

## SENECAN BAROQUE: THE DEATH OF HIPPOLYTUS IN SENECA, OVID, AND EURIPIDES

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### I

Lengthy narrative ecphrasis, often of violent or horrible contents, is a hallmark of Senecan tragedy. The descriptions of Medea's incantations, the calling forth of Laius' ghost, the killing of Thyestes' children are among the more sensational examples.<sup>1</sup> Since August von Schlegel it has been fashionable to label such accounts grotesque, formless, or tasteless, and to cite them as evidence of the decadence of an era that took pleasure in the carnage of the amphitheaters.<sup>2</sup> Earlier in this century scholars saw in such passages the exaggerated and self-indulgent rhetoric of Silver Age Latinity.<sup>3</sup> Recent critical opinion has swung back to the more favorable attitude of pre-nineteenth-century judgments and has attempted to appreciate the aesthetic aims and values of Seneca's distortions of language.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Medea* 670-848; *Oedipus* 353-99, 530-658; *Thyestes* 641-775.

<sup>2</sup> A. von Schlegel, *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Litteratur* (1809) in E. Lefèvre, ed., *Senecas Tragödien, Wege der Forschung* 310 (Darmstadt 1972) 13f. For a useful review of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century judgments of Senecan tragedy see P. J. Enk, "Roman Tragedy," *Neophilologus* 41 (1957) 282-307, especially 282-91.

<sup>3</sup> See for example, H. E. Butler, *Post-Augustan Poetry* (Oxford 1909) 44ff. J. Wight Duff, *A Literary History of Rome in the Silver Age*, ed. A. M. Duff (New York and London 1964) 207-14 gives a more positive estimate of Seneca's style.

<sup>4</sup> For this critical reevaluation, in addition to works cited later, see, for example, the series of articles by D. Henry and B. Walker in the 1960s, especially "Phantasmagoria and Idyll: An Element of Seneca's *Phaedra*," *G & R*, 2nd. Series, 13 (1966) 223-39; C. J. Herington, "Senecan Tragedy," *Arion* 5 (1966) 422-71; Berthe Marti, "Seneca's Tragedies: A New Interpretation," *TAPA* 76 (1945) 216-45; W. H. Owen, "Commonplace and Dramatic Symbol in Seneca's Tragedies," *TAPA* 99 (1968) 291-313; B. Seidensticker, *Die Gesprächsverdichtung in den Tragödien Senecas* (Heidelberg 1969). Otto Regenbogen, "Schmerz und Tod in den Tragödien Senecas," *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg, 1927-28*, ed. F. Saxl (Leipzig and Berlin 1930) 167-218 is an important precursor of the reevaluation of Senecan tragedy since World War II. For the larger context of these stylistic movements in the first century A.D. see Gordon Williams, *Change and Decline*, *Sather Classical Lectures* 45 (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1978), especially 193-271.

As the secondary elaboration of material already familiar in the literary tradition, Senecan descriptions tend to be overwrought, artificial, self-conscious of their artistic variations upon their sources. His description of the death of Hippolytus in the *Phaëdra*, the chief concern of this essay, is half again as long as Euripides' (114 verses to 76).<sup>5</sup> This expansiveness is probably an indication of an author composing at least as much for readers or hearers of recitations as for spectators in the theater.<sup>6</sup> I do not, however, intend to discuss the controversy of performance versus recitation, but rather to suggest that some of our difficulty with such scenes arises from judging them by standards drawn from classical rather than baroque composition. By viewing Seneca's ephrastic descriptions as "baroque" and by trying to understand their own stylistic principles, we may come closer to a fairer estimate of Senecan tragedy and also clarify the ways in which he uses and transforms his sources.

## II

While it can be misleading to apply to a verbal form criteria intended to describe painting and sculpture, the terms "baroque" or "mannerist" have gained a certain currency in the criticism of Latin literature.<sup>7</sup> Their usefulness lies in suggesting associations with the visual arts and in providing an alternative to the pejorative associations of "post-classical" or "Silver Age."

The fundamental principles of baroque composition were enunciated for the plastic arts by Heinrich Wölfflin in his celebrated *Renaissance und Barock* (1888).<sup>8</sup> These include constant change and movement

<sup>5</sup> *Pha.* 1000–1114 and *Eur. Hipp.* 1173–1248. The text of Seneca's play is cited from Pierre Grimal, *L. Annaei Senecae Phaëdra* (Paris 1965); that of Euripides' from Gilbert Murray, *Euripidis Fabulae*, vol. 1 (Oxford 1902).

