,²¹ for lions drive Bacchus' triumphal chariot (425) and roar on the prow of the Tyrrhenian pirates' ship (*fremuit*, 457). It may also be significant that the Nemean lion is mentioned in the description of the hot, dry heavens (40); and, ironically, real lions have been quieted by the plague (*cessat irati fremitus leonis*, 150). Another motif, the rending of viscera with claws (*saxa . . . revulsit unguis viscera expectans mea*, 99-100), unites the Sphinx with the plague (*viscera quassat gemitus*, 191-92), with the *extispicium* and its uncertainty and abnormality (352, 370, 380), with Oedipus' call for punishment (*quae tigris aut quae saeva visceribus meis incurret ales?* 929-30; cf. the Bacchic tiger in 458, the Sphinx as bird in 102), and with the actual blinding (note *vulsos*, 966; *unguibus*, 968). The Sphinx is thus portrayed as another projection into nature of the abnormality of the Oedipus-situation.

The monster is still further related to Oedipus by means of imagery of entanglement and confusion, which both borders on the motif of doubt and alludes to the king's incest and confused kinship. The monster and its riddles are described with knotty imagery, and the puzzling oracles similarly; moreover, a simile of confusion and doubt in the divination-scene seems to refer to Oedipus' kinship-ties allegorically:²²

. . . Sphinga caecis verba nectentem modis	92
<i>nodosa</i> sortis verba et <i>implexos</i> dolos	101
ac triste carmen alitis solvi ferae	102
responsa <i>dubia</i> sorte <i>perplexa</i> iacent	212
imbrifera qualis <i>implicat</i> <i>varios</i> sibi	315
Iris colores	316

These uses all serve as a background to the high-point of Laius' angry utterance, which touches upon Oedipus' kinship and incest; and with a like image of confusion Jocasta heralds the overthrow of normality in her final speech:

²¹ Bacchic motifs are discussed in detail below, p. 306-12.

²² Cf. note 12 above.

invisa proles: sed tamen peior parens	636
quam gnatus, utero rursus infausto gravis,	
egitque in ortus semet et matri impios	
fetus regessit, quique vix mos est feris	
fratres sibi ipse genuit— <i>implicitum</i> malum	
magisque monstrum Sphinge <i>perplexum</i> sua	641
omne <i>confusum</i> perit,	1025
incesta, per te iuris humani decus.	1026

The system of motifs of kinship, incest, destruction (especially parricide), intertwining, and confusion forms another tightly-knit complex of associations.²³ As with other systems, this one too tends to create a unity out of Oedipus' crime, the monstrous Sphinx, the plague, etc.—a unity in which the abnormal is normal, *natura versa est*.

Amid all this gloom and abnormality, are there pleasant, healthy counter-motifs and is there any prospect of release and purity? In the *Phaedra*, for instance, Seneca plays off two worlds against each other (Hippolytus' "idyll" and Phaedra's "phantasmagoria"); but in the end nightmare and death dominate.²⁴ In the *Oedipus*, the alternative motifs are much rarer and weaker, and prospects of order and salvation ultimately seem empty. In the most important contrast, the hot, dry air which is so oppressive in the prologue is balanced at several points by cool, gentle breezes and refreshing liquids (water and wine). On one side, Seneca emphasizes Auster (*gravi flatu . . . luctificus Auster*, 631–32; cf. *gravis . . . vapor*, 47) and the miasmal air (*halitu sicco*, 633); on the other, Zephyrus (note *gelido*, 37; *lenis*, 37; *levis*, 38, 884). All the good qualities in 37–39, however, are named only to be negated. Phoebus' oracle gives hope of pure skies once Laius' murder is avenged: *haustusque tutos aetheris puri dabit*, 220; *mitia . . . remeabunt sidera*, 233. Laius makes the same pledge: *spiritus puros dabit vitalis*

²³ There is probably something ironic in *nexa* in 989–92 (*non illa deo vertisse licet / quae nexa suis currunt causis. / it cuique ratus prece non ulla / mobilis ordo*), where the idea of tangled confusion is more appropriate to the Oedipus-situation than the suggestion of some immutable order in the universe. Other uses of *ordo* and *vertere* may also imply a certain hollowness in the sentiments here: cf. p. 310 below.

