Senecan Tragedy and Virgil's Aeneid: Repetition and Reversal

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SENECAN TRAGEDY AND VIRGIL’S AENEID: REPETITION AND REVERSAL

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Classics in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Abstract

SENECAN TRAGEDY AND VIRGIL’S AENEID: REPETITION AND REVERSAL

by

Timothy Hanford

Advisor: Professor Ronnie Ancona

This dissertation explores the relationship between Senecan tragedy and Virgil’s Aeneid, both on close linguistic as well as larger thematic levels. Senecan tragic characters and choruses often echo the language of Virgil’s epic in provocative ways; these constitute a contrastive reworking of the original Virgilian contents and context, one that has not to date been fully considered by scholars. This study is organized according to three main themes that are argued to have strong intertextual aspects: repetition of the past, victor and vanquished, and maius nefas, or greater crime. In each case Seneca tragicus is seen to take a theme present in the Aeneid and give it new life, in the process questioning or undermining some of the assumptions, political, philosophical, and otherwise, that underlie Virgil’s epic program. This project focuses on the two Trojan War plays of Seneca, the Troades and Agamemnon, as well as on his Medea. Consideration of the intertextual dialogue between Senecan tragedy and Virgil’s Aeneid helps enlighten the nature of Senecan tragedy, Virgilian epic, and the process of aemulatio in Latin poetry in general.
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This dissertation is dedicated to my grandmother, Janette Elizabeth Hanford (1915-1989), who taught me about literature, music, and life.
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Chapter 1 – Introduction.

1.1 Senecan Tragedy and Intertextuality.

The tragedies of Lucius Annaeus Seneca, composed in the first century C.E., are highly allusive texts; they often contain clear echoes of earlier poetry, especially that of Virgil and Ovid. A consideration of this Senecan engagement with earlier poetry can shed new light on the plays, including the issues of Seneca’s tragic program, themes, and the struggles and motivations of his characters. In this thesis, I explore in detail connections between Senecan tragedy and Virgil’s *Aeneid*.\(^1\) I argue that Senecan tragedy has a dynamic interface with Virgil’s epic, and that exploration of this interface enhances one’s perspective on both poets’ works.

My study is thus intertextual; it seeks connections between different texts. In the last thirty years, scholars such as Barchiesi, Conte, Edmunds, Hinds, and Wills have taken intertextual approaches to Latin literature with groundbreaking results. Their work points out the highly allusive nature of much ancient Latin poetry; poets such as Virgil and Ovid appear very aware of the Greek and Latin poetic tradition, and concerned with their contribution to and place within this tradition. This literary awareness and self-awareness is taken by these scholars to be part of the essential fabric of the poetry in question. In other words, if a poet alludes to an earlier poet’s work, this need not be dismissed as flattery, display of erudition, or simply “background noise”\(^2\) nonessential to interpreting the text in question. Instead, the alluding poet can manipulate and reformulate earlier poetry in many different ways, creating both continuity and

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\(^1\) Throughout this dissertation, for Seneca’s tragedies, I employ the text of Zwierlein (1986), and for Virgil’s *Aeneid*, that of Mynors (1969). All translations are my own. In translating, I have tended toward a literal rendering in English of passages discussed, but have been freer in my approach at times in order to make the meaning clear.

\(^2\) I borrow the term from Hinds (1998, 19).
contrast in the process. It is certainly possible for a reader/audience to overlook this process of allusion and nonetheless derive meaning and enjoyment from a text such as Virgil’s *Aeneid* or Seneca’s *Troades*; however, a close investigation of such allusions can help one appreciate the complexity of a given work and its place in the literary tradition.

Intertextuality is not an exact science; as a study, it allows for constant reinterpretation as opposed to clear boundaries and conclusions. For example, one might ask “What constitutes a poetic allusion?” or “How does one decide if an allusion is meaningful enough to warrant discussion?” or “How do we know if a given author intended a given allusion?” Any answers to these questions are bound to be unstable, as they involve different vantage points— alluding poet, earlier source poet, audience—each of which is itself an unstable category. We cannot fully grasp a poet’s intention, nor fully evaluate the poet’s knowledge of earlier poetry at any given point in time; likewise an allusion cannot be firmly defined as, say, being made up of a certain minimum number of words—part of an allusion depends on if and how it is perceived by a given audience. Poets such as Virgil and Seneca do not footnote their works, saying, for example “I am here alluding to Lucretius;” instead, a reader must decide if s/he hears a specific allusion, and whether that allusion is interesting or meaningful. On similar issues in Latin intertextuality, Barchiesi (2001, 142) argues:

> Intertextuality is an *event*, not an *object*. It is not a thing, a fixed given to be analyzed, but a relation in motion, even a dynamic destabilization…. Given a text that refers to another text, no critical authority exists that can establish a priori (a) how much of the text alluded to is present in the alluding text, and how much instead must be “left behind;” (b) whether the prevailing sense must be one of similarity or of difference; (c) whether one should view intertextuality as a process or a result, as an operation ever in progress or as a final product.

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3 Hinds (1998, 47-8).
These ideas of indeterminacy and destabilization actually enhance intertextual studies, in that they explore complex interactions between texts and do not offer simple answers. Thus, Senecan intertextuality is not just a matter of *Quellenforschung*, i.e., searching for Seneca’s “sources” in order to determine from where exactly Senecan poetry derives, end of story. Instead, intertextuality creates a dialogue of sorts between texts, one that is by its nature open-ended, one suggesting both similarity and difference, repetition and reinvention. Seneca’s tragedies, given their allusive nature, are very receptive to this kind of investigation.  

1.2 Senecan Tragedy and Earlier Literature.

The eight tragedies attributed to Seneca (*Hercules Furens, Troades, Phoenissae, Medea, Phaedra, Oedipus, Agamemnon, and Thyestes*) are the last surviving corpus of tragedies from antiquity. This allows for comparison with many earlier poetic works, tragic and otherwise, Greek and Roman. While this thesis will mostly be concerned with close allusions to Virgil within the Senecan tragic corpus, it will first be helpful to first consider Senecan tragedy in the larger context of the earlier Greek and Roman poetic tradition, particularly of a tragic nature.

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4 In this thesis I use the terms “allusion,” “reference,” “intertext,” and “echo” more or less interchangeably. While the first two terms suggest more active intention on the part of the poet (i.e. the poet is intentionally alluding or referring to something), I agree with Edmunds (2001, 164) that distinctions between such terms as “allusion” and “intertext” are likely to be unstable, given, again, the fundamental unknowability of a poet’s intention. “Allusion” and “reference” are nonetheless valid terms, as the text itself, regardless of the poet’s intention, can “play off of” or “refer back” to earlier poetry.

5 Partial exceptions to this statement are the tragedies *Hercules Oetaeus* and *Octavia*, included under Seneca’s name in the manuscripts, but now believed by most scholars to be written by a follower or followers of Seneca, presumably after Seneca’s death. I follow Fitch’s argument (2004a, 332-4 and 510-14) that the two plays should not be attributed to Seneca. Besides stylistic differences, as noted by Fitch, both plays end with words spoken by the chorus, something that never happens in the other eight plays. The *Octavia*, a *fabula praetexta*, also shows an awareness of events after Seneca’s death (Tarrant 1998, 224 n.35), and includes Seneca himself as a character.
My main point in this inquiry will be that Seneca clearly draws on a large range of sources for his tragedies, and that among these Augustan poetry plays a very significant role.

First, Senecan tragedy has undeniable links with Attic tragedy of the fifth century B.C.E., the first tragedies in the Greco-Roman tradition. Every Senecan play has one or more counterparts in the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides in terms of subject matter, plot, and characters. Four plays have the same overall dramatic trajectory of Attic tragedies: *Hercules Furens* (Euripides’ *Herakles*), *Medea* (Euripides’ *Medea*), *Phaedra* (Euripides’ *Hippolytus*) and *Oedipus* (Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus*). The *Phoenissae* has links with at least two different Attic tragedies (Euripides’ *Phoenissae* and Sophocles’ *Oedipus at Colonus*). The *Thyestes* has no extant Greek counterparts, but tragedies of the same name are attested for Sophocles, Euripides, and other Greek tragedians. The *Agamemnon* has connections to Aeschylus’ play of the same name; and the *Troades* is a sort of amalgamation of the plots of Euripides’ *Troades* and *Hekabe*. Frequently, comparison of the Attic plays with those of Seneca indeed enlightens the intertextual, metadramatic aspects of Senecan tragedy – see for example the close study of Gill on Euripides’ and Seneca’s Medeas (1987) and Segal’s monograph on Seneca’s *Phaedra* (1986). As Segal says of the *Phaedra* (202), “[It] is at nearly every point conscious of its literary ancestry and therefore of its literariness. The ghost of Euripides haunts every line.” Indeed, some of the rhetorical pointedness of Senecan tragedy derives from its interaction with Attic tragedy; Senecan characters such as Oedipus, Medea, and Hecuba seem to remember and play off of their past tragic incarnations. While in all cases it can be argued that Seneca was familiar with these Attic tragedies, one significant limitation in terms of comparison is the general lack of

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6 Tarrant (1985, 40).
7 The influences on the *Agamemnon* and *Troades* will be further discussed in chapters 3 and 4, those on the *Medea* in chapter 5.
close verbal correspondences between Senecan and Attic tragedy.\(^8\) That is, the ideas, sentiments, and scenarios found in Senecan tragedy often overlap with those in Attic tragedy, and so create part of the poetic past that Senecan tragedy remembers; but there is relatively little engagement with these Greek texts on a close linguistic basis,\(^9\) something, as will be argued, not true in the case of Augustan poetry. It is also the case that Seneca almost never quotes Attic tragedy in his prose works.\(^10\)

All of Greek and Roman tragedy after Euripides and before Seneca is, unfortunately, a problem: what remains at present is fragmentary, conjectural, or nonexistent. Post-classical Greek tragedy likely has connections to Senecan tragedy, as Tarrant (1978) has argued, mostly by comparing dramaturgic elements found in Greek and Roman New Comedy to similar ones in Senecan tragedy; but unfortunately post-classical Greek tragedy does not survive. Likewise, republican and early imperial (i.e. pre-Senecan) Roman tragedy only survives in fragments. It is particularly regrettable that Augustan tragedy does not survive: Quintilian highly praises Varius’ *Thyestes* and Ovid’s *Medea*,\(^11\) and Seneca was probably familiar with both. Both plays likely

\(^8\) A point made by Tarrant (1978, 215 n. 8); however Lavery (2004) for one argues that traces of Aeschylean language can be found in Seneca’s *Agamemnon*.

\(^9\) Linguistic overlaps across languages (in this case, Greek and Latin) are, by their nature, more limited, or limited in a different way, than overlaps within one language. See chapter 5 on Sen. *Medea* 607-15 as a reworking of the first lines of Euripides’ *Medea*.

\(^10\) See Fantham (1982, 20) on this issue.

\(^11\) *Institutio Oratoria* 10.1.98: *Iam Varii Thyestes cuilibet Graecarum comparari potest. Ovidii Medea videtur mihi ostendere, quantum ille vir praestare potuerit, si ingenio suo imperare quam indulgere maluisset.* (“Now Varius’ *Thyestes* can be regarded as equal to any of the Greek tragedies. Ovid’s *Medea* seems to me to show how much that man could have excelled if he had preferred to control rather than indulge his genius.”)
have strong intertexts with Seneca’s plays, but, given that they do not survive, these intertexts are entirely speculative.\textsuperscript{12}

Despite these limitations, it is clear that Senecan tragedy has a vigorous and complex dialogue with earlier works in the tragic genre, both Greek and Roman, one that must be considered in any intertextual study on Seneca’s plays. At the same time, there is a wealth of extant ancient poetry, from other genres besides tragedy, with which Senecan tragedy intriguingly interacts. From a close linguistic perspective, the most significant candidates are the Augustan poets. Seneca’s tragedies display a strong knowledge of Augustan poetry, in particular, Virgil, Horace, and Ovid.\textsuperscript{13} As Mayer (1982) argues, it was in the time of Nero, a mere 50 years after the death of Augustus, that Augustan poetry such as that of Virgil and Horace attained classic status in Roman culture.\textsuperscript{14} Tarrant (1995, 219-20) argues that, by the Neronian period, the classics of Augustan poetry – including the dramatic works of Varius and Ovid – in a way supplanted those of the Greeks, so that there was no longer the necessary process of \textit{aemulatio} with Greek models on the part of Latin poets, such as previously concerned Augustan authors themselves (e.g. Virgil vs. Greek epic, Horace vs. Greek lyric, etc.). As a result, the new Augustan classics, composed in Latin, set the standard that a Latin poet in Seneca’s time might attempt to equal or surpass.

\textit{Seneca’s Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium} 79 provides evidence that Seneca felt that a poet of his time inevitably must and indeed should look to Augustan poetry for guidance and

\textsuperscript{12} Two small fragments of Ovid’s \textit{Medea} that do survive, found at Seneca the Elder \textit{Suasoriae} 3.7 and Quintilian \textit{Inst. Or.} 8.5.6 respectively, do not present strong overlaps with the language of Seneca’s play; see below on the fragment from the \textit{Suasoriae}.

\textsuperscript{13} Ker, in a forthcoming article on Seneca and Augustan culture, argues for the persistence of Augustan models in Seneca’s corpus, both prose and poetry.

\textsuperscript{14} Mayer (1982, 313) notes of Seneca’s tragedies: “we can only see them as much indebted to Augustan poetry.”
inspiration (Russell 1982, 5; Fantham 1982, 24; Trinacty 2007, 10-11). Seneca here advises that it may be worthwhile for Lucilius to write poetry on the subject of Mount Aetna, despite the fact that the earlier Augustan poets Virgil, Ovid, and Cornelius Severus had already treated this poetic locus (79.5). The idea of belatedness in comparison to earlier poetry, according to Seneca, is not a problem:

Omnibus praeterea feliciter hic locus se dedit, et qui praecesserant non praeripuisse mihi videntur quae dici poterant, sed aperuisse.

Furthermore, this locus [i.e. Aetna] turned out favorably for all [i.e. Virgil, Ovid, and Cornelius Severus], and those who had composed first on this topic seem to me not to have snatched away what could be said, but rather to have opened it up [i.e. for later poets].

Seneca’s words here have a strong intertextual ring; they suggest that later poetry can actually have a meaningful dialogue with that which preceded it; the verb aperuisse is especially instructive in this regard. In this particular instance it is notable that Virgil’s description of Aetna (Aeneid 3.570-582) presumably set the standard for later Augustan poets, and also those of Seneca’s time. Seneca further clarifies his point for Lucilius and other would-be poets (79.6):

Multum interest, utrum ad consumptam materiam an ad subactam accedas; crescit in dies et inventuris inventa non obstant. Praeterea condicio optima est ultimi: parata verba invenit, quae aliter instructa novam faciem habent. Nec illis manus inicit tamquam alienis; sunt enim publica.