<sup>6</sup> The most recent discussion of this question that I have seen is Elaine Fantham, *Seneca's Troades: A Literary Introduction* (Princeton 1982), Introduction, pp. 34–49, who concludes in favor of an audience of readers.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, H. Bardon, "Ovide et le baroque," in *Ovidiana*, ed. N. I. Herescu (Paris 1958) 75–100, especially 82ff.; R. Crahay, "La Vision poétique d'Ovide et l'esthétique baroque," *Atti del convegno internazionale Ovidiano* (Rome 1959) 1.91–110; Erich Burck, *Vom römischen Manierismus* (Darmstadt 1971) especially 13ff., 36ff., 45ff.; also Simone Miarre, *L'Image et la pensée dans les Métamorphoses d'Ovide* (Paris 1964) 97f.; Christiane Wanke, *Seneca Lucan Corneille: Studien zum Manierismus der römischen Kaiserzeit und der französischen Klassik* (Heidelberg 1964), passim, especially 23ff., 151ff., 155ff., 188ff., with further bibliography. See also W. R. Johnson, "The Problem of Counter-Classical Sensibility and its Critics," *CSCA* 3 (1970) 123–52. Wölfflin (below, note 8) 84 himself extended these contrasts to the verbal arts, comparing the opening of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* to that of Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*. For an incisive critique of the usefulness and the limitations of Wölfflin's criteria when applied to literature see René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (New York 1956<sup>2</sup>) 120–24 and 258.

<sup>8</sup> *Renaissance and Baroque*, English transl. by K. Simon (London and Glasgow 1964), from which all citations are made.

rather than stability, the blurring of sharp silhouettes into "an indistinct and gradually fading boundary area,"<sup>9</sup> the representation of an "incomplete process and a movement toward its completion" rather than an already "perfected state," variety and exuberance rather than repose or balance.<sup>10</sup> Instead of the clear definition of the individual parts and their relation to one another against a stable background in classical art, there are sharp juxtapositions and a dramatic massing of effects. In painting this style characterizes the chiaroscuro contrasts of light and shade in, say, Rembrandt and Caravaggio as compared with Van der Weyden or Raphael. As Wölfflin says, "There is less perception and more atmosphere" (p. 85). The aim is a self-conscious grandiosity, weightiness, and convolution, the impression of incomprehensible forces, "the feeling of overwhelmingness and unfathomableness."<sup>11</sup> In Roman art we may compare the Ara Pacis with the sculptures from Sperlonga or the Second Style with the Fourth Style of Pompeian fresco painting.<sup>12</sup>

Roman "baroque" does not, of course, have behind it the cultural forces of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation that stimulated such artistic developments in the sixteenth century. One may, however, speculate on analogous influences: the concentration of enormous power in the hands of a few, the irrational terror of living under capricious or even insane emperors, the expansion of the Empire to hitherto unknown limits, the resultant change of scale in the perception of human experience, the internationalization of art and the impact of the Eastern religions, and so on.<sup>13</sup> With suitable adjustments, then, some of Wölfflin's categories are useful for Senecan drama. Among these are the preference for a complex, multifarious whole over simplicity and directness, the loss of clear linear perspective, the tendency to crowd the ensemble with a plethora of detail, the mood of pathos, violence, and grandiosity. What Bardon, apropos of Ovid, says of the baroque may also be applied to Seneca: "une plénitude de vie qui ne s'accommode pas des ordonnances classiques, et les remplace par une sorte de dynamisme tourmenté et explosif."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Wölfflin (preceding note) 31.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 67-70; cf. also Bardon (above, note 7) 85.

<sup>11</sup> Wölfflin (above, note 8) 86.

<sup>12</sup> I wish to thank Professor Sheldon Nodelman of the University of California, San Diego, for discussing with me the relation of Senecan tragedy and contemporaneous visual arts.

<sup>13</sup> For some suggestions along these lines see Wanke (above, note 7) 190f. and Elisabeth Henry, "Seneca the Younger," in *Ancient Writers: Greece and Rome*, ed. T. J. Luce (New York 1982) 2.821f.

<sup>14</sup> Bardon (above, note 7) 75.

## III

Far more than Euripides' account in the extant *Hippolytus*, Seneca's narrative of the death of Hippolytus emphasizes the monstrous aspect of the event. It shifts from a more or less realistic human setting to a fantastic realm of changing shapes.<sup>15</sup> Euripides' foreground is clearly defined by its geographical coordinates; Seneca's proceeds with discontinuous jumps and abrupt changes of perspective. Seneca's narrative builds up the climactic event as a monstrous cataclysm; in Euripides we are still in touch with a rationally intelligible world, even though it is a world into which divine violence may suddenly erupt.

Ovid's version of Hippolytus' death in *Metamorphoses* 15.497–529 closely follows Euripides and also influenced Seneca. It is told from an even more sharply focussed perspective than Euripides', for it is a first-person narrative by Hippolytus himself. Ovid doubtless took a certain delight in transposing the Euripidean narration from the spectator to the participant. By casting the event as a retrospective narration in the mouth of the dead man himself, he surprises his readers. Even the bloody details gain a certain grim humor when told as first-person present-tense narrative by the deceased:

excitior curru, lorisque tenentibus artus  
viscera viva trahi, nervos in stipe teneri  
membra rapi partim, partim reprensa relinqui  
[ . . . ] videres. (15.524–26)

Ovid wittily undercuts the horror by giving his story a fanciful enfram-ing context: his hero is addressing the nymph Egeria, whom he invites to engage in comparison of their respective sufferings (530f.). The exercise is to be a *consolatio* for her loss of Numa (cf. *consolantia verba*, 15.491). In this mixture of tones Ovid too approaches something of a baroque style; but he keeps a strong unity of perspective by the simplest of all focussing devices, the first-person singular narration. Hippolytus' remark to Egeria, "You would have seen my weary soul being breathed forth," *fessamque videres / exhalari animam* (527f.), even introduces a touch of humorous and youthful naiveté (if we may call a dead and resurrected hero young) that is in keeping with the diminutive scale of the episode and the graceful unreality of its improbable setting.