²⁴ Cf. Henry/Walker, *op. cit.* (note 5). The triumph of death over the idyll-world is nicely exemplified by the motif of hair let loose, symbolizing primitive naturalness, beauty, and innocence in Hippolytus (651–52, 657, 754, 801–4): Phaedra tries unsuccessfully to enter the idyll-world by imitating an Amazon (371, 393–96, 401–2); in the end, Hippolytus' lovely hair is brutally scattered on the rocks (1093–96).

aura, 650-51. And this at least is to be fulfilled by Oedipus' exile at the end:

<i>mitior caeli status</i>	1054
post erga sequitur: quisquis exilem iacens	
animam retentat, <i>vividus haustus levis</i>	
concinniat.	1057

The repetitions of words like *haustus*, *mitis*, *levis*, and *purus* in close proximity to one another help to delineate the motif of refreshing air which draws together these passages and links them with others. The motifs of clean, open air and purity from pollution again seem relevant when the better alternative in Tiresias' question is whether the sacrificial flame rises *pure* into the open air (309-11; note the converse—a flame which is heavy, uncertain, and unclean, 312-13) and when Oedipus mistakenly says that he can raise *pure* hands toward *heaven* (790-91). Lightness of breath (1056) counters the oppressiveness of 47 and 631; and *levis*, together with *lenis*, *spiritus*, and *aura*, also serves to make the Fortune-metaphor of 882-91 totally relevant to Oedipus and the plague (note *pressae gravi spiritu*, 885-86; cf. 47, 631) as well as a reaffirmation of Oedipus' own simile in 8-11.

While the motifs of pure air and gentle breezes might be said to triumph when Oedipus takes the horrors of the plague away with him into exile, the themes of cool liquids and springs are more ambiguous because closely related to two important systems—the Bacchic motifs and the Theban past, which must be considered in detail. The Bacchus-ode (403-508) has been recognized by sympathetic critics as an integral part, poetically, of Seneca's play:²⁵ it appears to provide a bright, cheerful contrast of relief and release between the horrors of the plague and *extispicium* which precede and the more dreadful necromancy which follows. Indeed, set against the rest of the work, it does reflect a happy mood; nevertheless, ominous notes intermittently jar this serenity and below the surface lurk the same crimes and gloom. The chorus opens with fresh growth (*corymbo*, 403; *thyrsis*, 404), softness (*mollia*, 404), and brightness (*lucidum caeli decus*, 405). Bacchus is in triumph, his hair flying loose and wreathed: hair let loose (*effusam*, 403) is an important symbol whose associations range from primitive

²⁵ Müller 450-51; Paratore 125-26.

naturalness or carefree release to simple beauty or innocence.²⁶ Thebes is given the epithet *nobiles* (406), a pleasant change from its other epithets, which are negative (*miseranda*, 112; *ruentes*, 512) or neutral (*Cadmeae*, 233; *Herculeae*, 749). Next, however, *palmis supplicibus* (408) introduces a more sombre note. Brightness returns immediately, dispelling the clouds (cf. 2, 45, and air-motifs discussed above), though the key-words *tristes* and *avidum* have their effect (411-11 bis). In 412 ff. spring flowers, ivy, and again wreathed, yet scattered locks emphasize growth and release; but *iratem . . . novercam* upsets this, as does the theme of metamorphosis and false limbs (418-20). Metamorphosis is unnatural and recalls the monstrous Sphinx and the physiological abnormalities of the *extispicium*. Moreover, transformation is the common feature of many mythological allusions in the play, most of which are related to Bacchic frenzy or to the Theban past or to both: serpent's teeth changed into men, Dirce into a spring, Ino and Melicertes into sea-gods, Agave and her women into Maenads, the Proetides into cows, the pirates into dolphins, Actaeon into a deer, Daedalus and Icarus into birds (note *falsis nimis . . . pinnis*, 896-97; cf. *falsos imitatus artus*, 419).²⁷ There is a certain horror and unhappiness in all these myths. Through the Theban past, the Sphinx, and the deformed womb of the *extispicium*, the metamorphosis-theme also reaches Jocasta and Oedipus, himself a monster. This Bacchic theme is thus inseparably involved in Theban past and Theban present.