It matters a great deal whether you undertake poetic material that has been exhausted or simply “ploughed up.” Poetic material grows day by day, and those things discovered [i.e. by earlier poets] do not stand in the way of those who are about to discover other things. Furthermore, the latest poet is in the best situation: he finds prepared words which, when arranged in another way, have a new form. He does not lay hands on them, as if they were not his own; for they are common property.

\[15\] I wish to thank Christopher Trinacty for sharing with me a draft of his monograph Senecan Tragedy and the Reception of Augustan Poetry (Oxford University Press, 2014). The book itself appeared too late for me to reference specifically in this dissertation.
While Seneca does not fully clarify the distinction between poetic material that is *consumpta* and *subacta*, his overall point is clear and informative: earlier poetry does not present an obstacle for later poets; instead, earlier poetry constitutes more *material* on which a later poet could meaningfully draw, so as to provide a new perspective (*novam faciem*) on this material. Furthermore, a poet need not worry about borrowing from earlier poetic works, as they are in the public domain.\(^{16}\)

Given the contents of this letter, it is perhaps not surprising that Senecan tragedy frequently echoes Augustan poetry. In the case of Horace, the choral odes of Senecan tragedy often have clear linguistic overlaps with Horatian lyric, as explored in Spika (1890). Ovid has an even stronger interaction with Senecan tragedy, to such an extent that he might be considered the one author to whom Senecan tragedy is most indebted: among other things, the profuseness as well as pointedness of Senecan poetic language clearly owes much to Ovidian poetry, especially the *Metamorphoses* and the *Heroides*, as the studies of Jakobi (1988), Trinacty (2007) and Hinds (2011) make clear.

While Ovid’s influence on Senecan tragedy is persistent and profound, the same is true of that of Virgil. Virgil occupies a special place, from Seneca’s perspective, as *the* great Roman poet.\(^{17}\) Seneca’s prose works contain no less than 119 quotes of Virgil’s poetry, much more than any other source, poetic, philosophical, or otherwise; Ovid comes in a distant (but notable) second, with 28 quotes (Motto and Clark 1993, 125). In his prose, Seneca frequently refers to Virgil as *Vergilius noster* and at one point calls him *maximus vates* (*De Brevitate Vitae* 9.2).

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\(^{16}\) cf. Horace *Ars Poetica* 128-32 on the issue of earlier poetry as *publica materies* for later poets.

\(^{17}\) It is interesting to note how Seneca’s early judgment on Virgil – some 50 to 75 years after Virgil’s death - is continuous with later and even current estimations of Roman poetry and Virgil’s place within that poetic tradition. See Ziolkowski and Putnam (2008) on the Virgilian tradition, including early receptions of Virgil such as that of Seneca (30-33).
Seneca thus shows a very strong familiarity with and admiration for Virgil’s poetry; his tendency to quote him as an authority of sorts (usually in a philosophical context) shows how much Seneca thought of Virgil’s poetry. While it would be a leap of judgment to assume that Seneca’s quotation of Virgil in a prose/philosophical context should necessarily argue for the influence of Virgil on Senecan poetry, the tragedies of Seneca actually confirm Virgil’s influence, as will be argued.

How exactly would Seneca have gained familiarity with Virgil’s poetry? It seems clear that Seneca must have studied and recited the works of Virgil in the course of his rhetorical education in the first half of the first century C.E. In 26 B.C.E., while Virgil was still alive, Q. Caecilius Epirota began instructing *adulescentes* on contemporary Roman poetry, first of all that of Virgil (Suetonius, *De Grammaticis* 16). After that, as Bonner argues (1977, 213–4), Virgil, especially the *Aeneid*, became standard material for Roman boys’ education. Quintilian approves of the contemporary teaching of Virgil in his own time, and some graffiti from Pompeii includes quotations (sometimes misspelled) from the early books of the *Aeneid* (Bonner 1977, 214). Seneca’s prose works, like his tragedies, reference not only the *Aeneid*, but also the

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18 Mayer (1982, 310) notes that at this early date Epirota could have only used the *Eclogues* and *Georgics*, and may never in fact have instructed on the *Aeneid*.

19 *Institutio Oratoria* 1.8.5 : *Ideoque optime institutum est, ut ab Homero atque Vergilio lectio inciperet, quamquam ad intelligendas eorum virtutes firmiore iudicio opus est; sed huic rei superest tempus, neque enim semel legentur* (“Therefore an excellent practice has been put in place that reading begin with Homer and Virgil, although a firmer judgment is needed to understand their merits; but time remains for this, for they will be read more than once”). See also Seneca’s *Consolatio ad Polybium* 8.2, in which he praises Homer and Virgil and encourages Polybius to find solace in their works.

20 See also Horsfall (2000, 250-53) for further discussion of Virgil as a school text and of Virgilian graffiti, and Milnor (2009) on Pompeian graffiti specifically relating to the *Aeneid*. 
Eclogues and the Georgics; but in both prose and tragedy, it is the Aeneid that is most frequently referenced. 

It is important to note that the echoes of Virgilian epic in Senecan tragedy constitute an intertextual dialogue of a specifically intergeneric nature. It will in fact be argued that the generic shift implicit in such borrowing is in fact part of the story: Senecan tragedy, qua tragedy, reinvents Virgilian epic. Indeed, the same process, in reverse, can be seen in Virgil’s Aeneid: Virgil’s epic contains tragic language that responds to that of Homer and the Greek tragedians, and, perhaps more importantly, it contains tragic episodes, most notably the passion and death of Dido (Aeneid 1 and 4), but also the fall of Troy (book 2), the death of Turnus (book 12) and other tragic plotlines and motifs. It is difficult to separate the epic and tragic elements of the Aeneid; the two necessarily overlap in a complex fashion. The same thing, in turn, can be said of Senecan tragedy; while it is firmly in the tragic genre, it intersects with epic, most notably the Aeneid (as well as Ovid’s Metamorphoses). Three examples of epic qualities in Senecan tragedy are extended descriptions or ephrases, extended similes, and lengthy catalogues; in the

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21 Batinski’s list of Virgilian citations in Seneca’s prose works (1983, 17-34) includes a total of 116 quotes from Virgil, 77 of which are from the Aeneid. Thus 66%, or two-thirds, of Seneca’s quotes of Virgil derive from the Aeneid.

22 Panoussi (2009) discusses intertexts and thematic overlaps between Greek tragedy and the Aeneid at length, noting Virgil’s knowledge of and indebtedness to works such as Aeschylus’ Oresteia and Sophocles’ Ajax.

23 Hardie (1993, 68) speaks of “Virgil’s radical contamination of epic with tragedy.” See also Conte (2007, 23-57 and 150-69), who argues that the Aeneid’s inclusion of multiple and divergent voices is essentially dramatic in nature (156): “Virgil’s new narrative technique comes from a grafting operation which makes the bitter branches of tragic ambiguity spring from the ancient trunk of epic. It is in this way that the divided language of tragedy invades the epic narrative.” Conte further notes (166) that Martial at 5.5.8 and 7.63.5 refers to Virgil as Maro cothurnatus, i.e. Virgil as essentially a tragic poet.

24 The OCD (3rd ed., 1996, 97; article signed by Leighton Reynolds, Miriam Griffin, and Elaine Fantham) comments on Seneca’s tragedies: “There is unmistakable influence from Ovid’s Heroides (Medea, Phaedra) and from episodes of violence and passion in the Aeneid and Metamorphoses: thus Troades makes full use of Aeneid 2, and Thyestes...undoubtedly adapts the language and psychology of Ovid’s Tereus in Met. 6.”
earlier extant Greek tradition, such elements are less commonly found in drama. Seneca clearly had few qualms about borrowing such apparently epic elements for his tragedies.\textsuperscript{25}

Seneca the Elder’s \textit{Suasoria} 3.7 provides evidence of deliberate appropriation of Virgilian language in a Roman tragedy that predates those of Seneca. Here Seneca’s father notes that Ovid was in the habit of borrowing phrases from Virgil, and that he did this \textit{non subripiendi causa, sed palam mutuandi, hoc animo ut vellet agnosc} (“not intending to steal, but to borrow openly, so that it might be recognized”). Thus, already in Augustan times, Virgil was a poet who was deemed worthy of allusion. In this respect, while discussing the Virgilian phrase \textit{plena deo},\textsuperscript{26} Seneca the Elder quotes a line from Ovid’s lost tragedy \textit{Medea}: \textit{feror huc illuc, vae, plena deo} (“I am carried this way and that, alas, full of the god”). If the phrase originally appeared in the \textit{Aeneid}, this would be an early appropriation of Virgilian epic language in Roman tragedy, one with which Seneca the Younger was most likely familiar.

In the same vein, Tarrant (1995, 225), in noting that much of Augustan poetry has intertextualities with earlier works of various genres (e.g. the Virgilian and Ovidian epics not only refer to earlier works in the epic tradition, but also to tragedy, elegy, etc.), argues that this generic cross-pollination is also echoed in Senecan tragedy:

One might fairly say that Seneca applies to tragedy the blending of genres so widely practiced by the major Augustan poets, and does so using predominantly Augustan material. Analyzing Seneca’s strong rereading of the Augustans is one of the most

\textsuperscript{25} See Tietze-Larson (1994) for a discussion of some of the epic elements in Senecan tragedy. She argues that Senecan tragedy operates more in the narrative, and hence descriptive, mode, and less in the dramatic mode, in contrast to Attic tragedy. The narrative/descriptive mode suggests links between Senecan tragedy and epic poetry, which she discusses. See also Rosenmeyer (1989, 161-78) on catalogues in Senecan tragedy, including their epic qualities. On Senecan tragedy and intertextuality across genre, see Tarrant (1995, 224-5), quoted in part below.

\textsuperscript{26} Unfortunately, the phrase does not survive in the Virgilian corpus; see Della Corte (1971), Borthwick (1972), and Trinacty (2009, 269 n.33) on this issue. All three scholars speculate that the phrase may have appeared somewhere in Virgil’s description of the Sibyl at \textit{Aen}. 6.46-51 and 77-80.
promising ways of further defining the themes and outlook of Senecan drama, but focusing on Seneca’s generic *contaminatio* may also enhance understanding of his dramaturgy.

Thus, as Tarrant argues, the very cross-genre nature of Senecan tragedy’s engagements with earlier poetry in a sense furthers the same intergeneric borrowing found in Augustan poetry. As Virgil’s and Ovid’s epics are eclectic in their intertextual echoes, so is Senecan tragedy. Just as the *Aeneid* reinvents earlier poetry in a sophisticated fashion, so, I argue, does Senecan tragedy reinvent the writings of Virgil and others.

1.3 Scholarship on Senecan Tragedy and Virgil.

While scholars have noted Senecan tragedy’s indebtedness to Virgil, very few have produced a comprehensive study on this issue, one that explores how Senecan tragedy and Virgilian poetry intersect. Seidensticker and Armstrong (1985, 923-4) lament the lack of full-scale studies on connections between Senecan tragedy and the Augustan poets. Tarrant (1995), as discussed above, argues for the profound influence of Augustan poetry on Senecan tragedy (in contrast to earlier scholarly attempts to understand Senecan tragedy through comparison to Attic tragedy), and he calls the *Aeneid* the “perhaps most variously and continuously present of all” Augustan influences on the tragedies (224-5). Boyle (1985, 1338) even argues that “Seneca, not Lucan, is the great Neronian successor” to Virgil.

Some scholarship explores this intertextual correspondence between Senecan tragedy and Virgil, but mostly on a limited basis. Ter Haar Romeny (1887) provides a useful catalogue of Virgilian *loci* within Senecan tragedy, but this catalogue is (of course) not exhaustive, and he offers no close reading or extended discussion of these Seneca-Virgil intertexts. Putnam (1995c) discusses Senecan tragedy’s interaction with Virgil’s *Aeneid* at length, but he specifically locates
his argument within the context of the end of the *Aeneid* (book 12) and Seneca’s redeployment of the unresolved emotions of *dolor*, *furor*, and *ira* found therein. Putnam’s discussion is very informative, but he does not discuss the links between Senecan tragedy and other books of the *Aeneid*, in particular 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, and 7.\(^{27}\) While Putnam’s focus on the destructive emotions operative in both Senecan tragedy and Virgilian epic is compelling, this thesis will argue for a different thematic basis between the two bodies of poetry, including specific linguistic overlaps, which also are not discussed in Putnam’s chapter at any length. Fantham and Schiesaro have also engaged with Seneca-Virgil intertexts, but on a limited basis.\(^{28}\) Furthermore, Putnam, Fantham and Schiesaro in these instances see mostly continuity, not reversal, between the poetic texts of Seneca and Virgil.\(^{29}\) Most, if not all, of this scholarship casts Seneca as an admiring “borrower” from Virgil, which he certainly was, as both his tragedies and prose works attest; but that is only part of the story. Zissos (2009), by contrast, points up the ironic contrasts between Virgil’s *Aeneid* and Senecan tragedy by focusing on passages from the *Troades* which call into question Virgil’s epic program; Seneca’s echoes of Virgil often seem ironic or even dissonant in comparison. Commenting on the theme of the circularity of human history as seen in Seneca’s *Troades*, Zissos argues: “Seneca’s persistent recourse to Virgilian allusion makes available a strategy of ‘ghost reading’ that signals notions of historical progress: the circularity of tragic iteration is implicitly set against the linearity of teleological epic, as articulated in the *Aeneid*."

\(^{27}\) There are, for example, many instances of *dolor*, *furor*, and *ira* spread throughout the *Aeneid*, not just at the very end, and Seneca’s quotes of the *Aeneid* in his prose works show no strong familiarity with or admiration for the last few hundred lines of Virgil’s epic as we have it today. Of the 43 quotes of the *Aeneid* in Seneca’s *Epistulae Morales*, only one is from book 12 (*EM* 58.3, quoting *Aeneid* 12.708-9), and in this instance Seneca is only making a point about Virgil’s use of archaic language.

\(^{28}\) Fantham (1975) on Virgil’s *Dido* and Seneca’s tragic heroines; Schiesaro on Seneca’s *Thyestes* and Virgil’s *Aeneid* (2003) as well as on Senecan tragedy and Virgil’s *Eclogues* (2006).

\(^{29}\) However, Schiesaro (2003, 208 and elsewhere) does discuss how Seneca’s *Thyestes* and other plays are at odds with the outlook and teleology of Virgilian epic.
Zissos is certainly not alone in seeing the pointed contrasts between Virgilian epic and Senecan tragedy; commentaries on Senecan tragedy, including those of Boyle (*Medea, Oedipus, and Troades*), Fantham (*Troades*), Fitch (*Hercules Furens*) and Tarrant (*Agamemnon and Thyestes*) often point out intriguing dissonances between Virgil and Seneca; but Zissos is one of the few to discuss the issue in a sustained way.

1.4 Seneca’s *Troades, Agamemnon, and Medea*, and Virgil’s *Aeneid*.

In this dissertation, I hope to expand upon the observations of Zissos, with a focus on three plays of Seneca: the *Troades, Agamemnon, and Medea*. These plays contain a great number of references to Virgil’s epic language, many of them showing a sophisticated contrast to or reworking of Virgilian material. The *Troades* and *Agamemnon* deal extensively with the Trojan War and its aftermath; thus it is perhaps not surprising that they overlap with the *Aeneid*. As the hero of the *Aeneid* is haunted by his memories of Troy, so are Seneca’s characters in these plays in a sense haunted by the *Aeneid*. The two plays also arguably respond to the two Homeric halves of the *Aeneid*: the *Agamemnon* is more Odyssean, in that it recounts events after the Trojan War, while the *Troades*, by virtue of its setting (Troy) is more Iliadic. Nonetheless, both plays show a fascination with the first half of the *Aeneid*, in particular book 2. The third play of Seneca I focus on, the *Medea*, has a sustained engagement with the *Aeneid*, particularly in the way that Medea’s plight in the play resembles that of Dido in Virgil’s epic.