Euripides' messenger repeatedly alludes to his perspective on the events. He thereby makes us "see" the events through the eyes of a sympathetic spectator whose reactions color our perceptions. Each major section of the messenger's account reiterates and progressively strengthens this unified visual focus (*Hipp.* 1173, 1187, 1198, 1204, 1206f., 1208,

<sup>15</sup> For instance, *Pha.* 1078ff., on which see W.-L. Liebermann, *Studien zu Senecas Tragödien*, Beitr. zur Klass. Philol. 39 (Meisenheim/Glan 1974) 42.

1216, etc.). Seneca's messenger, however, never claims autopsy for the scene that he describes. He gives only one indication of his own observation, namely at line 1025, where the swelling wave blots out the land: *haec dum stupentes quaerimus, totum en mare / immugit, omnes undique scopuli adstrepunt*.<sup>16</sup> This first-person perspective, in fact, intrudes so abruptly that it is not totally clear to whom the "we" refers.<sup>17</sup> By reducing the messenger's role as a sympathetic observer and commentator and by telling the story almost entirely as a remote third-person event, Seneca makes his hero appear as a helpless and isolated victim of irrational violence.<sup>18</sup>

This difference in the mode of narration reflects the different emphases of the two plays. Seneca's Hippolytus has disappeared from the stage some three hundred lines earlier, and he will not return. Phaedra's remorse and suicide hold the center of attention. Euripides' hero re-enters still alive, though barely, shortly after the calamity. Phaedra is already dead, and Hippolytus remains the focus of concern, from his re-entrance (1347) to his death onstage (1458), itself an unusual occurrence in Greek tragedy.

Euripides allows twenty-five lines of preparation for the mysterious calamity (*Hipp.* 1173–97), whereas Seneca has only seven (*Pha.* 1000–1006).<sup>19</sup> Euripides' narrative carefully defines the "shore" (ἀκτῆ) as the local setting (1173, 1179, 1199, 1206); but, each time the word occurs, the pronoun "we" stresses the fact that Hippolytus is surrounded by his many followers. The messenger alludes explicitly to the "myriad band" of friends and companions (1179f.), after which he quotes Hippolytus' direct address to his "attendants" in the second person plural (1183f.). Besides 1182–84, he reports two other statements by Hippolytus in direct discourse, addressed respectively to Zeus and to his horses (1191–93, 1240–42). Seneca's Hippolytus has only one address in direct discourse, to himself:

haud frangit animum vanus hic terror meum;  
nam mihi paternus vincere est tauros labor. (1066f.)

By referring to Hippolytus throughout as "master," *despotês* (1187, 1196,

<sup>16</sup> For Seneca's confusion of the Euripidean geography here see Friedrich Leo, *L. Annaei Senecae Tragoediae* (Berlin 1878) 1.201ff.; Grimal (above, note 5) ad 1022–24. Liebermann (above, note 15) 37 rather unfavorably compares Seneca's account of the monster in 1022–24 with "die euripideische Lucidität für Dekor und mystische Umschreibung." For the precision of Euripides' geography, on the other hand, see W. S. Barrett, *Euripides, Hippolytos* (Oxford 1964) ad 1198–1200.

<sup>17</sup> See Liebermann (above, note 15) 38.

<sup>18</sup> For the psychological aspect of such isolation see E. Paratore, "Originalità del teatro di Seneca," *Dioniso* 20 (1957) 72.

<sup>19</sup> Liebermann (above, note 15) 32.

1219), Euripides' messenger also calls attention to his own personal relation with the subject of his tale. He also includes himself with the followers in the first person ("we attendants," *prospoloi*, 1195; cf. 1184 and 1249f.).

Both authors use the familiar *est locus* motif, but Seneca transforms Euripides' objective spatial coordinates into a more interiorized atmosphere of nightmarish terror. Seneca's *est alta ad agros collibus ruptis via* (1057) abruptly introduces the final phase of the disaster.<sup>20</sup> The place is initially defined as empty of animate life, save for the ominous *illa moles* in 1059. Euripides' landscape is also a "deserted place," but his coordinating and subordinating conjunctions and pronominal adjective embed it with a continuous personal narrative and relate it to the known and familiar ("this land"):

ἐπεὶ δ' ἔρημον χώρον εἰσεβάλλομεν,  
ἀκτὴ τις ἔστι τοῦπέκεινα τῆσδε γῆς. (1198f.)

Even when Euripides' monster emerges from the sea, the participle *εἰσορώσι*, "as (we) looked on" (1216), maintains the spectator's personal perspective. Only as the horses panic and run out of control (1223ff.) does Euripides' continuous flow falter in the brief simile of the sailor (1221). Seneca, however, expands the simile to three verses (*Pha.* 1072–74). This is the only point where Euripides' narrative proceeds at length without first-person intervention, a stretch of twenty lines (1223–42).