The description of the triumph continues (424-35) with mention of the conquest of the wealthy East (earlier related to Thebes by the chorus in 113 ff.) and of the tamed lions, whose relation to the Oedipus-situation has already been mentioned. A more negative note is sounded by *turpi . . . asello* and *lascivi . . . mystae*, yet the motif of the wreath recurs with Silenus (430). Barbarian tribes are happily subdued, but the Cadmean mothers, again with hair let down in Bacchic release, present a more gruesome picture (435-44). The

²⁶ Cf. note 24 above. The use of *fusus* and *purum* implies that the same sort of symbolism extends even to the flame in 310-1: *rectusque purum verticem caelo tulit / et summam in auras fusus explicuit comam*.

²⁷ Seneca probably expects his audience to remember in addition that Cadmus was transformed into a serpent (Ovid, *Met.* 4.571 ff.), Pentheus was believed to be an animal by the Theban women, and Niobe became a rock with ever-flowing tears.

waving of the thyrsus marks celebration in 404, but is deadly in 440, as Laius recalls in 628.

Ambiguous alternation characterizes the next strophe as well (445–66). Ino and Palaemon now rule at sea, but it is likely that Seneca expected his audience to know the mythological background of their sufferings. The punishment of the pirates is a just victory and again features fresh growth (especially ivy and the vine, Bacchic plants) and Bacchic animals (lion and tiger); but it is still a metamorphosis one in which *utero* probably alludes to Jocasta (as it does in the *extispicium*).²⁸ Golden wealth recurs at the beginning of the fourth stanza, with more fierce barbarians tamed by Bacchus (467–83). The rich Pactolos is one kind of abundant Bacchic stream of liquid, providing a contrast to the dryness of the plague (cf. *aretque Dirce* etc., esp. *inopi unda*, 42–43), its barrenness (*non rura virent*, 156; cf. 452, and Laius' promise, 649; *non plena suo vitis Iaccho*, 157, cf. 456), and the victims' thirst (*fontes, latice*, 195–96). Yet, as verse 470 suggests (*lactea . . . pocula sanguine miscet*), blood too is a Bacchic liquid: Cithaeron flows with it when Pentheus dies (484); the wine of sacrifice turns to blood (*Bacchi dona*, 324). As was shown earlier, *cruentus* is a key-word for Oedipus and the Sphinx; other uses of blood-words refer to the plague, sacrifices, and the Theban heritage.²⁹ Thus Bacchus' association with liquids is not without horror, though the ode itself ends with an unspoiled picture of the marriage of Ariadne (488–502). The plague's dryness is countered with a miracle, *pumice ex sicco fluxit Nyctelius latex* (491–92), followed by *garruli . . . rivi* (493; the adjective, repeated from *garrula avis* in 454, connotes the essence of life in pleasant sounds), *dulces . . . sucos* (494), and *niveique lactis candidos fontes* (495). The metaphor of a wreath is applied to the island Naxos (488; cf. 403, 430), while Phoebus appears with his hair let loose (*infusis humero capillis*, 499); and even Jupiter lays aside his thunderbolts in a negation of a fire-motif.

²⁸ Cf. note 17 above.