Furthermore, these three plays explore important themes found in the *Aeneid*: in particular, repetition of the past, victor vs. vanquished, and *maius nefas*, or greater crime. I explore the first two themes as they appear in the *Troades* and *Agamemnon*, and I explore the third as it is presented in the *Medea*. As will be argued in the following chapters, these three
themes are all strongly intertextual in nature: they are thus appropriate and enlightening avenues of comparison between the two poets’ works.

First, temporal repetition is an essential element of both Senecan tragedy and Virgil’s Aeneid, in particular as seen in the theme of repeating the Trojan War: both Virgil’s and Seneca’s characters consistently engage with the memory of Troy, and attempt, in various ways, to come to grips with this issue. The Aeneid depicts Aeneas as being able to move beyond Troy, but in a problematic fashion (book 12); Seneca in his tragedies picks up on this Virgilian problem, and questions whether the legacy of the past, literary, historical, or otherwise, can be overcome – or even whether it should be. Senecan tragedy engages insistently with what Boyle calls the theme of semper idem,\textsuperscript{30} the idea of the repetitiveness and circularity of history. This makes sense in that these tragedies of Seneca are revenge plays (i.e. revenge as a repetitive act, based on the past, not transformative), but the influence of the Aeneid on Senecan tragedy with regard to this issue is clear and provocative, as the Aeneid at times offers a way out of the repeating temporal cycle, whereas Senecan tragedy usually does not.

Second, Senecan tragedy engages with the Virgilian issue of victor vs. vanquished: Virgil problematizes this issue most notably in casting Aeneas, the Trojan who was defeated at Troy (Aeneid 2), as the victor in Italy (Aeneid 12). Seneca picks up on this tension and embellishes it in both the Agamemnon and the Troades, in both cases blending Greek and Trojan identities, and thus questioning the identification of victor and victim.

Third, Virgil’s theme of maius nefas (“greater crime,” Aeneid 7.386) is vigorously explored in Senecan tragedy, in particular in the Medea. I argue that Senecan tragedy both borrows the Virgilian idea of maius nefas and takes it further, through Senecan tragedy’s

\textsuperscript{30} Boyle (1985, 1312-20).
obsession with crime and violence, as well as its even darker outlook and tone. The larger theme of *maius* is also implicitly related to Senecan and Virgilian themes of repetition: to what extent is something a repetition or, instead, something *maius*, something greater in comparison with the (literary) past?

1.5 Relative Dating of the *Troades*, *Agamemnon*, and *Medea*.

The tragedies of Seneca, who was born in Spain between 4 B.C.E. and 1 C.E. and died at Rome, under Nero’s orders, in 65 C.E., are very difficult to date. Neither Seneca nor any other ancient source gives any clear indication of when or in what order he might have composed them, nor does Seneca even mention that he is a writer of tragedies (Fantham 1982, 9-10); there is also no information about when, or in what manner, any tragedy might have been performed during Seneca’s lifetime, and the plays contain no clear references to current events of Seneca’s day. The fact that Seneca’s *Apocolocyntosis*, dated to late 54 (Eden 1984 4-5), at one point appears to parody his own *Hercules Furens* establishes a potential *terminus ante quem* of late 54 for that play. Fitch has produced an important article (1981) in which he analyzes the incidence of mid-line sense pauses and shortened final *o* in Senecan tragedy, the greater incidence of both of which is taken to indicate a later date of composition (as is the case, as Fitch shows, for plays of Sophocles and Shakespeare in terms of mid-line sense pauses). Based on this

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32 *Hercules Furens* 1296, *hoc en peremptus spicule cecidit puer* (“look, the boy fell slain by this arrow”) seems to be parodied by one line of *Apocol*. 7.2, *hoc ne peremptus stipite ad terram accidas* (“lest you fall to the earth slain by this club”) (Fitch 1987, 51). Both lines are spoken by Hercules, that of the *Apocol.* in the context of a mock-tragic speech. Tarrant (1985, 10 n.55) also mentions the overlap of *Apocol*. 12.3.3, *resonet tristi clamare forum* (“let the forum resound with sad clamor”) with *Hercules Furens* 1108, *resonet maesto clamore chaos* (“let chaos resound with sorrowful clamor”).
data, Fitch has postulated an early group of plays (Agamemnon, Oedipus, and Phaedra), a middle group (Hercules Furens, Medea, and Troades) and a late group (Thyestes and Phoenissae). I accept Fitch’s conclusions, and thus am led to believe that the Agamemnon was composed before the Troades and Medea; however, as Fitch’s dating is only relative between plays, it is impossible to assign a date to any one play. All that can be said is that Agamemnon was probably composed before 54 (by how much is unclear – perhaps during the reign of Claudius, Caligula, or even Tiberius) and the Troades and Medea after the Agamemnon. From these dating issues, some interesting points emerge: first, Agamemnon was likely an early composition of Seneca, and thus he may have been inclined to be more experimental in composing it (for example, the Agamemnon and the Oedipus are the only plays that contain polymetric odes); second, at least one (perhaps all) of the plays was very likely composed before the reign of Nero; and third, of the Trojan War plays, the play that comes first in terms of the chronology of Greek mythology (the Troades) was likely written second; thus, despite the similarities between the two plays, it seems unlikely that they were originally meant to be performed or read together (unlike, for example, the plays of Aeschylus’ Oresteia). Seneca’s Agamemnon does in some ways seem to be the product of a younger tragic poet; in particular, the second and fourth odes seem somewhat unrelated and foreign in tone to the rest of the play. Fitch’s study makes clear that the Thyestes was most likely written later in Seneca’s tragic career, and that play is notable for its strong unity of choral odes and episodes; the same can be said for the Troades and the Medea. One of the most significant overlaps between the Agamemnon and Troades, the captive chorus of Trojan women, also suggests that the Troades may have been composed later. In the Agamemnon, the chorus is secondary, only singing the third ode on the fall of Troy; the same chorus of Troades, which sings all the odes in that play, is strongly integrated in terms of the
subjects of their odes and the action of the play. Regarding the Medea, Nisbet (2008, 350) and Romm (2014, 34-6) speculate that the last lines of the chorus’ second ode (375-9) were composed after Claudius’ invasion of Britain in 43 C.E. (Romm argues for shortly after 43, Nisbet for some point between 43 and 54); but this evidence is in no way conclusive.

1.6 The Scope of Senecan Allusion to Virgil.

There is, as noted above, a wide range of Virgilian references within the Senecan corpus, including direct quotes of Virgil in the prose works as well as poetic allusions in the tragedies. In numerous cases, the poetic allusions to Virgil are reinforced by actual quotes of Virgil in Seneca’s prose works. Among these references a general distinction, always open to question, can be made regarding the degree to which a Senecan reference to Virgil is mostly consonant with or in harmony with Virgil’s poetry, or to some extent adverse or ironic in light of the original Virgilian context. As this thesis is mostly based on incidents in which Senecan poetics is in some way dissonant with that of Virgil, it should be noted that this is not always clearly the case. One example of relative harmony between these poets is Theseus’ description of Charon in the Hercules Furens as compared to the same description of Charon given by Aeneas in Aeneid 6:

Virgil, Aeneid 6.298-304: Seneca, Hercules Furens 764-8:

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33 See also Fantham (1981) for further discussion of the connections between the Troades and Agamemnon and their relative dating.
34 venient annis saecula seris, / quibus Oceanus vincula rerum / laxet et ingens pateat tellus / Tethysque novos detegat orbes / nec sit terris ultima Thule (“An era will come in later years, in which Ocean will loosen the bonds of the universe, and an enormous land will lie open, and Tethys will uncover new worlds, and Thule not be the furthest of lands”).
35 One example among several is Aeneid 1.94-96, which is directly quoted at Ep. Mor. 67.8 and alluded to in Phaedra 694-6, and also, less directly, in Agamemnon 512-4 and in Troades 369 and 650.
portitor has horrendus aquas et flumina servat terribili squalore Charon, cui plurima mento canities inculta iacet, stant lumina flamma, sordidus ex umeris nodo dependet amictus.

A grim ferryman oversees these waters and rivers, Charon of frightful squalor, whose chin is covered with a mass of white hair, his eyes are aflame, a dirty cloak hangs by a knot from his shoulders. He himself steers the ship with a pole, attends to the sails and conveys the dead in his dusky vessel, now rather old, but a god’s old age is fresh and green.

This intertext provides a neat example of Seneca clearly borrowing from a Virgilian precedent to a great extent both in terms of vocabulary and phrasing. Of Seneca’s 27 words, 18 of them (in italics above) have a direct or very close counterpart in Virgil. For example, in line 768, Seneca repeats three exact words from line 302 of Virgil (ipse, ratem, and conto), and substitutes regit for Virgil’s subigit. For Virgil’s three-word phrase stant lumina flamma (300), Seneca has the corresponding concavae lucent genae (767). But in this case, Seneca does not here appear to manipulate the Virgilian precedent in any notable or striking way, except that he adapts Virgil’s dactyls to tragedy’s iambs, and is somewhat more brief in his description; from an intertextual perspective, Seneca’s lines read somewhat like a sophisticated academic exercise on Virgil. Seneca’s Theseus clearly remembers Aeneas’ words, but he does not “do” much with them in terms of reinvention or reformulation.

However, other Senecan references to Virgil are pointed; they suggest contrast with Virgilian precedent. As Mann (2006) discusses, sometimes quotations of Virgil in the prose

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36 Fitch (1987, 320) notes that Seneca’s reworking of Virgil here “is toward a simple, direct, less elevated (and less evocative) style.”
works seem not entirely in keeping with the original Virgilian context or tone. The Menippean satire *Apocolocyntosis* provides an informative example in which Seneca plays off of Virgilian precedent: the dead emperor Claudius is indirectly described as approaching the heavens non passibus aequis (1.2), a direct quotation of *Aeneid* 2.724, in which Ascanius is described following his father Aeneas out of Troy with exactly the same phrase, “with unequal steps.” As Eden (1984, 66) notes, “Seneca gives an exquisitely malicious twist to the meaning; Iulus’ steps were unequal to his father’s, Claudius’ steps were unequal to each other.” Seneca here thus plays off of the original Virgilian meaning to make a witty point about the limping Claudius and his supposed deification.37

Here Seneca is quoting Virgil verbatim, something that does not happen in the tragedies. However, the language of Senecan tragedy is often close enough to Virgil to suggest a clear echo (as in the Charon example above) as well as contrast. Consider, for example, these words of defiance spoken by Seneca’s Medea to the nurse (*Medea* 159): *fortuna fortes metuit, ignavos premit* (“fortune fears the brave, but crushes cowards”). Here we see a shocking reversal of *Aeneid* 10.284, *audentis fortuna iuvat* (“fortune helps the daring/brave”)38 as well as Terence *Phormio* 203, *fortis fortuna adiuvat* (“fortune helps the brave”) (Costa 1973, 87). In line with Seneca’s Stoic thinking, Medea seeks to rise above and conquer the vicissitudes of *fortuna*, in the process upending the inspirational, “feel-good” words of Virgil and Terence. References to Virgil within Seneca’s works thus vary in terms of the way they interact with the earlier text; in this thesis I will necessarily be selective in choosing intertexts which can be perceived as in some significant way reversing or calling into question Virgilian precedent. It is also often the case, as these two examples perhaps suggest, that Seneca reinvents Virgilian language in a new context

37 See Edmunds (2001, 140) for the relationship between parody and intertextuality.
38 The Virgilian phrase is actually quoted by Seneca at *Ep. Mor*. 94.28.
that is often more horrific or fatalistic, as is appropriate given the dark and morbid shades of Senecan tragedy.

1.7 Outline of Following Chapters.

Going forward, the outline for my dissertation will essentially be thematic in nature, that is, structured according to the three themes noted above: repetition of the past, victor and vanquished, and *maius nefas*. The second chapter will briefly explore all three themes as found in Virgil’s *Aeneid*, in order to give important context for my following discussion of how Seneca reinvents these themes in his tragedies. Chapter 3 will discuss the theme of repetition of the past in Senecan tragedy, with a focus on the *Troades* and *Agamemnon*. Chapter 4 will cover the theme of victor vs. vanquished, also as found in the *Troades* and *Agamemnon*. Chapter 5 will discuss the theme of *maius nefas* especially as found in the *Medea*. 
Chapter 2: Three Intertextual Themes in Virgil’s Aeneid.

2.1 The Aeneid and Intertextuality.

The purpose of this chapter is to briefly outline three specific themes – repetition of the past, victor and vanquished, and maius nefas – found in Virgilian epic that, as I will argue in subsequent chapters, have a profound influence on Senecan tragedy. My discussion of Virgilian themes will thus be selective, not comprehensive; furthermore, there will be discussion of aspects of and passages from the Aeneid in later chapters that do not form part of the present chapter. As subsequent chapters will focus on Senecan tragedy and its intersection with Virgilian epic, specifically according to these three themes, it will be helpful to survey briefly the same themes as they appear in Virgilian epic. In subsequent chapters, Seneca will be seen to take these themes, which are mostly understated in the Aeneid, and give them strong prominence in his tragedies.

In fact, all three of these themes have a strong intertextual aspect. As suggested in chapter 1, Virgil’s Aeneid shares with Seneca’s tragedies a preoccupation with earlier poetry. The Aeneid is itself a highly allusive text, perhaps the most famously and complexly allusive text of antiquity. Like Senecan tragedy, the Aeneid references works of various genres, including epic (e.g. Homer, Apollonius, Ennius), didactic (e.g. Lucretius, Virgil himself in the case of the Georgics), tragedy (e.g. Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides), and elegy (e.g. Catullus). In all cases, Virgil is not engaged in simple imitation of his poetic forebears, but rather reinvention and transformation of past poetry within the complex fabric of the Aeneid. To give two very brief examples: in the case of epic, Virgil incorporates not only Homer’s Odyssey but also the Iliad, signaled in the proem (arma virumque, 1.1), as well as throughout the course of the poem, perhaps most notably in its Odyssean and Iliadic halves (books 1 to 6 and 7 to 12 respectively).
Virgil thus reinvents Homer by including both Homeric epics within one new epic poem; this idea of literary merging will be seen to be important in the Virgilian epic program. Furthermore, Virgil’s epic reverses the traditional order of Homeric epic, as the first half of the *Aeneid* is more Odyssean, and the second more Iliadic.\(^\text{39}\) Second, in the case of Lucretius, scholars such as Hardie (1986) and Lyne (1994) have discussed Virgil’s contrastive reworking of the *De Rerum Natura*. Lyne mentions the close echo and reversal of *DRN* 5.1127ff. found in *Aeneid* 6.851;\(^\text{40}\) Hardie likewise sees in Virgil’s works “a very close and detailed dependence on the *De Rerum Natura* combined frequently with a total transformation of the content of Lucretius” (233). Thus the process of reversing or transforming an earlier poetic text does not begin with Seneca; instead, as suggested above, Seneca is, ironically, imitating Virgil by reversing him, as will be seen. While in these brief examples Virgil is seen to be working in a spirit of emulation regarding certain specific past poetry or poets, the following discussion will briefly pursue specific themes found in the *Aeneid* that, I argue, have intertextual aspects, as they also do in Senecan tragedy.