#### IV

Even after the supernatural makes its appearance, Euripides still maintains continuity and human scale, in two ways. First, he stresses Hippolytus' personal relation with his horses (cf. 1219f., 1240f.), and in fact begins with the hero's combing the horses by the sea (1173–75). Seneca, however, makes only the briefest mention of the hero's rapport with his horses in 1056, *notae vocis hortatu*. Second, Euripides' messenger emphasizes the efforts of the attendants to keep up with the mad-dened steeds (1243f.): "Many of us, though willing, were left behind with feet that came too late" (πολλοὶ δὲ βουληθέντες ὑστέρῳ ποδὶ / ἐλειπόμεσθα). The detail keeps before us the emotional involvement of the youth's entourage, of which we have been steadily reminded (e.g. 1179f.). It also reinforces the spatial logic of the scene: the final disaster has a certain necessary vagueness because it is reported by a witness who could not get too close. Hence in the next lines the messenger admits that he "does not know in what way" Hippolytus got free of the reins (ἐκ δεσμών λυθεῖς / . . . οὐ κάτοιδ' ὅτῳ τρόπῳ / πίπτει, 1244–46).

<sup>20</sup> On Seneca's *error geographicus* here see Leo (above, note 16) 1.205f.

As soon as Seneca's Hippolytus gives free rein to the horses (1003, 1006), however, we move to the "suddenness" (*subito*) of the sea's "thunder" and its instantaneous swelling "to the stars" (1007f.).<sup>21</sup> With that detail the vaguely delineated landscape outside the city (cf. *urbem liquit*, 1000) reaches a new level of unreality in the limitless horizons suggested by the hyperbole of 1007 and by the rhetorical geography of the winds in 1011–14.<sup>22</sup> The references to Sicily and Leucas here and to the Cyclades in 1021, along with the rhetorical amplification in 1009–14 and 1020f., pull us away from Euripides' intense focus on a single stretch of shoreline.<sup>23</sup>

These features of style also contribute to the unstable shifting between the real and the imaginary, between specific detail and rhetorical exaggeration. As in some baroque or mannerist painting—El Greco, for example—the improbable, fantastic, and spectacular are brightly, even exaggeratedly, highlighted, whereas the factual grounding of the events in a logically coherent setting is handled briefly and casually.<sup>24</sup> In Euripides, however, when the thunderous roar comes from the sea, his first-person narration maintains coherence with the preceding events:

παρ' ἡμῖν δ' ἦν φόβος νεανικὸς  
 πόθεν ποτ' εἴη φθόγγος. ἐς δ' ἄλιρρόθους  
 ἀκτὰς ἀποβλέψαντες ἱερὸν εἶδομεν  
 κῦμ' οὐρανῶ στήριζον, ὥστ' ἀφῆρέθη  
 Σκίρωνος ἀκτὰς ὄμμα τοῦμὸν εἰσορᾶν. (1204–8)

Seneca introduces four similes, all of which reinforce the impression of vagueness and remoteness of place: those of the whale, the pilot, and Phaethon.<sup>25</sup> The lengthy ecphrasis of the monster in 1035–50, along with the fear that it inspires in the other inhabitants of the landscape in 1051–54, contributes to this discontinuity and atmosphere of horror.<sup>26</sup> It

<sup>21</sup> Liebermann (above, note 15) 32 notes the clash between the realistic details of the reins and the suddenness of the movement to the fantastic, but it is characteristic of his approach that he regards this change as "grotesque" rather than attempting to understand it on its own terms: "Seneca stürzt sich auf das spektakuläre Ereignis, alles andere wird so kurz abgetan, dass es geradezu grotesk wirkt."

<sup>22</sup> Note the accumulating details and increasing geographical specificity in the passage, from *nullus ventus* (1008f.) to *nulla pars caeli* (1009) and on to *non tantus . . . nec tam* (1011f.).

<sup>23</sup> For the problem of geography in 1011–14 and the uncertain text see Grimal's commentary (above, note 5) ad loc.

<sup>24</sup> On this point see Liebermann (above, note 15) 39f., apropos of Seneca's description of the sea-monster in 1035ff. Liebermann again adds his pejorative judgment, "Seneca sucht immer das Unmögliche."

<sup>25</sup> 1029f., 1048f., 1072–75, 1090–92. As noted earlier, only the pilot simile occurs in Euripides, although Phaethon may have been suggested by the chorus of *Hipp.* 732ff.

<sup>26</sup> For a good analysis of this horrific atmosphere see Regenbogen (above, note 4), especially 207ff.; also Bruno Snell, *Scenes from Greek Drama*, Sather Classical Lectures 34

is characteristic of this atmospheric *locus horridus* that Euripides' monster is still a bull (*ταῦρος*, 1214, 1229), whereas Seneca's is a strange, phantasmagoric composite of bull, sea-monster, serpent, and fire-breathing dragon.<sup>27</sup> Euripides' monster is "a sight greater than our eyes could look upon" (*κρείσσον θέαμα δεργμάτων*, *Hipp.* 1216f.); Seneca's is "greater than fear" (*maius timore*, 1033), an expressive brachylogy for "greater than our fear would have expected."<sup>28</sup> This change from exterior vision to an interior, emotional state typifies the difference between the two narratives.