²⁹ Cf. 30 uses of *crutor*, *cruentus*, *sanguis*, *sanguineus*, *sanies*, 11 apply to various aspects of sacrifices (140, 141, 320, 324, 346, 350, 355, 358, 377, 563, 565); five to Oedipus (634, 642, 863—torture, 979, 1022—birth); four to the Theban heritage (177—Dirce; 484—Pentheus, 624—Laius, 627—general); two to the plague (186, 190); one to Jocasta (1041); one to the Sphinx (93); one to the Massagetæ here in the Bacchus-ode (470). The remaining five uses are conventional metaphors which seem neutral: fear (224–586), birth (203, 837—ominous?), strength (298).

The Bacchus-ode ends with six hexameters which emphasize eternal, orderly natural phenomena (503-8). Similar orderliness on a cosmic level is implied in Oedipus' solemn invocation in 248-57. It might legitimately be said that these passages reflect the Stoic vision of an orderly universe and are intended to present the opposite of the chaos of Oedipus' world; none the less, it would be quite wrong to give these lines undue emphasis and seek a consistent attitude of Stoicism in Seneca's poetry. Despite these lines, Oedipus' world remains one of crime and chaos; disorder spreads from humans to upset natural processes, and any vision of serene order is indeed futile because countered and overwhelmed by the rest of the work. Likewise, though Laius claims *non ira deum, sed scelere raperis* (630-1), that makes no difference to the chorus, who in 712 reaffirm Tiresias' interpretation of *ira numinum* (331, 333). Jocasta asserts *nemo fit fato nocens* (1019), but this has no effect on her feelings and her subsequent actions. Seneca thus offers no consistent philosophical solution.³⁰ Even the salvation of Thebes at Oedipus' departure is partially empty, for the whole heritage of the Theban royal line stresses impiety and abnormality. The future will be no better: Eteocles and Polyneices are alluded to several times (237, 321-23, 360-65, 646, 749-50).³¹

With its superficial relief of brightness and its underlying irony, the Bacchus-ode prepares for the necromancy and the ode on the Theban past (709-63). The necromancy shifts firmly back to the gloom characteristic of the whole work, but several minor motifs link it to the Bacchic triumph. There is an emphasis immediately on dense growth, shade, and water, but with a much different mood (530 ff.): for example, plant-growth is denied to Thebes (*non virent*, 156) until Laius' murderer is punished (*virens*, 649), and Bacchus promotes luxuriant growth (*viret*, 452), but what thrives here is the tree of death (*virente*, 533). Tiresias is the very reverse of Bacchus—*maestus* (554)

³⁰ With the dominant theme of *natura versa est*, the spirit of the poetry as a whole is averse to Stoicism's vision of an orderly universe. Cf. Henry/Walker, G & R 10 (1963) 109: as opposed to the *Moral Epistles*, "the plays reject entirely the Stoic view and proclaim disorder. In other words the Seneca of the tragedies is, so to say, disloyal to Stoicism." Stoic influence in greater or lesser degree has unfortunately been either forced upon the plays or assumed too facilely, in my judgment, by many recent writers *Contra*, Herington, *op. cit.* (note 2), esp. 460 f.

³¹ Cf. note 23 above for another possibility of hollow consolation.

where the god was of *vultu sidereo* (410), his hair bound not with ivy but with *mortifera taxus* (555). Like Bacchus and his attendants with their *thyrsi*, Tiresias shakes a branch (*frondem quatit*, 552). The god wears *sinus laxi fluidumque syrma* (423), and the seer too has a trailing robe, but it receives a different epithet: *lugubris imos palla perfundit pedes* (553).

In addition to these repetitions, themes of the Theban past link the necromancy and the Bacchus-ode. The significance of metamorphosis, of the Bacchic lions, and of the tradition of impiety has already been emphasized. It remains to review a whole series of references throughout the play to four interrelated themes—animals (especially bulls and cows), forests, springs, and Theban royalty. Early in the work these motifs begin to build up: the spring Dirce (42), the Sphinx as dreadful bird or lion (96, 97, 102), sacrificial animals (notably *taurus*) prefiguring the later scenes (135–41), the same beasts affected by the plague (145–48), a serpent (153), *Cadmeum nemus* (176), Dirce befouled with blood (177), *Amphionios canes* (179), plague-victims seeking *fontes* (195). At Delphi, springs and forest receive mention in Creon's visit (229),³² in Laius' embassy (276), and in Cadmus' (712). Sacrificial oxen reappear in 299 and are of immense importance through the next scenes. The Bacchus-ode has lions, tigers, Cithaeron with its forests, the Proetides (cows) roaming through forests, and springs of wine and milk.