2.2 Repetition of the Past in the *Aeneid*.

The *Aeneid* shows a consistent fascination with the past, particularly the Trojan War. One of Aeneas’ most pressing concerns in the epic is his need to move beyond Troy and its memory,

\(^{39}\) Wills (1996, 23) makes this interesting point: “the fact that the order of the *Aeneid*’s Odyssean wanderings and Iliadic war inverts the Homeric order makes it no less (perhaps more) an allusion than if the sequence were not inverted.”

\(^{40}\) Both Lucretian and Virgilian passages contain the phrase *regere imperio* (“to rule with *imperium*”), but in Lucretius the phrase is a warning, in Virgil an injunction: “The Lucretian text tells present day Romans to lead the quiet life: *not* to seek ‘regere imperio’. Anchises in the *Aeneid* tells the Roman the opposite: that ‘regere imperio’ is, precisely, his duty.” (Lyne 1994, 194)
and thus reconfigure history, for his sake as well as for future Romans. By transforming himself from victim of the Greeks at Troy into Trojan victor in Italy, Aeneas will reinvent himself and thus reverse the past narrative of Homeric epic. Troy and the Trojan War thus become an extended metaphor in the Aeneid for the past. This idea of past time relates to the notion of past poetry: as Aeneas struggles to master his Trojan past, so do Virgil and his epic seek to carve out space for themselves in a world dominated by Greek poets, including Homer and the poets of the epic cycle. Furthermore, the memory of Troy is important from a dynastic aspect in that Augustus and the Julian gens claimed to be descended from Iulus/Ascanius (Aen. 6.789-90); the story of Aeneas and Ascanius’ survival of Troy’s fall and their migration to Italy is thus a foundational story for the rulers of the early empire, from Augustus to Nero.

Hardie, in a brief discussion of the theme of repetition in Virgil’s Aeneid (1993, 14-18), argues that “In the Aeneid repetition is above all of Troy and events at Troy” (15). This is true as early as book 2, in which Aeneas, at Dido’s request, gives an extended account of the fall of Troy. Aeneas famously begins his account with the words infandum, regina, iubes renovare dolorem (“Queen, you order me to renew an unspeakable grief,” 2.3). Aeneas is thus required to bring the fall of Troy, and the difficult emotions associated with it, to life again (the sense of renovare, I argue) in words. Aeneas indicates that he himself played a significant part in this story (quorum pars magna fui, 2.6), and part of his sense of dolor at recounting these events is

Contrast the view of Pöschl (1962, 37-42), who sees part of Aeneas’ essential duty as refounding a new Troy, something that, he argues, the Aeneid realizes. Virgil’s text simply does not bear this out: Troy’s refounding does not happen, as the Trojans will ultimately fuse with the Latins in Italy, and significantly lose their name, according to Juno’s requirement, agreed to by Jupiter in Aeneid 12.819-42. While Poschl makes the good point that Aeneas states to his soldiers that he hopes to refound Troy in Italy at Aen. 1.206 (illic fas regna resurgere Troiae, “there it is right for the kingdom of Troy to arise again,”), this specific hope does not come true in the progression of Virgil’s epic.
clearly based on his own inability to save the city, and the fact that he abandoned it; his words in 2.431-4 display an Aeneas who may even feel guilt at having survived Troy; thus the very recounting of Troy is a painful experience. Within the narrative, Hector and Venus warn Aeneas that he must abandon Troy, but he at times hesitates. At the end of book 2, Aeneas returns to the city in order search in vain for his wife Creusa (749-794); the language here is strongly suggestive of temporal repetition, as in 749-51:

ipse urbem repeto et cingor fulgentibus armis.  
stat casus renovare omnis omnemque reverti  
per Troiam et rursus caput obiectare periclis.  

I myself seek the city again, protected by my shining armor.  
I decide to renew every risk and retrace my steps throughout all of Troy and again expose myself to danger.

The description of Aeneas returning to find Creusa is a mini-drama of repetition within Aeneas’ larger recounting of the fall of Troy; note the use of renovare in 750, as in 3 discussed above. He is not even safely out of Troy, and already he is revisiting it. Aeneas’ feelings for his wife lead him back to the place he must leave behind, attempting to maintain a marriage that is at

42 The same issue of Aeneas’ act of abandonment will, ironically, resurface in book 4, when Aeneas leaves Carthage and Dido behind; Dido seems to miss the hints found in Aeneas’ narrative in books 2 and 3. See Ovid Heroides 7.83-5, in which Ovid’s Dido bitterly notes this.  
43 Iliaci cineres et flamma extrema meorum, / testor, in occasu vestro nec tela nec ulla / vitavisse vices Danaum, et, si fata fuissent / ut caderem, meruisse manu (“Ashes of Troy and final flame of my people, I swear that in your fall I neither avoided the weapons nor any retaliations of the Greeks, and if it had been fated that I fell there, I would have earned it by my own hand.”)  
44 There is also later in the Creusa episode Aeneas’ repeated manner of calling on his lost wife (2.769-70, maestusque Creusam / nequiquam ingemines iterumque iterumque vocavi, “and wretched, I in vain, repeating again and again, called on Creusa”), noted by Panoussi (2009, 155). On the vocabulary of repetition, Hardie (1993, 17) writes: “Alius, the word repeated in Aeneas’ nos alia ex aliis in fata vocamur [Aen. 3.494], is one of a number of words of iteration, alius, alter, iterum, rursus, etc. whose occurrence in epic is always worth attention. Alius can mean both old and new, another of the same or a different other; and that is precisely the issue, a matter for historical and literary judgment.” It will be seen that such language of iteration and the issues it brings with it are also prominent in Senecan tragedy.
odds with his future political status in Italy, as Creusa’s ghost soon tells him (776-789). While Aeneas appears ready to lose his life on the night of Troy’s fall, he is in a sense saved by his future in Italy, which Virgil will narrate in the second half of the epic.

As Aeneas’ narrative continues into book 3, during which Aeneas and the Trojans seek a new settlement, the memory of Troy and the question of reliving Troy loom large. This is especially true in the Buthrotum episode (3.294-505), in which Aeneas visits Andromache, former wife of Hector, and Helenus, seer and brother to Hector, who are now married. Aeneas first meets Andromache as she is engaged in making offerings at a cenotaph (tumulum...inanem, 304) for Hector, by the banks of a stream described as falsi Simoentis undam, a copy of the Simois in the Troad. Andromache is still overwhelmed by her Trojan past, to the point that she seeks to recreate Hector’s tomb in similar surroundings. Furthermore, when she sees Aeneas, she wonders if she is in the underworld (311-2), and then declares Polyxena, who was sacrificed at Troy, felix ante alias (321). Andromache, as Quint (1993, 57-60) argues, serves as a warning to Aeneas on the dangers of being obsessed with Troy, for Andromache’s (new) Troy is a vision of death and mourning; she seems lost in the past, in a sort of spiritual death. Aeneas then sees the city of Buthrotum itself, which is also a pale copy of Troy (349-51):

procedo et parvam Troiam simulataque magnis
Pergama et arentem Xanthi cognomine rivum
agnosco, Scaeaque amplector limina portae.

I move on and recognize Little Troy, with a citadel in imitation of great Pergamum, and a parched stream with the name of Xanthus. I embrace the threshold of the Scaean gate.

Buthrotum is a sort of Trojan theme park; Helenus has designed his new city as a lesser copy of Troy, one that, in its imitation, suggests how much it falls short of the earlier model. The description of the new Xanthus as parched (arentem) is particularly instructive in this regard: this
copy of Troy is feeble and withered. Despite the fact that the Trojans of Buthrotum have survived Troy, they live in a Trojan past. For Aeneas, such a scenario is ultimately problematic because Troy was defeated; as Helenus prophecies to Aeneas, things under greater auspices (maioribus...auspiciis, 374-5) await the son of Venus.\(^45\)

The problematic nature of reliving Troy is further brought out in Aeneid 5.632-4, when Iris, disguised as Beroe, encourages the Trojan women who have sailed with Aeneas to set fire to the Trojan ships. In this guise, Iris exclaims to the women:

\[
o patria et rapti nequiquam ex hoste penates, 
nullane iam Troiae dicentur moenia? nusquam 
Hectoreos amnis, Xanthum et Simoenta, videbo?
\]

O fatherland and penates snatched in vain from the enemy, will no walls now be said to be of Troy? Will I nowhere see the rivers of Hector, Xanthus and Simois?

Iris effectively uses the idea of recreating Troy in order to convince the women to burn the ships, thus giving up hopes for settlement in Italy. In fact, after most of the ships are saved, Aeneas, at the advice of Nautes and the spirit of Anchises, settles the women, the aged and the weak in a new foundation, Sicilian Acesta, parts of which Aeneas actually designates with the names Ilium and Troia (5.711-61). Thus Acesta becomes another incarnation of past Troy, like Buthrotum, which Aeneas needs to leave behind.

Once Aeneas arrives in Italy, the Sibyl predicts that his future will, unfortunately, be similar to his past at Troy (6.86-94):

\[
\text{bella, horrenda bella,} 
\text{et Thybrim multo spumantem sanguine cerno.} 
\text{non Simois tibi nec Xanthus nec Dorica castra}
\]

\(^{45}\) As Quint (1993, 55) notes: “It is because Italy is a terra incognita, lying outside their past experience, that it can be a virgin territory for the defeated Trojans, a site for a new and fresh beginning.”
Part of the great challenge to Aeneas in his settlement in Italy will be a war that, as the Sibyl styles it, will closely resemble the Trojan War. Aeneas thus will be required, in the second half of Virgil’s epic, to repeat his Trojan past and, in this case, overcome it, by winning this new war.\textsuperscript{46} The Sibyl here describes the waters of Italy as similar to those in Troy, assimilates Turnus to Achilles\textsuperscript{47}, and equates the coming marriage of Aeneas and Lavinia to that of Paris and Helen. From a literary perspective, it may be said that the scenario in which Aeneas will struggle in Italy is necessarily close to that of Homer’s \textit{Iliad}; as much of Virgil’s descriptions of battles and duels derive from Homer, so also Virgil and his epic must seek to differentiate themselves from such a model.

The Sibyl’s prediction is further confirmed by Juno’s speech in 7.293-322, in which she complains of Aeneas’ impending settlement in Italy and promises to summon the forces of the

\textsuperscript{46} Quint (1993, 50) argues, “Thus the new \textit{Iliad} of the second half of the \textit{Aeneid} forces the Trojans to repeat their past struggle, but they will repeat it \textit{with a difference}: this time they will be the winners.”

\textsuperscript{47} Horsfall (2000, 165) notes that the phrase \textit{alis} \textit{Achilles} (as opposed to \textit{alter} \textit{Achilles}) implies a non-Greek warrior, i.e. Turnus.
underworld (*Acheronta*, 312) in order to create delays (*moras*, 315) for the marriage of Aeneas and Lavinia. Her speech ends with an address to Lavinia (7.317-322):

> hac gener atque socer coeant mercede suorum:
> sanguine Troiano et Rutulo dotabere, virgo,
> et Bellona manet te pronuba. nec face tantum
> Cisseis praegnas ignis enixa iugalis;
> quin *idem* Veneri partus suus et Paris *alter*,
> funestaeque *iterum recidiva* in Pergama taedae.

Let the father-in-law and son-in-law join at the cost of their own people:
your dowry, maiden, will be Trojan and Rutulian blood,
and Bellona awaits you as bridesmaid. Not only did
Hecuba, pregnant with flame give birth to a marriage of fire,
no, it will be the same for the one born of Venus, a second Paris,
and deathly nuptials will again take place – in reborn Troy.

Not only does Juno intend to mix Aeneas’ and Lavinia’s nuptials with violent war; she also, like the Sibyl, makes an explicit connection in this respect to the past Trojan war, in which Lavinia is likened to Helen, Venus to Hecuba, and Aeneas to Paris.⁴⁸ Juno’s plan seems to employ repetition in order to frustrate Aeneas and his people, as they will be required to relive a past scenario in which they fared badly. Repetition can indeed be maddening: characters seem to be caught in a regressive cycle with no hopes for transformation. In employing repetition, Juno may seem to act out of revenge, that is, she may wish Aeneas and his people to suffer for their past by reliving that (unfortunate) past. But Juno already had her revenge against the Trojans when Troy was destroyed; in fact, she herself is caught up in repetitive acts as she once again realizes her hostility to all things Trojan. Aeneas’ crime in Juno’s eyes, as in *Aeneid* 1, seems to be that he survived Troy. At the same time, the notion of *recidiva Pergama* (7.322; the same phrase is also found at 4.344 and 10.58), especially in the context of the second half of the *Aeneid*, suggests textual repetition, as books 7 to 12 repeat the *Iliad* and other poetic accounts of

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⁴⁸ Note that at *Aen*. 4.215 the Numidian king Iarbas, frustrated because Dido prefers marriage to the son of Venus, refers to Aeneas as *ille Paris*. 

29
the Trojan War. The question is whether this will be regressive repetition, or repetition as transformation. 49

After book 7, other characters pick up on the rhetoric of repetition employed by the Sibyl and Juno. In book 9, the Rutulians and their allies use this motif to strengthen their confidence and taunt the Trojans. Turnus, addressing his troops, likens himself to the sons of Atreus, as his (planned) marriage, like that of Menelaus to Helen, was marred by a Trojan (9.138-9), and, before killing Pandarus, styles himself another Achilles (hic etiam inventum Priamo narrabis Achillem, “you will tell to Priam [in the underworld] that here also you found an Achilles,” 9.742). Turnus’ knowledge of the past Trojan War is analogous to a knowledge of past poetry, and in turn reflects Virgil’s aemulatio with Homer and others. Numanus, in taunting the Trojans, calls them bis capti Phryges (9.599), as they are once again besieged, now in Italy. 50

On the pro-Trojan side, at the beginning of book 10, Venus, in complaining to Jupiter of Aeneas’ and the Trojans’ continuing struggles, expresses frustration at this same cycle of temporal repetition (10.25-30):

numquamne levari
obsidione sines? muris iterum imminet hostis
nascentis Troiae nec non exercitus alter,
atque iterum in Teucros Aetolis surgit ab Arpis

49 See Quint (1993) for a further description of the tension between these two types of repetition (regressive and transformative) in the Aeneid. Quint draws on Brooks (1984), who in turn discusses Freud’s idea of the repetition compulsion found in Beyond the Pleasure Principle. Quint argues that the second half of the Aeneid allows the Trojans, as ultimate victors in Italy, to find a way out of repetition; however, Quint (like Putnam 1995b) sees Aeneas’ final killing of Turnus as problematic in that it may suggest a further repetitive cycle of revenge.

50 The sense of bis capti can also refer to the fact that Troy was conquered twice, first by Hercules, second by Agamemnon’s expedition. That is in fact the sense of Turnus’ later similar reference to the Trojans as a gentis bis victae (11.402), and Anchises expresses the same idea in Aen. 2.642-3, as does Helenus in 3.476. But here in book 9, as Williams notes ad loc., Numanus is referring to the current besieging of the Trojan camp during Aeneas’ absence as a repetition of the besieging of their city during the Trojan War. Later on the Trojan side, Latinus at 12.34 refers to his Latins as bis victi at the hands of the Trojans.
Tydides. equidem credo, mea vulnera restant
et tua progenies mortalia demoror arma.