Terror is important in Euripides too (*φόβος* in 1204 and 1218; *φρικῶδες* in 1202 and 1216), but its effect is localized in the immediate physical perceptions of what is heard and seen (1201–5, 1215–18). In Seneca the fear is generalized to the entire surrounding world. The ecphrasis of the monster, for example, is followed by the simile of the whale that destroys ships in "the furthest sea" (*extremo mari*, 1048), and then by the "trembling of the lands" (plural) in 1050 (*tremuere terrae*), upon which follows the consternation among the cattle, herdsman, and hunters (1050–54). Seneca uses nature to resonate emotional states. In Euripides the earth does not "tremble" in universal fright, but merely "re-echoes fearfully" when it is "filled with the voice" of the creature:

οὐ πᾶσα μὲν χθὼν φθέγματος πληρουμένη  
φρικῶδες ἀντεφθέγγετο. (1215f.)

Euripides' "all the earth" here, unlike Seneca's *tremuere terrae* in 1050, remains within the physical coherence of nature. His verbs of concrete, material action—"filled" and "re-echoed" (*πληρουμένη*, *ἀντεφθέγγετο*)—keep a hold on intelligible human reality.

Euripides' scene is the account of a past terror whose constituent elements and causes are set forth in logical order; Seneca's is itself a terror-inspiring narrative. It attempts not merely to tell of fear in the past but to recreate the mood of that fear in the present and to find symbolic equivalents for that fear in the setting, the diction, the similes, and so on. The narrative voice in these lines is less that of a messenger who has really seen such a thing than that of the poet himself who wants us to "see" this object of terror with our inner vision of emotional participation.

(Berkeley and Los Angeles 1964) 27; R. Mugellesi, "Il senso della natura in Seneca tragico," *Argentea Aetas: In memoriam E. V. Marmorale* (Genoa 1973) 29–66, especially 43ff., 63ff.

<sup>27</sup> See Liebermann (above, note 15) 21 on the "Abfolge akustischer-visueller Eindrücke" in *Hipp.* 1215ff. Henry and Walker (above, note 4) discuss various aspects of the phantasmagoric atmosphere, but without reference to the death of Hippolytus.

<sup>28</sup> See Grimal (above, note 5) ad loc.



## V

The term baroque is appropriate, if anywhere in this passage, to Seneca's version of the sea-monster. The creature is a fusion of contrasting forms, colors, and masses. Its emergence from the sea is framed between two similes of awful marine monsters (1029f., 1047f.). It heaves itself forth from its liquid womb (cf. 1019f.) in a metamorphic fluidity of earth and water:

inhorruit concussus undarum globus  
solvitque sese et litori invexit malum  
maius timore, pontus in terras ruit  
suumque monstrum sequitur. Os quassat tremor. (1031–34)

In contrast to Seneca's literal and figurative running together of sea and land (*solvit sese*; *pontus in terras ruit* / *suumque monstrum sequitur*), Euripides keeps the two realms distinct. The watery mass does not "dissolve itself" into the strange creature; the sea retains its separateness as a part of nature that "sent forth" the bull:

αὐτῷ δὲ σὺν κλύδωνι καὶ τρικυμία  
κῦμ' ἐξέθηκε ταῦρον, ἄγριον τέρας. (1213f.)

In Euripides it is the wave alone that swells and foams toward the shore, an ironic echo, perhaps, of the Hesiodic birth of Aphrodite.<sup>29</sup> In Seneca the sea and the monster are virtually one (1033f.).

Ovid closely follows Euripides' clarity in separating the marine and the terrestrial:

mare surrexit cumulusque immanis aquarum  
in montis speciem curvari et crescere visus  
et dare mugitus summoque cacumine findi.  
corniger hinc taurus ruptis expellitur undis . . . (Met. 15.508–11)

Ovid's *taurus ruptis expellitur undis* merely turns into the passive Euripides' *κῦμ' ἐξέθηκε ταῦρον*, with an added touch of violence in *ruptis*. The phrase *cumulus immanis aquarum* (15.508) probably lies behind Seneca's *concussus undarum globus*, but Seneca's blending of wave with monster is far stronger (*solvitque sese* in 1031 and *suumque monstrum sequitur* in 1034). The preceding simile also arouses an intenser mood of supernatural terror. The strong atmospheric verb *inhorruit* confers a sinister quasi-personification on the mass of water (*inhorruit* . . . *undarum globus*, 1031).

<sup>29</sup> Compare *Hipp.* 1210–14 with Hesiod, *Theogony* 190–200. The bull, though emanating directly from Poseidon via Theseus' curse (itself arising in part from latent sexual jealousy), is also the result of Aphrodite's intervention in the action and reveals the sinister and destructive aspect of her elemental power.

Like its Senecan counterpart, Ovid's creature snorts through flaring nostrils:

pectoribusque tenus molles erectus in auras,  
naribus et patulo partem maris evomit ore. (15.512f.)

opima cervix arduos tollit toros  
naresque hiulcis haustibus patulae fremunt. (*Pha.* 1042f.)