Next the necromancy takes place in a dark grove (530 ff.) with a spring (545–47), again with sacrificial animals (556). The victims are drawn backwards (if the reading of *A* be accepted: *retro trahuntur*, 557). It is possible that this odd detail is related to *natura versa est* (371), earlier applied to the heifer's entrails (and the whole Oedipus-situation). In the earlier passage, *sed acta retro cuncta* (367) also occurs (following *mutatus ordo est*, 366) and still earlier an unnatural flow of blood from the bull (*versus retro . . . sanguis*, 349–50). Turning backwards and upsetting the laws of nature recall Oedipus' incest:

turpis maternos iterum <i>revolutus</i> in <i>ortus</i>	238
utero rursus infausto gravis,	637
egitque in <i>ortus</i> semet et matri <i>impios</i>	
fetus regressit	639

³² Giardina has suggested reading *nemus* in 228; see his *apparatus criticus*.

retro reversas generis ac stirpis vices 870

illa quae leges ratas 942

Natura in uno vertit Oedipoda 943

Thus Oedipus is fully implicated in the animal-imagery of the play.³³

The necromancy brings forth generations of Theban characters. There are the Spartae, *viperum genus* (587), and Zethus and Amphion, the former quelling the bull (610-12). Amphion's wife Niobe is a victim of metamorphosis and mother of unhappy children; Agave is compared to her: *peior hac genetrix adest furibunda Agave* (615-16). Agave in her Bacchic fury is perhaps the worst of the line, but Oedipus must compete with her, as *peior parens quam gnatus* (636-37) recalls and demands comparison with 615-16. Bloody Pentheus and Laius complete the scene. The chorus adds to this history of Theban horrors by alluding to Cadmus' arrival in Boeotia (Delphic *nemus*, 712, the spring Dirce, 714). Again a cow plays a significant role (*erranti vaccae*, 720), and the wandering is an essential motif. Cerberus and ghosts roam (*errare, vaga*, 173-74) in plague-stricken Boeotia; Tiresias, confused by uncertain signs, is *vagus* (329); being lost figures in Laius' death (*plures fefellit error*, 778; note Oedipus' query *explica errores*, 773). Actaeon wanders through forests (*per saltus ac saxa vagus*, 757), and finally the guilty Oedipus himself (*saeculi crimen vagor* 875; cf. *erres*, 951; *fallentes vias*, 1047, answering Laius' threat, 656). All the strands of this theme again tie Oedipus to his place in the Theban heritage.³⁴

The chorus continues with a description of the great serpent, in a forest and towering over it, recalling the cypresses of the necromancy (725 ff.; cf. 532-23.).³⁵ The battle of the Spartae ends with a parallel to Oedipus' incest: *genetrixque suo reddi gremio . . . vidit alumnos*, 746-47. Again with Actaeon fountain and forest are essential elements of the story. Moreover, he is like Oedipus in coming to self-recognition as well as in wandering; Seneca emphasizes Actaeon's realization that he

³³ For the laws of nature theme, cf. the language of 989-92, where *verto, ratus*, and *ordo* recur (note 23 above). For Oedipus and the sacrificial bull, cf. note 36 below.

³⁴ The *A*-tradition reads *vagans* in verse 13, which would add to this scheme, but *vacans* (*E*) seems to be the *mot juste* there. The only other instance of a word of wandering seems to be neutral (284).

³⁵ On 530 ff. cf. pp. 313-14, below and note 39.

is no longer human, not his death, in order to relate him to Oedipus, who vainly claims *sibi que melius quam deis notus*, 767, against the declaration of Phoebus' oracle, *Phoebo iam notus et infans*, 235.