Will you never allow
for an end of besieging? An enemy again
threatens the walls of a new Troy, a second army;
and again a son of Tydeus, from Aetolian Arpi,
rises up against the Trojans. Indeed, I believe, my wounds remain
and I, your offspring, delay mortal arms.

Venus also sees the Italian war as a repetition of that in Troy; she complains about just what Juno
had promised in 7.319-22 (though Venus tellingly does not mention Aeneas’ new marriage), to
the point that she sarcastically suggests that she will again be wounded by Diomedes, as in Iliad
5.323-51. The memory of Troy has become a rhetorical locus at this point in the Aeneid, to the
extent that a character such as Venus can self-consciously reflect on her earlier role in Homeric
epic. She even suggests that her Trojans be allowed to go back to Troy and settle on its ashes
(10.59-62):

non satius cineres patriae insedisse suprmos
atque solum quo Troia fuit? Xanthum et Simoenta
redde, oro, miseris iterumque revolvere casus
da, pater, Iliacos Teucris.

Would it not be better to have settled on the last ashes of their fatherland
and the soil where Troy stood? Give back, I beg you, the Xanthus
and the Simois to the wretched and again allow, father, the Trojans
to endure their ill fortune in Ilium.

These words of Venus, which end her speech, summarize her frustration with the repetition of
the past. Her mention of the Xanthus and Simois recalls the Sibyl’s prophecy of repetition in
6.88-89: the Sibyl has been proven right, and Venus can see no way out of this cycle.\footnote{Venus herself describes Aeneas as attempting to found in Italy a \textit{recidiva Pergama} (10.58),
echoing Juno’s words in 7.322. In her response to Venus’ speech (10.63-95), Juno in fact points
out that Venus was a primary cause of the Trojan War (90-93), the implication being, perhaps,
that she has no grounds to complain about this new war in Italy.}
In book 12, at the end of the epic, Aeneas is described as complaining about repetitive cycles, as he prepares to attack the city of the Latins (12. 579-582):

\[
\text{ipse inter primos dextram sub moenia tendit} \\
\text{Aeneas, magnaque incusat voce Latinum} \\
\text{testaturque deos itern se ad proelia cogi,} \\
\text{bis iam Italos hostis, haec altera foedera rumpi.}
\]

Aeneas himself in the forefront, under the walls, extends his right hand, and blames Latinus in a loud voice, and calls the gods as witness that he again is forced to do battle, with the Italians his enemies a second time, that this second treaty is broken.

Aeneas’ complaint is notable in that here the cycle of repetition is contained within the *Aeneid*: just as the preliminary treaty with Latinus was broken in book 7 (through the intercession of Juno and the Fury), so again the agreement on a duel between Aeneas and Turnus to resolve the war was broken (through the intercession of Juno and Juturna).\(^{52}\) Thus the hero of Virgil’s epic himself acknowledges the repetitious nature of his ordeals, and uses such notions to defend his current actions.

In the final (delayed) duel between Aeneas and Turnus at the very end of the *Aeneid*, Aeneas finds a problematic way out of the cycle of repetition: through Aeneas’ victory over Turnus, the Trojans finally win a war, thus reversing their defeat at Troy (*Aeneid* 2), and establish a new homeland. Thus the Trojans, through Virgil’s epic, are able to reverse the notion of themselves as the losers of history: the Roman Empire, under the guidance of Augustus, will bear out that this victory of Troy and its descendants is final – they are granted *imperium sine fine* (*Aen*. 1.279).

\(^{52}\) Putnam (1966, 175) also argues that the Trojans’ attack on the city of the Latins in *Aeneid* 12 looks back to the fall of Troy narrated in book 2; now the situation is reversed, as the Trojans are the aggressors. He notes that the phrase *ipse inter primos* (12.579, quoted above), referring to Aeneas, was also used to refer to Pyrrhus in 2.479, before he kills Priam. The same phrase is also used of Turnus in the catalogue of troops at 7.783.
The final duel between Aeneas and Turnus is, from an intertextual aspect, perhaps most reminiscent of that between Hector and Achilles in *Iliad* 22: the two greatest warriors from each side of the battle have an extended duel that is essential in determining the outcome of the war. Aeneas revenges the killing of Pallas – and, more broadly, of Hector – by killing Turnus, the new Achilles (*Aen.* 6.89, 9.742); his lack of mercy for Turnus reflects Achilles’ attitude toward Hector in *Iliad* 22, who also was avenging the death of his companion (Patroclus). Thus the Trojan War has been reversed in Italy. At the same time, Aeneas’ duel necessarily suggests another Homeric duel, that between Paris and Menelaus in *Iliad* 3: both duels are predicated upon issues of marriage and further political rule (unlike, for the most part, the Achilles-Hector duel). The duel between Paris and Menelaus in the *Iliad* was famously indecisive, because it was contrary to the will of Zeus, and so Paris was rescued by Aphrodite; but Aeneas’ victory over Turnus is shockingly realized through Aeneas’ merciless killing of Turnus. Thus Virgil destabilizes the final victory of Aeneas by locating it within various Homeric perspectives; is Aeneas’ killing of Turnus decisive, or not? To repeat an earlier poetic scenario is problematic: to what extent does the poet suggest transformation, or simple repetition? The emphatic end of the *Aeneid*, in which Aeneas displays no mercy for the conquered Turnus (cf. Anchises’ injunction *parcere subiectis*, *Aen.* 6.853) suggests that Virgil’s epic only partially allows for an escape from the repetitive cycle of violence; Seneca’s tragedies in turn, as will be argued, confirm this notion. As Hardie (1993, 15) argues, “The impossibility of circumscribing repetition within the *Aeneid* overflows into the ‘repetitions’ of the poem in the works of the successors of Virgil.”

Furthermore, as has been suggested above, this idea of repetition in the *Aeneid* has an important political and historical aspect. Quint (52) argues of these differing notions of repetition – i.e., transformative vs. regressive – in the *Aeneid*: “The negative and positive forms of
repetition in the two halves of the epic correspond to the double message of Augustan propaganda: the injunction to forget a past of civil war (so as to stop repeating it), and the demand that this past be remembered and avenged (and so be repeated and mastered).” Thus Aeneas’ final victory in the Aeneid has an essential analogue in Augustus’ victories over his and Caesar’s enemies in the civil wars of the first century B.C.E. On the one hand, these victories ensured peace and prosperity for Rome and its empire, and an end to civil war. On the other hand, they entailed revenge, often of a bloody sort, over those Romans who resisted Caesar and Octavian during their quests for dominion. Thus the remembrance of past war may be problematic: rather than evoking a political solution, it may suggest further repetition of a violent and vengeful past. While Seneca lived during the Pax Romana, the civil war of 68-9 C.E., just three years after the death of Seneca, proved that the Julio-Claudian principate inaugurated by Augustus had its limits.

The theme of repetition of the past in the Aeneid, particularly of the fall of Troy, is thus ambivalent: the way that Aeneas conquers and transforms his past is compromised by the painful memory of this very past. As argued, this ambivalence reflects also the struggle of the poet, who may seek to outdo past poetry, but also may be heavily reliant upon past poetic precedents in doing so. In fact, as will be seen in chapter 3, the struggle with the poetic past as found in Senecan tragedy takes this issue of repetition to new levels, with particular reference to Virgilian epic, and, once again, with political implications.

2.3 Victor and Vanquished in the Aeneid.

A second theme that is important to Virgil’s Aeneid and Senecan tragedy is what I refer to as victor and vanquished. In the Aeneid, Virgil at times suggests the blending of victor and
victus, or winner and loser, in a way that is potentially troubling, and that furthermore suggests a blending of texts and poetic traditions. The Aeneid is to some degree about winning, that is, it consistently points toward the final victory of Aeneas and the Trojans in Italy – and, by extension, the victory of the Romans and Augustus. But Virgil problematizes this theme by also portraying Aeneas and his people as the losers of history, especially in the Iliou Persis that is book 2. Put another way, part of the identity of Aeneas as victor in the Aeneid is founded upon his earlier status as victus in the Trojan War, and this paradox is essential to parts of the Aeneid, including book 2 and Aeneas’ ultimate victory over Turnus in book 12.

This notion of the blending of victor and victus is actually a favorite topos in Roman literature: “Latin authors of all ages and genres seem drawn to the juxtaposition of conqueror and conquered” (Wills 1996, 251). Examples are found as early as Ennius, and Virgil was undoubtedly aware of these: Williams (1973, 402) on Aeneid 11.305-6 (discussed below) notes that Servius quotes Ennius Annales 493: qui vincit non est victor nisi victus fatetur (‘he who conquers is not a conqueror unless the conquered admits it’). Wills (253) also notes Ennius Ann. 344-5: quae (sc. Pergama) neque Dardaniis campis potuere perire / nec quom capta capi nec quom combusta cremari) (“Troy which was able to be destroyed neither on the Trojan plains, nor when captured, to be captured, nor when consumed by fire, to be burned”) which is echoed by Juno in Aeneid 7.295-6, who is also discussing the Trojans: num capti potuere capi? num incensa cremavit / Troia viros? (“The captured were not able to be captured? Did Troy, consumed by fire, not burn the soldiers?”).53

53 Wills (1996, 251-3), under the subject of verb polyptoton, contains an extended list of examples with vincere and capere, including Horace Epist. 2.1.156 (Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit, “captured Greece captured an uncultivated victor”), Ovid Fasti 1.523, also on the Trojans (victa tamen vinces eversaque, Troia, resurges, “Troy, though conquered, you will conquer, and overthrown, you will rise up”), and Petronius 89.27, ibat iuventus capta, dum
As these examples suggest, the blending of *victor* and *victus* often takes place in a military context; indeed in the *Aeneid* most examples of this theme come from the sections of the poem of a martial nature, namely books 2 and 7 through 12. Regarding book 2, Heinze (1993, 3) notes that, before Virgil, extended poetic narratives of the sack of Troy had always been given from a Greek, not Trojan perspective; thus it is perhaps not surprising that Aeneas blends Greek and Trojan perspectives in his reformulation of this material. At the beginning of book 2, Aeneas, when about to recount the fall of Troy and his subsequent wanderings, makes an interesting authorial observation (2.6-8):

\[
\text{quis talia fando}\\
\text{Myrmidonum Dolopumve aut duri miles Ulixi}\\
\text{temperet a lacrimis?}
\]

Who, when speaking such things, whether a Myrmidon, Dolopian, or soldier of cruel Ulysses, could hold back the tears?

Aeneas’ words here are perhaps surprising: he imagines that even Greeks would find cause for lamentation in narrating the story of Troy’s fall and Aeneas’ subsequent exile. While this notion recalls Odysseus’ tears in the *Odyssey* when listening to Demodocus’ poetic narration of the fall of Troy (*Od. 8.499-532*), Virgil’s Aeneas complicates the scenario by suggesting a similar emotional reaction on the part of both Trojans and Greeks. Later in the actual narrative

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*Troiam capit* (“The imprisoned youth [i.e. imprisoned in the wooden horse] went forward to make Troy prisoner”). See also Otto (1890, 371 s.v. *vinco*) who notes Plautus *Casina* 510, *iam victi vicimus* (“now we the conquered have conquered”) and Petronius *Satyricon* 59, *qui vincitur vincit* (“he who is conquered conquers”). One example not noted by Wills or Otto is Silius Italicus, *Punica* 13.867-8, *nec leviora lues quam victus, crimina, victor* (“nor, victor, will you atone for lesser crimes than the vanquished”). See chapter 4 for other examples.

54 The other way one could understand Aeneas’ words is as hyperbole, that is, exaggeration to make a point, in this case about the magnitude of sufferings at Troy; but such an argument strips Aeneas’ words of their larger meaning, as will be further argued.
of the fall of Troy, Aeneas buttresses his argument by describing how both Greeks and Trojans
died once he and his comrades entered the fray that night (2.366-8):

\[
\text{nec soli poenas dant sanguine Teucri: quondam etiam victis redit in praecordia virtus victoresque cadunt Danai.}
\]

Nor do Trojans alone pay the penalty of death:
sometimes bravery returns even to the hearts of the conquered,
and the victorious Greeks die.

Aeneas and Virgil here strikingly blend *victores* and *victi*. In the midst of the fall of Troy,
Aeneas also reminds his audience that this was a tragedy also suffered, to some extent, by the
Greeks. Aeneas’ equation of Trojan and Greek deaths is disconcerting, in that it suggests that the
distinction between victor and vanquished may not be so clear. Aeneas actually reinforces this
notion in the following episode: he and his comrades blend Greek and Trojan identities by
donning armor stripped from Greek corpses, thus practicing a form of martial deception worthy
of their Greek victors (*Aeneid* 2. 386-401). While deception, as Aeneas tells it, appears an
essentially Greek quality, nonetheless Aeneas confesses that he and his comrades likewise used
deception when Troy fell.

Furthermore, in the last three books of the *Aeneid*, there is sometimes an intriguing
confusion between conqueror and conquered, one similar to that found in book 2. In the
concilium deorum at the beginning of book 10, Jupiter, frustrated by the contrary claims of
Venus and Juno on the issue of Aeneas’ future marriage, makes the following pronouncement
(10.107-8):

\[
\text{quae cuique est fortuna hodie, quam quisque secat sper,}
\text{Tros Rutulusne fuat, nullo discrimine habebo,}
\]

I will make no distinction, whether he be Trojan or Rutulian,
regarding the fortune that each has today, the hope that each follows,
Jupiter’s professed impartiality creates a sense of blending between the two sides of the war in Italy; there is a certain loss of, in Jupiter’s words, *discrimen*. Later in book 10, as in 2.366-8, the blending is further accomplished through polyptoton of forms derived from *vincere*: Virgil says of the battle in 10.756-7, *caedebant pariter pariterque ruebant / victores victique* (“both conquerors and conquered equally slew and fell”); the juxtaposition of *victores* and *victi* reinforces the notion of blending.

In book 11, both Diomedes and Latinus warn of the dangers of fighting the unconquerable Trojans. Diomedes, in his speech to the ambassadors, reported by Venulus (11.252-293), in which he refuses to join the Latin and Rutulian side of the war, notes the great penalties that have been visited on the Greeks after the Trojan War. He says at one point (258-9): *scelerum poenas expendimus omnes, / vel Priamo miseranda manus* (“We have all paid the penalty for our crimes, we a troop even to be pitied by Priam”). The implication is that fighting Trojan stock in Italy is likely to end badly. The fact that Diomedes sees his own Greeks’ role in the Trojan War as criminal and worthy of punishment is striking, as this is “quite contrary to the Greek traditions”\(^{55}\); but it is also surprising that he imagines that the Greeks would be pitied by Priam for their ensuing punishments.\(^{56}\) The implication may be that Priam would be able to relate to the sufferings of the Greeks because the Trojans paid the penalty for refusing to return Helen. On hearing Diomedes’ reported speech, Latinus says of the Latins’ battle with the Trojans (11.305-7):

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bellum importunum, cives, cum gente deorum
invictisque viris gerimus, quos nulla fatigant
proelia nec victi possunt absistere ferro.
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Citizens, we are waging an ill-advised war with a divine race,

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\(^{55}\) Williams 1973, 396.