The two passages also show a different way of composing the two taurine bodies. Ovid presents the unity of the whole creature emerging from the water into the air; Seneca stresses the separately articulated masses of the flesh, the massive "heavy neck" and the bulging "hard muscles," in a manner that recalls the Sperlonga sculptures or the Laocoon. Seneca also suppresses Ovid's naturalistic detail of watery spray (15.513) and instead adds eyes that "vomit forth fire": *hinc flammam vomunt / oculi, hinc relucent caerula insignes nota* (1040f.).

Seneca continues with the monstrous details of the green moss and reddish seaweed on the creature's flanks and the horrible scaly tail (1044–48), whereas Ovid at this point provides the human perspective of the contrast between Hippolytus' courage and his companions' terror (15.514): *corda pavent comitum, mihi mens interrita mansit*. Since Ovid's Hippolytus is his own messenger, as it were, we cannot discount the possibility that the poet means to us to perceive his story as slanted in his own favor (see also 15.530f.). Whereas Ovid thus lightens his account and keeps a larger perspective in view (a privilege of the mobile focus of his *carmen perpetuum*), Seneca piles on the supernatural elements and blurs the division between realistic and fantastic details.

## VI

The monster's serpentine tail in Seneca, as commentators point out, is a literary echo of Virgil's serpents attacking Laocoon:

pectora quorum inter fluctus arrecta iubaeque  
sanguineae superant undis, pars cetera pontum  
pone legit sinuatque immensa volumine terga. (*Aeneid* 2.206–8)

caerulea taurus colla sublimis gerens  
erexit altam fronte viridanti iubam. (*Phaedra* 1036f.)

tum pone tergus ultima in monstrum coit  
facies et ingens belua immensam trahit  
squamosa partem. (*Phaedra* 1046–48)

Virgil distinguishes clear (if intertwined) masses as his serpents "twist their enormous backs in coils" (207f.). Seneca's adaptation stresses metamorphosis and fusion of shapes as the end part "comes together (*coit*) into the monster," an expression as convoluted as its subject. Virgil's

account has a clear directional focus across a broad landscape as the snakes “make for the shore” (2.205), “gain the fields” (209), and “seek out Laocoon” (213). Seneca’s narrative diffuses the precisely defined spaces of the epic into a nightmarish phantasmagoria.

Later in his narrative Seneca adapts another Virgilian passage, with a similar transformation of its spirit. The monster’s charge in 1059–63 imitates, in part, the battle of mating bulls in *Georgics* 3.232–34:

temptat sese atque irasci in cornua discit  
arboris obnixus trunco, ventosque lacessit  
ictibus, et sparsa ad pugnam proludit harena.

hic se illa moles acuit atque iras parat.  
ut cepit animos seque praetemptans satis  
prolusit irae, praepeti cursu evolat,  
summam citato vix gradu tangens humum,  
et torva currus ante trepidantes stetit. (*Phaedra* 1059–63)

Seneca’s creature seems to move in a void, whereas Virgil’s bull has around him winds, a tree, sand. The difference is a result of Seneca’s barer marine setting (cf. 1058). Seneca’s periphrasis, *illa moles*, in 1059 evokes an ominous and mysterious “mass” that suddenly becomes animated with vehement anger (*iras parat, cepit animos*). Virgil attributes emotions to his bull as part of his sympathetic identification of human and animal love (*Georg.* 3.225ff.). Whereas Virgil humanizes the bull, Seneca depersonalizes it into a murderous machine. This creature becomes terrifyingly and pitilessly Other. The juxtaposition of *moles* and *animos* in 1059f. produces, once more, a baroque fluidity between animate and inanimate, reality and fantasm, movement and stasis.

## VII

In contrast to the distinctly articulated, linear progression in Euripides and Ovid, Seneca’s tale moves ahead in a succession of stages that shade into one another. We are not always sure where one stage ends and another begins. The rhetorical amplification within each part creates a series of individual climaxes and lessens the forward impetus toward a single culminating point.

The first climax is the thundering of the sea in 1007–24. In Euripides and Ovid this warning produces the monster almost at once. In Seneca it is merely a preliminary. The whole process seems to begin all over again in 1025. The similarity of the two descriptions even enhances the feeling of circularity:

cum subito vastum tonuit ex alto mare  
crevitque in astra. (1007f.)

consurgit ingens pontus in vastum aggerem. (1015)

totum en mare  
immugit, omnes undique scopuli adstrepunt. (1025f.).

In Ovid, who here stays close to Euripides, the swelling wave “is split at its topmost crest” and at once the bull is “thrown forth” (*expellitur*, 15.510f.). In Seneca the same phrase describes a preparatory disturbance of the sea from which only “salt water is thrown forth” (*summum cacumen rorat expulso sale*, 1027).<sup>30</sup> There follows the simile of the whale’s blowing spray in “Ocean’s deep channels.” Water is then massed for another violent shock in 1031 and again dissolves, finally, into the monstrous creature carried to the shore (1032–34). The repeated sea similes throughout the passage reinforce the impression of overlapping events, of returning to what we have met before (1029f., 1048f., 1073–75).