Oedipus is one of the family, for he was exposed on Cithaeron (note *nemora*, 809) and saved among the flocks. Without actual transformation, he is none the less identified in imagery with Sphinx and bull.³⁶ In the end he imitates the Bacchic frenzy of Agave: when he knows the truth, he is like a mad lion shaking its mane (919–20; the Bacchic animal, and the Bacchic hair-motif recurring in a brutal context). He mentions tiger and bird, Cithaeron, and Agave (929–33). Not only does he blind himself in fury (*iratus ferox*, 960), but Jocasta too is another Agave and succumbs to the same Bacchic frenzy (1006). Thus, metamorphosis affects both Oedipus and Jocasta as the latent violence of the Bacchus-ode comes completely to the surface and overwhelms any suggestion of relief and resolution. The Theban past, its metamorphoses, and its miraculous and tragic encounters with forests, springs, and animals appear wholly uniform with the present; the future may well be the same.

The examples already given are not exhaustive,³⁷ but should suffice to demonstrate one sense in which one might speak of "the drama in the word" in Seneca's *Oedipus*. Groups of words with their associated moods and imagery recur with shifts of meaning which reinforce and illuminate other uses of the same word, mood, or image. Some interconnections are fairly definite, but the independent life assumed by individual words in their interplay may add vague and ominous suggestiveness to a seemingly straightforward passage. For instance, in the choral interlude which follows the full acknowledgment of Oedipus' guilt (882–910), the conventional *exemplum* of Daedalus and Icarus is used in praise of *aurea mediocritas*. The final couplet (909–10) recalls Oedipus' own simile about fortune in the prologue (8–11). Is it merely by chance that in the tangle of the boy's punishment for excess (*in ponto manus movit implicitas puer*, 906–7) the word used so effectively of Oedipus' confused kinship (*implicitum malum*,

³⁶ This interpretation of the animal-themes confirms the observations of Pratt, *Dram. Susp.*, 96, relating *ortus* in 338 with the Oedipus-motif in 238 and 638 and noting the similarity of the actions of the bull in 339 to those of Oedipus in 1011–12.

³⁷ E.g., one could discuss *gravis*, *nocens*, *metus*, *ira*, *tenebrae* and many other words.

640) reappears? Or, again, since the *funesta pestis* is ultimately one manifestation of the horrid Oedipus-situation, the reader may be invited to further thoughts on the equalizing of fathers and sons and mutual deaths of husbands and wives which it, like Oedipus, causes:

iuvenesque senibus iungit et gnatis patres	54
funesta pestis, una fax thalamos cremat	55

And when Oedipus calls for public punishment, the relatives he mentions are not only the ones hurt by the plague (52-63), but the ones that his marriages have intermingled and confused:

me petat ferro parens,	872
me gnatus, in me coniuges arment manus	
fratresque	874

Even there it is possible to find an echo of the pervasive Oedipus-situation. As a final example, consider the description of the grove where Tiresias conjures up Laius (530-47). The language used seems to have vague intimations related to the plot (making the passage more than "rhetorical ecphrasis"):

cupressus altis exerens silvis caput	532
virente semper alligat trunco nemus,	
curvosque tendit quercus et putres situ	
annosa ramos: huius abruptit latus	
edax vetustas; illa, iam fessa cadens	
radice, fulta pendet aliena trabe.	537
medio stat ingens arbor atque umbra gravi	542
silvas minores urguet et magno ambitu	
diffusa ramos una defendit nemus.	
tristis sub illa, lucis et Phoebi inscius,	
restagnat umor frigore aeterno rigens;	
limosa pigrum circumit fontem palus.	547

The cypresses, the oaks,³⁸ and the unnamed *ingens arbor* are all personified. The cypresses, with funereal connotations, are conspicuous,