\(^{56}\) Note the similarity of Diomedes’ thought to that of Aeneas in *Aen*. 2.6-8, discussed above.
unconquerable\textsuperscript{57} men, whom no battles weary
nor, when conquered, can they abstain from the sword.

Latinus brings out fully the paradox of the Trojans: part of their identity as winners is defined by their past defeat.

As mentioned, the same paradox emerges at the very end of the \textit{Aeneid} during the duel with Turnus. On a broad level, Aeneas represents the intersection of victor and victim, as his killing of Turnus is predicated upon his past losses, not only of Pallas but also of Troy. This emphasis on the past is also intertextual: Virgil, through Aeneas, is victor over Greek epic. But Aeneas’ \textit{furor} and \textit{ira} compromise this victory; indeed the characterization of Aeneas as \textit{furiis accensus et ira / terribilis} in some of the closing lines of the epic (12.946-7) assimilates Aeneas with some of Aeneas’ victims, the women of Latium, followers of Amata (7.392, \textit{furiisque accensas pectore matres}).\textsuperscript{58} At the same time, the duel itself confuses victor and victim to the degree that Aeneas and Turnus resemble each other. As Hardie (1993, 34) explains:

Instead of Aeneas facing Turnus we might see this as two versions of Pallas opposing each other, Aeneas as the agent of Pallas’ revenge and Turnus as the young warrior, who, by foolishly dressing in the sword-belt of Pallas, has consigned himself to the same premature and pathetic death as his victim.

The mention of Pallas by Aeneas at the end of the epic is thus a focal point of confusion between the identities of victor and victim.\textsuperscript{59} Thomas (1998, 275-83) further discusses the blending of identities between Aeneas and Turnus in book 12. He notes that the phrase Virgil uses to describe Turnus’ death, \textit{illi solvuntur frigore membra} (“his limbs are slackened with cold,” 12.951) is the same as that used earlier to describe Aeneas’ reaction to the storm, \textit{Aeneae solvuntur frigore membra} (1.92). On this link, Thomas argues: “In a poem that constantly and

\textsuperscript{57} \textit{OLD} s.v. \textit{invictus} 2.
\textsuperscript{58} Putnam (1995b, 161).
\textsuperscript{59} This confusion is reinforced by the words of Achilles, Aeneas’ earlier enemy, in \textit{Iliad} 22.270-1, when he assures Hector that Pallas Athena will soon use Achilles’ spear to kill Hector.
powerfully confuses victim and victor, Vergil here gives the most powerful such reversal: Turnus becomes what Aeneas had been when first we saw him, isolated and facing death."

In discussing the confusion between Aeneas and Turnus, Hardie (34) speaks of “the collapse of distinctions that results from the play of the literary models”; the idea of victor vs. victim, so essential to the framework of the *Aeneid*, is problematized by the complex intertextual imagery in its closing lines. Furthermore, this theme of victor vs. vanquished in the *Aeneid* has a clear political aspect: both Aeneas and Augustus are called upon to rule over those whom they conquered, but they can also identify with the *victi*, in Aeneas’ case, because he himself was once *victus*, and in Augustus’ case, because he conquered fellow Romans. The same tension between victor and vanquished is also explored, and even expanded upon, in Senecan tragedy, as will be argued in chapter 4.

2.4 *Maius Nefas* in the *Aeneid*.

A third theme important in both Virgil’s *Aeneid* and Senecan tragedy is what I refer to as *maius nefas*, or greater crime. As will be discussed, this theme has clear overlaps with the theme of temporal repetition. In my discussion here, I will first outline Virgil’s use of the comparative adjective *maior/maius* in the *Aeneid* (19 times), as some of its uses are especially marked; I will then seek to make the connection between Virgil’s phrase *maius opus* (*Aen. 7.45*) and his similar phrase *maius nefas* (7.386).

The comparative adjective *maior/maius* is, not surprisingly, used by Virgil to depict a larger size or state of grandeur. We have already seen that Helenus predicts that Aeneas will

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60 Hardie (93) also convincingly argues: “In the final duel between Turnus and Aeneas there is a far-reaching effacing of moral distinctions that suggests that the two are ‘brothers’ in their blind blood-lust.”
make it to Italy under greater auspices (*maioribus auspiciis*, 3.374-5): there is a greatness in Aeneas’ future, presumably in comparison with that of Helenus, which may be associated with Aeneas being born of a goddess. In fact, the use of *maior/maius* in the *Aeneid* is sometimes associated with things more than mortal. Thus the comparative is employed in describing divine inspiration or prophecy: so Aeneas describes Creusa’s ghost as appearing as an image greater in size than when she was alive (*nota maior imago*, 2.773). This increase in magnitude perhaps befits the prophetic words she speaks to Aeneas of his future in Italy (777-784). So also the Sibyl, as she becomes possessed by Apollo, is described by Virgil as *maiorque videri / nec mortale sonans, adflata est numine quando / iam propiore dei* (“now she seemed greater in size, not of mortal voice, when she was inflamed with the nearer presence of the god,” 6.49-51). The Sibyl’s growth in appearance seems associated with her divine inspiration; her prophecy of Aeneas’ coming repetitious wars in Italy follows shortly thereafter (6.83-94). In the descriptions of both Creusa and the Sibyl, there is a sense that the adjective *maior* signals mention of Aeneas’ divinely decreed, “greater” future in Italy, just as Helenus had suggested.61 The comparative adjective is also associated with divine sanction or presence in book 12, when Iapyx the healer perceives the hand of Venus in the miraculous healing of Aeneas’ wound: *maior agit deus atque opera ad maiora remittit* (“a greater one is at hand, a god, and he sends you back for greater works,” 12.429). Aeneas’ future is often predicated upon achieving something *maius*.

As Aeneas’ future, particularly in the second half of the *Aeneid*, is associated with grandeur, so also does Virgil’s poem in its course strive for something greater.62 In the most

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61 Note that Romulus, upon his apotheosis as Quirinus, is described by Ovid at *Fasti* 2.503 as appearing *humano maior*.
62 Compare also the opening words of *Eclogues* 4: *Sicelides Musae, paulo maior canamus* (“Sicilian muses, let us sing of things somewhat greater”); see chapter 5 for further discussion of *Eclogues* 4 in the context of *maius nefas*. 

41
famous use of the comparative adjective *maius* in the *Aeneid*, Virgil, in the belated proem to book 7 (37-45) describes (the second half of) his epic as a *maius opus* or “greater work.” In his extended invocation of the Muse Erato (37-40), Virgil suggests the divine assistance required for this second half of the poem. When Virgil declares of books 7-12 *dicam horrida bella* (41), his words echo the prophecy of Aeneas’ Italian future spoken by the Sibyl in 6.86: *bella, horrida bella*; the three words of each passage are furthermore at the end of the hexameter. Virgil thus suggests that his plan for the second half of the poem, like Aeneas’ future, is both divinely sanctioned and caught up in the horrors of war. Virgil actually employs the comparative adjective twice (7.44-45):

\[
\text{maior rerum mihi nascitur ordo,} \\
\text{maius opus moveo.}
\]

A greater sequence of matters arises for me,  
I begin a greater work.

What is the exact sense of the words *maior* and *maius* in this passage? The answer, as often in Virgil, is complex. As suggested above, his work is *maius* in that it is authorized by the gods of poetry; but that was also true for books 1 to 6 (cf. *Musa*, 1.8). In a collective sense, Virgil begins a work greater simply in size, in that he continues his poem past the Odyssean first half – the poem simply gets longer. Along the same lines, as suggested above, Virgil creates a *maius* epic by incorporating both Iliadic and Odyssean strains within his poem: he “outdoes” Homer by synthesizing two seemingly disparate traditions.

Thus Virgil’s statement here is also intertextual: his poem is *maius* in comparison to his poetic predecessors. But this is true also in the narrower sense that martial epic such as the *Iliad* and *Aeneid* 7-12 is thought of as heavier, greater material than the *nostos*-centered narrative of
the *Odyssey* and *Aeneid* 1-6. But while the Homeric epic tradition progresses from the highly dramatic *Iliad* to the episodic *Odyssey*, from essential conflict (the Trojan War) to resolution (the return of Odysseus), Virgil reverses the order, thus creating a dramatic “bang” at the end of his poem: he thus both reaffirms and reverses Homeric epic.

Virgil’s characterization of (the second half of) his *Aeneid* as a *maius opus* is informatively attested by other Augustan poets. Propertius says of Virgil’s burgeoning epic, *nescio quid maius nascitur Iliade* (“Something greater than the *Iliad* is being composed,” 2.34.66). Propertius’ words, I believe, make clear that he has heard *Aeneid* 7.43-44 in some form, and that he identifies Virgil’s epic as an essentially intertextual struggle of sorts with Greek epic: both Aeneas and Virgil are striving for something *maius*. Later in Augustan poetry, Ovid attests to the strong resonance of Virgil’s phrase *maius opus*, using that exact phrase eight times in his surviving poetry. For example, in *Tristia* 2.1.63, Ovid, in his defense, refers to his epic *Metamorphoses* as his *maius opus* in comparison to his elegiac poetry, thus implying that

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63 Williams (1973, 169) argues regarding the *maius opus*: “Virgil regards his task in the last six books as a greater one (lines 44-5) perhaps in three senses: firstly because from the promise of Aeneas’ destiny he now comes to the fulfillment; secondly because the account of battles is in a way more decisive and dramatic than the Odyssean books (cf. Longinus’ preference for the *Iliad*, *De Subl.* 9.13f.); and thirdly because he is now to portray the character and achievements of the early ancestors of his own Italians.” Horsfall (2000, 75) sees in the use of *maior/maius* in these lines “an expansion of the preceding thought” (namely *totam...Hesperiam* in 43-44) and also states: “the scale of what follows [i.e. in the rest of the *Aeneid*] is greater in both geographical range (Mantua to Apulia) and in numbers involved.” Thomas (1999, 103-4), in discussing Virgil’s larger poetic program, asks: “In the words *maius opus moveo* are we not entitled to see a reference to the μέγα βιβλίον of Callimachus (fr. 466 Pf.), disdained by that poet and by his Roman followers?”; thus Virgil’s *maius opus* would stand as a renunciation of Callimachean aesthetics.

64 Horsfall (2000, 75) speculates that it is possible that Propertius was alluding to *Aen.* 7.45 in this case; Thomas (1999, 101 n.2) is more cautious, stating of the *Aeneid*, “Propertius had probably seen next to nothing but merely knew that it was being written.”
Virgil’s lengthy *Aeneid* is *maius* in comparison to the *Eclogues* and *Georgics*. Furthermore, Ovid’s *Amores* 3.1 suggests that the move to a *maius opus* within the course of a poetic text implies a shift in genre. Ovid recounts how the muse of tragedy urged Ovid to leave elegy behind, in favor of her (23-24):

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tempus erat, thyrsoph pulsum graviore moveri;
cessatum satis est – incipe *maius opus*!
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Now it was time to be inspired by the heavier thyrsus; enough of delays – begin a greater work!

Here the muse suggests to Ovid that tragedy with its thyrsus is *maius* in comparison to elegy. It seems clear that Ovid is echoing Virgil’s phrase *maius opus*; Ovid may also be hinting at the tragic aspects of Virgilian epic. In any case, both Propertius and Ovid understood the programmatic importance of this notion of *maius* within Virgil’s epic; note that Propertius casts the idea of *maius* as intrageneric (i.e. the *Aeneid* may be *maius* than earlier epic), while Ovid uses the phrase *maius opus* in an intergeneric sense (i.e. genres such as epic and tragedy may be *maius* than others). Both ideas, I argue, are relevant: Virgil defines his epic as *maius* in multiply referential ways.

*Maious* can indeed also have darker connotations. To return to *Aeneid* 7: while Virgil in his proem announces his intention to sing of weightier battles, it is Juno, as Virgil tells it, who actually instigates the war in Italy. Juno sends the fury Allecto to inflame Amata, the Latin women, Turnus, and Ascanius’ dogs with a fury for battle. It is in the case of Amata that the

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65 This is in fact the argument of Thomas (1999, 101-13), namely, that Virgil conceives of his epic as *maius* in comparison to his earlier poems; Thomas notes that the *Eclogues* contain a *recusatio* in which Virgil explains why he is not composing epic (6.3-9) and the *Georgics* contain a markedly attenuated form of epic in the account of the bees and their battles (book 4).
66 See also Ovid *Fasti* 2.3, 2.123, 4.3, and 4.10 on the idea of *maius* suggesting a generic shift or comparison, discussed in Hinds 1987, 115-18.
comparative *maius/maior* is again used twice, as she leaves her husband Latinus behind and, similar to a bacchant, heads for the forest (7.385-7):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{quin etiam in silvas simulato numine Bacchi} \\
\text{maius adorta nefas maioremque orsa fuorem} \\
evolut…
\end{align*}
\]

Now she even rushes into the woods, imitating the spirit of Bacchus, having embarked upon a greater crime, and having initiated a greater furor…

In what sense are Amata’s *nefas* and *furor* greater? Perhaps this refers to the fact that she soon involves all of the women of the city in her Bacchic frenzy (392-6), or it may refer to the Bacchic imagery, and again in turn the association with tragedy: she is described as waving a thyrsus in 390. Be that as it may, there is here a striking echo of *Aeneid* 7.44-45, discussed above (*maior rerum mihi nascitur ordo, / maius opus moveo*). Both passages contain two comparatives, one masculine (agreeing with *ordo* and *furor*) and one neuter (agreeing with *opus* and *nefas*). Furthermore, the *ordo* in the earlier passage in book 7 is echoed in the second by *adorta* and *orsa*. While the use of *maius* forms in close proximity happens one other time in the *Aeneid* (12.429, *maior agit deus atque opera ad maiora remittit*, discussed above), it seems clear that the two instances in book 7 are related. In fact, Barchiesi (2001, 182 n.17) argues as much: “Note also that Amata’s frenzy (*maius nefas, maiorem furorem* 7.386) is parallel to (and a

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67 This interpretation is suggested by the strong allusion in Ovid *Ex Ponto* 2.2.15-16, in which the poet, in qualifying his past deeds that led to his exile, appropriates the first three words verbatim: *est mea culpa gravis, sed quae me perdere solum / ausa sit et nullum maius adorta nefas* (“My guilt is serious, but one which dared to ruin me alone, and gave rise to no greater crime”).

68 Wills (1996, 284), in a discussion of “repeated adjectives which vary in gender and number” also cites *Eleg. Maec.* 1.31-2: *maius erat potuisse tamen nec velle triumphos, / maior res magnis abstinuisse fuit.* (“It was a greater thing to have been capable of triumphs, but not to want them, it was a greater matter to have refrained from impressive things.”)
necessary implement of) Virgil’s *maius opus.* To expand on Barchiesi’s observation, the close linguistic overlap between the two passages suggests that Virgil’s *maius opus* is associated with the idea of *maius nefas.* The intentions of Virgil and Juno are not so far apart, as they both set out to create violence and bloodshed, and indeed delays, before Aeneas’ and the Trojans’ settlement in Italy can be established. Thus the second half of the *Aeneid* is in a sense also a *maius nefas.* Putnam argues in a similar vein (1995a, 107):

If the *maior rerum ordo* to which Virgil alludes at line 44 is Rome, the remark is made with bitter stress – the rebirth of Aeneas is the “birth” of war. If it refers specifically to the catalog of horrors that follows in the next six books, it is a begetting that leads to funerals, not lives.