Seneca’s descriptive details command an attention that distracts from the overall unity (e.g. the ecphrasis of the monster in 1035–49). Individual actions lose their sharpness of outline by being repeated in slightly varied form. The disturbances of the sea and the fright of Hippolytus’ horses recur as variations on a theme.<sup>31</sup> The contrast between Hippolytus’ calm and the terror of his horses is stated twice (1054f., 1063–77).<sup>32</sup> That latter outbreak of fear is in turn raised to a new level of intensity at 1083, *tum vero pavida sonipedes mente excit.*<sup>33</sup>

In both Euripides and Ovid the final calamity follows a brief and well demarcated sequence: Hippolytus’ struggle to control his horses, the crash of the chariot, and the mangling of the body caught in the reins.<sup>34</sup> In Seneca the hero’s initial struggle against his horses’ panic is not only repeated, as we noted above, but is separated from the next stage by the long description of the monster’s attack (1057–65). There is then a second struggle to control the horses (1066–77), followed by a second attack from the monster (1080f.). Once more the horses startle in fear (1082–84), and it is only at this point that Hippolytus is entangled in the reins:

<sup>30</sup> On the sequence of thought in this passage see Leo (above, note 16) 1.204f. He argued for the deletion of 1016, *tumidumque monstro pelagus in terras ruit*, on the grounds that it contradicts the gestation of the creature in the sea’s “burdened womb” in 1019f. and its appearance for the first time in 1025ff. (1.207). Grimal (above, note 5) ad 1016 rightly defends the line as a reference not to the monster itself but to the “*prodige* menaçant que constitue cette vague énorme.” Even so, the repeated vocabulary of monsters, swelling, and rolling deliberately blurs the separate stages of the creature’s arrival. Leo’s treatment of the passage is characteristic of the misapplication of “classical” aesthetics—logic, economy, and clear articulation of the parts—to a baroque text.

<sup>31</sup> For the repeated motif of the frightened horses see Liebermann (above, note 15) 43; also pp. 58ff. for repetitiveness in general in Seneca’s narratives.

<sup>32</sup> For the *solus*-motif (1054f.) see Liebermann (above, note 15) 59ff.

<sup>33</sup> For this intensifying effect of *tum vero* cf. *Aen.* 4.450, *tum vero infelix fatis exterrita Dido*.

<sup>34</sup> Eur., *Hipp.* 1219–31, 1232–35, 1236–39; Ovid, *Met.* 15.514–20, 521–23, 524–28.

praeceps in ora fusus implicuit cadens  
laqueo tenaci corpus et quanto magis  
pugnat, sequaces hoc magis nodos ligat. (1085–87)

Seneca here is following Euripides, but with an important modification. In Euripides' narrative, as in Ovid's, entanglement in the reins leads at once to the mangling of the body:<sup>35</sup>

αὐτὸς δ' ὁ τλήμων ἡνίασις ἐμπλακεῖς  
δεσμὸν δυσεξέλικτον ἔλκεται δεθείς,  
σποδούμενος μὲν πρὸς πέτραις φίλον κάρα  
βραύων τε σάρκας, δεινὰ δ' ἑξανδῶν κλύειν. (*Hipp.* 1236–39)

excutor curru, lorisque tenentibus artus  
viscera viva trahi, nervos in stipe teneri,  
membra rapi partim, partim reprensa relinqui  
ossa gravem dare fracta sonum fessamque videres  
exhalari animam. . . . (*Met* 15.524–28)

At the corresponding point of his account, however, Seneca abruptly turns the focus away from Hippolytus to the horses (*sensere pecudes facinus*, 1088), introduces the Phaethon simile, and only then arrives at the bodily injuries (*late cruentat arva*, 1093ff.).

Even the gruesome detail of the hero "transfixed through the middle of the groin by a burnt stake" (1098f.) does not yet conclude the chain of events.<sup>36</sup> The horses delay "only a little while" and then take off again, dragging the half-dead youth over the thorns and bushes (1100–1108). Seneca thus creates a rapid alternation from excited movement (*celeres . . . pervolvunt rotas*, 1097) to sudden halt (*domino currus affixo tenet*, 1100), then back to energetic movement and violent dispersion (*pariter moram / dominumque rumpunt*, 1101f.; *errant*, 1105; *dis-tractus*, 1106).

This alternation of movement and rest also brings together the contrasting theme of imprisonment and enclosure on the one hand and

<sup>35</sup> In 1237 I follow Barrett in preferring *δυσεξέλικτον* to Murray's *δυσεξήγυστον*, even though the latter has stronger manuscript authority.