³⁸ The interpretation of *cupressus* and *quercus* as collective singulars is certainly correct: cf. T. H. Sluiter, *L. Annaei Senecae Oedipus* (Groningen 1941) 102, and L. Herrmann's Budé translation. Thus *huius* and *illa* refer to two oaks: *cupressus* must have a collective sense, for otherwise *alligat* ("circumscribe"; cf. *OLD* s.v. 6 b) makes no sense; nor would *virente . . . trunco* be compatible with either *huius . . .* (535-36) or *illa . . .* (536-37).

like tall persons in a crowd (*exerens silvis caput*), and circumscribe the whole forest: likewise, death's agent, the plague, makes itself conspicuous in Thebes and embraces the whole population.³⁹ The oaks, sacred and often oracular trees, are like Tiresias, bent and old and supported by another (cf. Manto). Finally, the *ingens arbor* is like a powerful politician (cf. *magno ambitu*), oppressive (*urguet*) and protective (*defendit*) at the same time (again the people correspond to *nemus*)—suggestive of both the tyrant and the king in Oedipus. But this towering tree (or king) has beneath it a gloomy spring, not unlike Oedipus' troubled mind (*tristis . . . lucis et Phoebi inscius*). Whether one makes such connections or not, the spirit and mood of the passage is consonant with other details of the play, and the long description is a justifiable, an essential element of Seneca's conception, as is the *extispicium*, which is full of similar suggestiveness. The words and moods carry a great burden of interest in Senecan tragedy; they require and deserve close attention.

The art of Seneca's *Oedipus* is not stage-art. Indeed, from the above analysis, a case might be made for ignoring the traditional elements of drama (and the traditional questions of research—characterization, sources, Stoic influence, etc.) in an attempt to understand better the peculiar nature of Senecan tragedy as Latin poetry. The *Oedipus* is not, as in Sophocles, a dramatic portrayal of a man seeking salvation for his city and a full sense of identity for himself, but discovering in the process his own guilt and meeting disaster. To speak of discovery or *Enthüllung* in Seneca is perhaps somewhat false, since Oedipus' guilt is implicit in the imagery from the prologue on. The Latin play is rather a description of a static situation centered around a guilty man who already feels his guilt, a situation in which the guilt spreads into or has ramifications and responses in the natural universe depicted in the poem. The moods of the play, the mental-emotional situation of Oedipus, the plague, the Sphinx, the Theban past, etc. fuse into one complex entity. The vehicle of this fusion is the words themselves and their "drama"—the interplay of motifs taken over from many previous poets, but most of all continuing the Latin

³⁹ A similar description is given to the serpent killed by Cadmus (725–30), the connection perhaps being that the serpent too was deadly to many (Ovid, *Met.* 3.28–49).

tradition of Ovid.⁴⁰ The peculiar literary form employed evidently offered to Seneca a viable means (and one especially congenial to an artist of words) of verbalizing the themes of evil which seem to have haunted his thoughts and to have appeared rampant in his society. Seneca's tragedies thus seem to be the artistic expressions of a clever, yet deeply brooding mind trapped in the sophisticated but violent society of Neronian Rome.⁴¹

⁴⁰ E.g. Seneca's fondness for an environment completely consonant with the emotional state of his human subjects is an extension of one of Ovid's uses of landscape: on "cosmic sympathy" cf. Brooks Otis, *Ovid as an Epic Poet* (Cambridge 1966) esp. 233, 256, and on Ovid's various uses of landscape cf. C. P. Segal, *Landscape in Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Hermes Einzelschriften 23, Wiesbaden 1969). Likewise, many motifs which Seneca plays upon (such as the hunt and love-chase in the *Phaedra*) have their precedent in Ovid. Almost the entire Theban story, indeed, derives from *Met.* 3, but Seneca has concentrated and interconnected the myths to an extraordinary degree.

⁴¹ Cf. Regembogen's entire thesis in "Schmerz und Tod" and B. Walker's suggestion in *CP* 52 (1957) 170: "the tragedies can be regarded as an attempt to objectify an intolerable inward experience."