These notions of the disturbing nature of the second half of Virgil’s epic are important because characters in Senecan tragedy often are driven to commit a *maius nefas* (*Agamemnon* 124), and their crime is understood as *maius* especially in comparison to those of the poetic past, just as the *Aeneid* attempts to be *maius* compared to earlier poetry. The drive to go further, to create something greater, seems, in both authors, to necessarily involve horror and violence.

In terms of the notion of *maius* and horror, it can also be noted that the exact form *maius* is used two other times in the *Aeneid,* both times referring to fateful portents. The death of Laocoon in book 2 is referred to by Aeneas as *aliud maius* (2.199), something that hinted at the

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69 See also Schiesaro (2003, 35) on the relation between Virgil’s *maius opus* and *maius nefas.*

70 Joseph (2012, 31-2) also discusses Virgil’s use of the verb *moveo* in *Aeneid* 7, and notes an interesting parallel between 7.45 (*maius opus moveo*) and Juno’s words in 7.312 (*flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo,* “if I am unable to sway the gods above, I shall move Acheron”). Thus Virgil’s poetic plans are associated with Juno’s decision to “raise hell.” As Joseph notes, “Juno’s act of disruptive agency mirrors – and in fact depends upon – the poet’s similar act of violent agency at 7.45”; Joseph argues that *moveo* in 7.45 “brings with it the familiar connotation of political upheaval.”
coming destruction of Troy.\textsuperscript{71} The portent that Juturna reveals in the skies to encourage the Rutulian forces is also described as \textit{aliud maius} (12.244).\textsuperscript{72} These two passages also closely overlap, especially in the way that both Trojans and Rutulians misunderstand the portent and so fail to foresee the coming tragedies, that is, the fall of Troy and the death of Turnus. Thus \textit{maius} can also be associated with divine warnings of catastrophe or even acts of deception, as in Juturna’s case.

Finally, it should also be noted that there is a clear precedent for a double use of the comparative adjective, one neuter, one non-neuter, to be found in the fragments of Accius. In the \textit{Atreus}, the protagonist states with strong alliteration of \textit{m} (\textit{Atreus} frag. 31 Dangel):

\begin{quote}
\textit{maior mihi moles, maius miscendum est malum.}
\end{quote}

A greater task awaits me, a greater evil is to be wrought.

Such a line befits the nefarious plans of Atreus; but it is also conceivable that Virgil remembered this line when composing the second half of the \textit{Aeneid}. Thus the \textit{Aeneid} can again be understood as productive of crimes and suffering, of the kind often found in tragedy.\textsuperscript{73}

In conclusion, the \textit{maius} motif in Virgil can suggest the divinely sanctioned future of Aeneas in Italy, but it can also signal the crime and violence inherent in that future. The intertextual nature of this theme hinges on the belated proem to book 7 (37-45), as Virgil intends all or part of his epic to be a \textit{maius opus} in relation to other texts, both his own and others’, both

\textsuperscript{71} 2.199-200: \textit{hic aliud maius miseris multoque tremendum / obicitur magis atque improvida pectora turbat} (‘Here something greater and much more to be feared is hurled at us wretched ones and disturbs our blind breasts.’)

\textsuperscript{72} 12.244-6: \textit{his aliud maius Juturna adiungit et alto / dat signum caelo, quo non praesentius ullum / turbavit mentes Italas monstroque fefellit} (‘To these words Juturna adds something greater and gives a sign high in the heavens, which immediately, more than any other, disturbed the Italians’ thoughts and deceived them with its portent.’)

\textsuperscript{73} Compare also Horace \textit{Odes} 3.11.30, \textit{nam quid potuere maius}? (‘for what greater thing could they do?’), describing the crime of the Danaids (i.e. killing their husbands).
epic and otherwise. This theme, like that of temporal repetition, is problematic in that its very argument can be called into question. Does Virgil create a *maius opus*, or simply another epic? Is this *maius opus* compromised through its association with *nefas*? Similar questions, as will be seen, arise in Senecan tragedy’s exploration of the theme of *maius nefas*.

2.5. Conclusion.

This chapter has laid out, in selective fashion, three specific themes found in Virgil’s *Aeneid* that, as will be argued in subsequent chapters, are essential to Senecan tragedy, particularly in the way that Senecan tragedy creates a dialogue with past poetry. The three themes in Virgil – repetition of the past, victor and vanquished, and *maius nefas* – have been shown to be strongly intertextual in nature. Partly because of this, all three themes are, importantly, somewhat open-ended; that is, one can always question what constitutes a repetition of the past, how exactly one draws the line between victor and vanquished, or whether something is actually *maius*. These difficulties of interpretation are analogous, I argue, to the complex nature of intertextual study, as discussed in chapter 1. Thus while I will argue going forward that Seneca in his tragedies vigorously interacts with Virgilian precedents in terms of these same thematic constructs in creating his own poetry, this interaction in effect results in another interpretation, or reinterpretation. As will be argued, Senecan tragedy revisits these intertextual problems as explored by Virgil, and in the process raises some of the same questions, but in different contexts, and in an even more sustained fashion.
Chapter 3. Repetition of the Past in Senecan Tragedy.

3.1 Introduction.

I argued in the last chapter that repetition of the past, particularly of Troy and events at Troy, is a significant theme in Virgil’s *Aeneid*; this chapter seeks to make the connection to Senecan tragedy regarding the same theme. Two of Seneca’s eight tragedies treat the subject of the Trojan War and its aftermath: the *Troades* and *Agamemnon*. There is never any direct reference in these plays to Aeneas, his role in the war, or his life after Troy; this makes sense in that he was not a subject or character in the Greek tragedies from which Seneca adapts his essential plotlines and narratives. Nonetheless, Virgil’s *Aeneid* is frequently echoed by Seneca’s characters in these plays in interesting ways; Seneca here remembers Virgil’s poetry based on Troy and its aftermath, often situating Virgilian language in intriguing and informative new contexts. This echoing of Virgil becomes an essential part of Senecan tragedy, and helps us to both read Seneca in a Virgilian context, and also to (re)read Virgil from a Senecan point of view. In this chapter, I will focus on the theme of remembering and repeating the past, particularly Troy, in these two plays – and also on how Seneca in this context remembers Virgil. While repetition of the past plays a significant role in the *Aeneid*, in Senecan tragedy this same theme holds still greater prominence, partly because of the influence of Virgil. I argue that the memory of Troy, which dogs Virgil’s Aeneas, in Senecan tragedy becomes a sort of end in itself, or even a source of victory: as Schiesaro (2003, 207-8) and Zissos (2009) argue, Senecan tragedy, in its tendency toward cyclic repetition, including seemingly endless cycles of violence and crime, upends the epic teleology of the *Aeneid*. Put another way, while Virgil “pads” Aeneas’ memories of Troy by juxtaposing them with his future in Italy, essential to Rome and Augustus,
Seneca’s *Agamemnon* and *Troades* do not seek to look beyond Troy – paradoxically, in comparison to the *Aeneid*, the very memory of Troy in Senecan tragedy is complete in itself.

The theme of repetition of the past is found not only in the *Troades* and *Agamemnon*, but in every Senecan tragedy to some degree. As will be seen in chapter 5, Seneca’s Medea in her play explicitly wills – and realizes – a repetition of her own violent past. In the *Thyestes*, Atreus creates a horrific banquet for his brother that echoes the meal Tantalus, Atreus’ grandfather, had attempted to serve to the gods, as well as the meal Procne served to Tereus. Phaedra, in her tragedy, understands her own taboo-breaking passion for Hippolytus as a repetition of her mother Pasiphae’s passion for the bull;\(^74\) the incest committed by Oedipus with his mother is represented as a sexual *return* to the womb from which he emerged in the *Oedipus*;\(^75\) and Hercules in the *Hercules Furens*, after returning victoriously from the underworld, returns to it *again*, in a sense, when he kills his family in a state of madness.\(^76\)  Seneca’s tragedies constantly cast actions, thoughts, and feelings as being repetitions of those of the past.\(^77\)

\(^{74}\) See especially *Phaedra* 113, spoken by Phaedra, regarding her feelings for Hippolytus: *fatale miserae matris agnosco malum* (“I recognize the fateful evil of my wretched mother”).

\(^{75}\) See e.g. *Oedipus* 238, describing Oedipus: *turpis maternos iterum revolutus in ortus* (“foul one, having returned again to your motherly source”).

\(^{76}\) Juno, in planning her revenge, declares to Hercules *in absentia* (90-1): *iam Styga et manes feros / fugisse credis? hic tibi ostendam inferos* (“Do you now believe that you have fled the Styx and its cruel shades? Here I’ll show you hell”).

\(^{77}\) Furthermore, Owen (1970, 121-4, on the *Troades*), Shelton (1975, on the *Thyestes and Hercules Furens*) and Schiesaro (2003, 177-190, also on the *Thyestes and Hercules Furens*) see temporal repetition present within the very structure of the plays, that is, they find that Seneca at points disturbs the convention of linear dramatic time, as performed from act to act. They argue that temporal frames of episodes or acts within specific plays (especially from acts 1 to 3) seem to overlap, so that events can seem to repeat themselves. For example, Schiesaro (184-6) argues that Amphitryon’s words in 520-3 of the *Hercules Furens*, describing the exit of Hercules from the underworld as happening in the present, temporally contradict the statement of Juno in the prologue (47-52) in which she says she has already witnessed the exit of Hercules from the underworld. Thus for Schiesaro, the play disrupts, to some degree, the normally linear progression of dramatic time, so that we seem to return to an earlier temporal stage at a later point in the play. I find these types of arguments unpersuasive; in my opinion, it is not a question
This in turn brings up the larger question of why the theme of temporal repetition is so prominent in Seneca’s plays. As argued in chapter 2 regarding the *Aeneid*, the theme is fundamentally intertextual: the historical past, as explicated in a given text, represents and reflects the literary past, against which the poet and her/his characters struggle to define themselves, in the process seeking both continuity and difference from that which was composed previously. But this theme of temporal repetition was also seen to have an implicit historical/political aspect, in that the repetition of Troy in the second half of the *Aeneid* ultimately gave way to a new political order in Italy, which in turn symbolizes the principate inaugurated by Augustus. The same can be said, to a lesser extent, and in reverse fashion, for Senecan tragedy: the insistently repetitive framework of the plays suggests that the Julio-Claudian principate did not provide the transformative political solution that Virgil detailed. Put another way, Seneca takes us *again* back to Troy, and provides no way out of this violent, bleak scenario, except through death, as will be seen.

While, as stated in the last chapter, the fact that the Julio-Claudian emperors claimed descent from Trojan Aeneas necessarily makes any evocation of the fall of Troy during the early empire intriguing, Rome’s further cultural and historical links to Troy during Seneca’s era deserve mention. Boyle (1994, 18) notes that “Rome’s first imperial family proclaimed its descent from the Trojan hero Aeneas in forum, temple, and on sculptural reliefs”; for example, the reliefs on the enclosure of the *Ara Pacis* show Aeneas and Ascanius/Iulus sacrificing to the

of time being disrupted on Seneca’s stage, but rather of characters putting forward different, sometimes dissonant, perspectives on the same events within the dramas, sometimes out of ignorance of what has happened earlier in the play. Furthermore, prologues, in that they foreshadow coming events in the play, may seem at times to operate on a somewhat different temporal level from the following acts; but this does not form part of, as Owen (121) terms it, “a basic revolution in the concept of dramatic time.”
penates, and one of the two large niches in the porticoes of the Forum of Augustus was decorated with statues of Aeneas, Anchises, and Ascanius fleeing Troy, also flanked by statues of their Julio-Claudian descendants.\(^7\) Boyle further argues (29) that “Imperial Rome was Troy rewritten and reborn” and notes that Augustus established the “Troy Game” or *Lusus Troiae* (Suetonius, *Augustus* 43.2), in which Nero later participated in 47 C.E. (Tacitus *Ann.* 11.11). This is particularly noteworthy in that Andromache in the *Troades* (777-9) points out that Astyanax, about to be executed, will *not* have the chance to participate in the *Troicus Lusus*. Regarding Nero, Boyle further notes that he delivered an oration on behalf of the city of Ilium in 53 C.E. and is notoriously rumored to have sung of the fall of Troy during the fire of Rome in 64 (Tacitus *Ann.* 12.58 and 15.39). Thus the legacy of Troy was firmly in play in early imperial propaganda and anecdote; Seneca’s *Troades* and *Agamemnon* can even be seen as part of, as well as reactions to, this sort of propaganda.

At the same time, the theme of repetition of the past as found in Senecan tragedy may be said to have an analogue in Stoic ideas of *palingenesis* (regeneration) or eternal return of the cosmos. The Stoics held that after *ekpyrosis* or conflagration, the universe reconstitutes itself in exactly the same form as it had in earlier cycles, including a “rebirth” of human beings who had lived earlier; this process has gone on, and will go on, forever.\(^7\) Seneca himself appears to endorse this idea at *Epistulae Morales* 36.10; in exhorting Lucilius not to fear death, he points out that they will one day live again: *veniet iterum, qui nos in lucem reponat dies* (“a day will

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\(^7\) Claridge (1998, 159-60 and 187).
\(^7\) On Stoicism and *palingenesis* or everlasting recurrence, see Long (2006) and Gourinat (2009, 70-72). Long (262-3) argues that “the Stoics fully embraced the stipulation that the order which results from each new cosmogony is always essentially the same, an instance of ‘turning back’ to how things were before.”

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come again which will restore us to the light”). It is therefore reasonable to think that Seneca’s propensity toward the theme of temporal repetition, as found in the tragedies, was partly based on his adherence to standard Stoic cosmology. However, this philosophical influence can only be taken so far; Stoic theories of *palingenesis* usually imply exact recurrence of the past, whereas in the tragedies it is more the case that a general scenario is said to be recurring, sometimes involving different persons or places, as well as other differences.

The constant fascination that Senecan tragedy and its characters show with the past, and with the repetition of past precedents, has only partially been explored by scholars. Boyle (1997, 54-59) discusses the importance of this theme in Senecan tragedy, but does not, for the most part, consider its larger signification – i.e. why Seneca chooses to dwell on this theme, as well as the theme’s larger implications. By comparison, Schiesaro (2003, 177-220) explores the theme of past repetition in Senecan tragedy at length, and often points out the intertextual dynamics at play within this thematic structure. Furthermore, Schiesaro discusses the contrast between Senecan tragedy’s insistence on regressive repetition and the *Aeneid*’s sense of political transformation, in a similarly repetitive framework. My discussion in this chapter, as well as that in chapter 5, may be seen as following Schiesaro’s lead on this subject, but with a more vigorously intertextual stance, as I will focus on the echoes of Virgil’s epic within this theme of temporal repetition in Senecan tragedy. Within my discussion, I will often consider echoes of Virgil’s epic in Seneca’s *Troades* and *Agamemnon* as themselves temporal repetitions, in that Virgil’s text was composed before that of Seneca. Indeed, the same may be said for the *Aeneid*’s

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80 Zeller (1892, 166 n.2) cites this passage in discussing Stoic *palingenesis*; see also Seneca’s fuller treatment of similar matters at *EM* 71.12-16.
82 Furthermore, Schiesaro (2003, 216) argues that Seneca in both prose and poetry seems at points to depart from standard Stoic thought on *palingenesis*. On overlaps or connections between various parts of Seneca’s oeuvre, see, among others, Ker (2006).
echoes of Homer and others: it repeats Homeric formulas and scenarios, but in a later historical context.