<sup>36</sup> The detail of the tree-trunk with the burnt stake in 1098 (*truncus ambusta sude*) is obscure. There is also a branch or stake in Ovid (15.525), and Grimal (above, note 5, ad loc.) suggests the survival of some cultic element. Compare, however, the role of trees and branches in the very similar death of Charicles in Achilles Tatius 1.12.5. The death of Euripides' Hippolytus involves no trees, only rocks (*Hipp.* 1238; cf. 1230, 1248). An anonymous referee suggests that the scene may have been suggested by the practice of impaling victims on the *stipes* in the gladiatorial arena (e.g. Sen. *Dial.* 6.20.3). Seneca's "burnt stake" may also imply symbolical castration from a powerful father-figure, particularly as Hippolytus invokes Jupiter, with the piercing and burning attributes of his lightning fire, when he confronts the possibility of taking his father's place with Phaedra (680–83). I am grateful to Professor Edward Lee of the University of California, San Diego, for helpful discussion of this passage.

mutilation and penetration on the other.<sup>37</sup> The tension of opposites, which is another feature of baroque style,<sup>38</sup> is especially clear in the first stage of the calamity:

praeceps in ora fusus implicuit cadens  
laqueo tenaci corpus et quanto magis  
pugnat, sequaces hoc magis nodos ligat. (1085–87)

The lines juxtapose the sudden centrifugal movement implied in *praeceps . . . fusus . . . cadens* with the immobility and entrapment of *implicuit, tenaci, sequaces . . . nodos ligat*. The reins which Hippolytus pulled tight to control the horses at the beginning (*ora frenis domita substrictis ligat*, 1003) and then released to start his journey into exile (*acerque habenis lora permissis quatit*, 1006) now mark his total loss of control as they immobilize him for a horrible death.

The physical loss of identity by mutilation has a correlative psychological dimension in the helplessness before something that he once controlled (cf. 1086f., *et quanto magis / pugnat, sequaces hoc magis nodos ligat*). The hunter's "snare" in the wild where Hippolytus roamed free at the beginning of the play (*laqueos*, 46) has now become the "clinging noose" (*laqueus tenax*, 1086) that imprisons the rider even as he hurtles among the rocks (1093ff.).

The monster's overpowering presence in the landscape prepares for this effect of entrapment. It follows him as "a persistent companion" (*sequitur adsiduus comes*, 1077), spreads terror to "every part" (*omni parte terrorem movens*, 1079), cuts off all avenues of escape (*non licuit ultra fugere*, 1080), and blocks him by its frontal attack (*toto obuius / incurrit ore corniger ponti horridus*, 1080f.). The nominal construction of Seneca's *sequitur adsiduus comes*<sup>39</sup> contrasts with the more precisely localized pursuit of the bull in Euripides: *σιγῇ πελάζων ἄντυγι ξυνείπετο* (1231). Euripides' terror comes from the verbal action, the silence; Seneca's from the claustrophobic associations of the "constant companion." The sequence of modifiers—*adsiduus, omni, non . . . ultra, toto*—reinforces this sense of hopeless entrapment. *Adsiduus comes* adds a grim irony to the horror of Hippolytus' present isolation from everything human.

The rapid changes of subject characteristic of this narrative are particularly prominent here in 1093–1114.<sup>40</sup> They create the impression of a

<sup>37</sup> For this double aspect of the anxiety about the violation of the body see my essay, "Boundary Violation and the Landscape of the Self in Senecan Tragedy," *A & A* 29 (1983) 176ff.

<sup>38</sup> See E. D'Ors, *Du Baroque* (Paris 1935) 33: "Partout où nous trouvons réunies dans un seul geste plusieurs intentions contradictoires, le résultat stylistique appartient à la catégorie du baroque" (cited by Viarre [above, note 7] 97).

<sup>39</sup> See Liebermann (above, note 15) 42.

<sup>40</sup> See Grimal (above, note 15) 42.

rapid flurry of heterogeneous events. The dismemberment is actualized in language as the parts of the body shift from being subjects to being objects of the verbs (*caput, comas, ora, membra*, 1093–97). It is not Hippolytus who “perishes with many a wound,” but his “ill-omened beauty” (*peritque multo vulnere infelix decor*, 1096).<sup>41</sup> When he is designated by a personal noun or pronoun, it is to underscore the dispersal of his body as a lifeless mass of unrecognizable pieces: *dominum rumpunt* (1102); *distractus Hippolytus* (1106). He (*ille*) is “gathered together” (*col-ligitur . . . con-fertur*, 1113f.) only for the funeral that closes the preceding dis-persion (1106; cf. 1093).

### Conclusion

The style of this passage reflects not just the inert turgidity of which Seneca is often accused,<sup>42</sup> but a set of compositional principles by which he radically transforms his sources. He does not aim at the linear clarity of classical narration, but at a sharp and rapid counterpoint of strikingly individual and sometimes overlapping details. He relies not on symmetry but on a doubling or tripling of motifs in spirals of increasing violence and intensity. His style, like that of the visual arts of his time, does not attempt to reproduce the well proportioned grace and harmony of his “classical” predecessors, but creates its own heavier, “baroque” effects of overwhelming massiveness, agitated and decentered movement, dis-orienting vastness, and emotional turbulence.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>41</sup> The theme of Hippolytus’ beauty (*decor, decus*) and its loss runs throughout the play: cf. 657–59, 761–76, 820–23, 1110, 1173f., 1269f.

<sup>42</sup> E.g. Liebermann (above, note 15) 58: “Senecas Stil ist schwer und statisch, ohne Wechsel und ohne Bewegung.”

<sup>43</sup> I thank TAPA’s editor and anonymous referees for helpful suggestions.