While Senecan tragedy postdates the *Aeneid* in terms of composition, and thus of course must be understood as a poetic development subsequent to Virgil, it is curiously anterior in that the mythological time frame of all the plays is prior to the time frame of the *Aeneid*. Thus echoes of Virgilian language in Seneca’s plays can be puzzling to the reader/audience, as Senecan tragic characters and choruses seem to remember a text which, from a mythological perspective, has not yet happened. Barchiesi has termed such anachronistic memories or allusions as cases of “future reflexive,” that is, “what happens when the older tradition enters the new text as a view of the future” (Barchiesi 1993, 334). Barchiesi focuses on Ovid’s *Heroides*, in which letter writers such as Phaedra, Dido, and Medea (*Her. 4, 7, and 12* respectively) make pointed allusions to their later selves and predicaments as depicted in poetry composed earlier than that of Ovid. Regarding Senecan tragedy and Virgil’s *Aeneid*, the only speaking characters that overlap in this way are Andromache, who speaks in Seneca’s *Troades* and in *Aen. 3*, and Juno, who speaks the prologue of the *Hercules Furens* and gives speeches throughout the course of the *Aeneid*. As will be discussed, the case of Seneca’s Andromache in the *Troades* is particularly informative, as she seems to both remember and anticipate her Virgilian self. More widely, as will be argued, the *Troades* and other plays of Seneca seem to preclude or head off the

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83 Of Seneca’s plays, the time frame of the *Agamemnon* is closest to the that of the *Aeneid*, but it must be, mythologically speaking, prior to the time frame of Virgil’s epic, as Agamemnon’s arrival at Argos (enacted in the play) happens relatively briefly after the fall of Troy, whereas Aeneas only comes to Carthage after seven years of wandering (as reported by Dido at *Aen.* 1.755-6).

84 Hecuba and Pyrrhus both speak in the *Troades* and in *Aen. 2*, but their words in the *Aeneid* are spoken during the murder of Priam, whereas in the *Troades* Priam is already dead. Note that Virgil’s Andromache (like his Hecuba and Pyrrhus, and unlike his Juno) speaks through Aeneas, who narrates *Aen.* 2 and 3.
somewhat positive, even glorious, future that earlier Virgilian epic poetry entails. Furthermore, both Senecan tragedy and Virgil’s *Aeneid* problematize memory in that they incorporate allusions to works that were composed earlier, but in the process, they may “recall” events that are subsequent to the time frame of the works in which these allusions appear.\(^8^5\)

It will be seen that, considering the whole of the *Aeneid*, book 2, in which Aeneas recounts the fall of Troy, has the most resonance in Seneca’s *Troades* and *Agamemnon*. Seneca clearly had a strong knowledge of and inclination toward this section of Virgil’s epic, and it is appropriate that he should incorporate this text in the context of his characters’ memories of Troy, particularly in the case of the *Troades*. Book 2 is prefaced by Aeneas’ own reluctance to recount such a disaster (*animus meminisse horret luctuque refugit*, “my mind shudders to remember and has recoiled in sorrow” 2.12) in part because it represents the defeat of Aeneas and his Trojans. For Virgil’s Aeneas, Troy is the past, which must be forgotten or transformed; in Seneca, Troy is past, present, and future. For characters such as Hecuba and Andromache in the *Troades*, Cassandra in the *Agamemnon*, and for the chorus of Trojan women (the sole chorus in the *Troades*, and a secondary chorus in the *Agamemnon*), the fall of Troy is the essential point of reference in terms of understanding and motivation. Thus these Senecan tragic figures give new life to Andromache’s regressive Trojan obsession as displayed in the Buthrotum episode in *Aeneid* 3: what is a warning to Aeneas –namely, Andromache’s inability to forget Troy – becomes a focal point of the action in Senecan tragedy. In my discussion, I will begin with the

\(^8^5\) Regarding the *Aeneid*, one example among many is 2.270-1, in which Aeneas describes seeing Hector in his dream (*in somnis...Hector / visus adesse mihi*, “in sleep Hector seemed to me to be present”) in a way that alludes, as Austin notes *ad loc.*, to Ennius *Annales* 5-6, in which Ennius has a dream vision of Homer (*somno leni placidoque revinctus /visus Homerus adesse poeta*, “enveloped in gentle and peaceful sleep, Homer the poet seemed to appear”). While Aeneas here alludes to an earlier text, Ennius’ dream is actually subsequent, in terms of time frame, to that of Aeneas. Note, however, that unlike Ovid’s *heroïdes* or Seneca’s Andromache, Virgil’s Aeneas is not referring to his own future in earlier poetry, but to that of Ennius.
*Troades*, since this play comes first in the mythological sequence, as it recounts events immediately after the fall of Troy; then I will proceed to the *Agamemnon*, which recounts events after the sailing of the Greek fleet from Troy. Thus my discussion will also follow the sequence of Aeneas’ narration from books 2 to 3. As stated in chapter 1, this approach may be anachronistic in terms of the composition of the tragedies, as the *Troades* may well have been composed later; but this approach helps situate Senecan tragedy along the same historical continuum as explored in Virgil – that is, first Troy, and then everything after Troy.

3.2 Seneca’s *Troades*.

Seneca’s *Troades* is about death and mourning – and the triumph of death. The play begins with a funeral dirge for Hector and Priam, in which Hecuba somewhat stridently leads the chorus, recounting her and her city’s recent losses. From there, the play’s main subject is human sacrifice: Polyxena (daughter of Hecuba and Priam) is to be “wedded in death” to Achilles’ shade, and Astyanax (son of Andromache and Hector) is to be destroyed, so as to cut off Hector’s lineage. Acts 2, 3, and 4 recount the debates about and arrangements for these two sacrifices, while Act 5 includes a messenger account of the sacrifices themselves. Between the acts, the chorus of Trojan women ruminates on the nature of death, suffering, and displacement, including mention of their own imminent dispersal on Greek ships as slaves to their captors. As this brief description suggests, the play is bleak in its obsession with death and dissolution; but that is, as will be seen, precisely the point.

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86 This point is made by Henry and Henry (1985, 116) and Lawall (1982, 244).
As scholars have noted,\(^{87}\) Seneca’s *Troades* has a relatively tight structure; it forms a sort of ring composition, in which acts 1 and 5 open and close the play in similar ways (act 1, mourning Hector and Priam; act 5, mourning Astyanax and Polyxena), acts 2 and 4 both discuss the fate of Polyxena, and Act 3 that of Astyanax. In its overall trajectory, the play suggests the cyclical nature of death and suffering. The fact that Astyanax’s fate forms the center of the play is interesting from a Virgilian perspective: Astyanax is a potential successor to Trojan royalty (through his father, Hector, and his grandfather, Priam), much as Ascanius is in the *Aeneid*. But Seneca’s *Troades* emphasizes the death of Astyanax, and make no mention of Ascanius or any other potential heir.\(^{88}\) This is appropriate in tragedy (cf. Euripides’ *Troades*), but Seneca’s sustained evocation of the *Aeneid*, I argue, points up contrast between Seneca and Virgil on this issue. Taken further, the *Aeneid*’s implicit justification of the principate initiated by Augustus is undermined in Seneca’s *Troades*, as Seneca’s play suggests that no one, except the Trojan slaves and their Greek captors, survives Troy; there is no succession of Trojan power in the *Troades*, but only a succession of cruel killings within sight of the burning ruins of the city. This emphasis on repeated bloodletting necessarily leads one to remember that Seneca conceived of and composed his tragedies at some point within the reigns of Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero; while the *Aeneid* celebrates the triumph of Augustus (albeit in a problematic fashion), Seneca’s tragedies may evoke the shortcomings of the Julio-Claudian dynasty after Augustus.

Seneca *tragicus*’ continually dark outlook on human activity – namely that people have an abiding propensity for crime, and that a brave acceptance of death and suffering is the only way

\(^{87}\) Including Boyle (1994, 25-6) and Keulen (2001, 12).

\(^{88}\) Ker (2009, 134) similarly argues: “Given the *Aeneid*’s epic emplotment of a Julian teleology from Troy to Rome, Seneca’s trojanized tragedies amount to a troubling revisitation of Roman origins in which there is no trace of Aeneas, and Trojan survivors are not consoled with any hint of Rome’s foundation.”
out – makes no room for a “better tomorrow.” This is all the more intriguing given Seneca’s admiration and appropriation of Virgilian poetry.  

**Hecuba’s Fire**

Seneca’s *Troades*, like his *Agamemnon*, includes a multiplicity of perspectives on the action at hand. In the case of *Troades*, it is hard to say who, among the characters, really “owns” this play. Nonetheless, Hecuba, I argue, has the broadest perspective within the *Troades*. She opens and closes the play: her extended opening monologue (1-62) focalizes the recent fall of Troy from her perspective, and her temporarily assumed role of coryphaeus or chorus leader (63-155) helps suggest Hecuba’s role as leader of the Trojan captive women. Furthermore, her last speech (1165-77) at the end of the play shows her commanding perspective on the action. Her words at the end, *concidit virgo ac puer; / bellum peractum est* (“A virgin and boy have died: the war is complete”) (1167-8) tersely summarize the almost senseless violence that has happened in act 5, the climax of the play. Despite her absence from acts 2, 3, and most of 4, Hecuba is arguably the one character in the play that has the closest link to the two humans sacrificed, as mother to Polyxena and grandmother to Astyanax. These notions also accord with Hecuba’s elder status: she is wise and has the most to grieve for. She says at the end (1170-1), *natam an*  

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89 While I thus interpret the dialogue between Senecan and Virgilian poetry as partly political in nature, it will be seen that I do not argue for close resemblance between Seneca’s tragic characters and actual political figures of the early empire; given our limited understanding of when the plays were composed and how, if at all, they were performed, and given the lack of evidence within the plays of any reference to current affairs in Seneca’s day, it is very difficult to say, for example, that Pyrrhus represents Caligula, that Atreus is a stand-in for Nero, or the like, except in very free terms. For a similar argument regarding the interpretation of Statius’ *Thebaid*, see Ganiban (2007, 231-2), who writes, “Though the *Thebaid*’s representation of monarchy must be informed by the political climate in which Statius lived, it is difficult to argue that the *Thebaid* is a direct critique either of the Flavian regime or of Domitian himself.”  

90 The other candidate would be Andromache, as mother (to Astyanax) and sister-in-law (to Polyxena).
nepotem, coniugem an patriam fleam? / an omnia an me? (‘Shall I grieve for my daughter or grandson, husband or country? Or for everything or for myself?’) and earlier (1061) sua quemque tantum, me omnium clades premit (‘Individuals are only burdened by their own disasters; I am burdened by everyone’s’).

Hecuba’s opening speech in the *Troades*, in which she surveys the burning wreck of her recently captured city, includes allusions to the *Aeneid* that in fact point out this play’s distance from Virgilian epic. As scholars have noted,\(^91\) line 17, in which Hecuba declares *omnisque late fumat Assaraci domus* (‘the whole house of Assaracus gives off smoke far and wide’) echoes, in its last two words, part of Jupiter’s prophecy of Rome to Venus in book 1 of the *Aeneid* (1.283-5):

\[
\text{veniet lustris labentibus aetas}
\]
\[
\text{cum domus Assaraci Phthia clarasque Mycenas}
\]
\[
\text{servitio premet ac victis dominabitur Argis.}
\]

There will come an age, as the centuries pass, when the house of Assaracus will press Phthia and renowned Mycenae with servitude, and will be master over conquered Argos.

Assaracus was Aeneas’ great-grandfather (*Iliad* 20.231-40), only great-uncle to Hector; thus the mention of Assaracus in both Virgil and Seneca suggests a link to Aeneas. In Virgil, the phrase *domus Assaraci* is associated with the ultimate triumph of the Romans; but in Hecuba’s words, the house of Assaracus is utterly ruined, and not associated with any future greatness; the fact that the word order is reversed in Seneca (i.e. from *domus Assaraci* to *Assaraci domus*) also suggests the reversal in thought and context here. Hecuba’s repetition of Virgilian phrasing suggests a rewriting of the glorious history that Jupiter had predicted.\(^92\) Furthermore, the fact that

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\(92\) Zissos (2009, 193) also makes this interesting point about both poets’ use of the phrase *domus Assaraci*: “Whereas Virgil’s Jupiter uses *domus Assaraci* in a doubly metonymical sense, to
this is recognizably Virgilian phrasing is also supported by the same phrase in the *Bellum Civile* of Lucan, Seneca’s nephew, in the similar setting of Caesar’s visit to the ruins of Troy (9. 966-7): *iam silvae steriles et putres robore trunci / Assaraci pressere domos* (“Now barren forests and tree-trunks of rotten wood pressed upon the homes of Assaracus”). As in Seneca, the house of Assaracus is in total ruins; note the further pointed use of *premo* in Lucan in comparison to *Aeneid* 1.285 (i.e. in Virgil, the house of Assaracus will press servitude on the Greeks; in Lucan the decayed tree life of Troy presses upon the house). Lucan, like his uncle, implicitly questions, or provides a different perspective on, Augustan/Virgilian propaganda within his own poetry.

Further in her speech, Hecuba makes a lengthy statement on her role in the saga of the Trojan War, one that echoes a similar statement of Aeneas in *Aeneid* 2. Let us consider the Virgilian passage first. Aeneas, after narrating the deaths of some of his Trojan comrades in battle on the fateful night of Troy’s fall, says this of himself (2.431-4):

```
Iliaci cineres et flamma extrema meorum,
testor, in occasu vestro nec tela nec uallas
vitavisse vices, Danaum et, si fata fuissent
ut caderem, meruisse manu.
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Ashes of Ilium, and fatal flame of my people,
I call you to witness, that in your fall I avoided
neither weapons nor the hazards of the Greeks,
and if the fates had been that I should die, I would have
earned it by my own hand.

Aeneas seems to feel guilt that he survived Troy while so many of his people died, and thus makes this statement that he did his best and would have gladly accepted death. Of course, Aeneas’ survival that night at Troy is essential to Virgil’s epic and to Roman imperial denote future Roman civilization, identified through its progenitor, Seneca’s Hecuba uses it…for the actual palace of Assaracus. The Virgilian expression, in other words, is neutralized through a repetition that is merely lexical.”
mythmaking. Hecuba noticeably retains some of Aeneas’ wording in her own call to witness, but in a different fashion (Tro. 28-40):

Testor deorum numen adversum mihi
patriaeque cineres teque rectorem Phrygum

30 quem Troia toto conditum regno tegit,
tuosque manes quo stetit stante Iлим,
et vos meorum liberum magni greges,
umbrae minores: quidquid adversi accidit,
quaeque Phoebas ore lymphato furere

credi deo veteante praedixit mala,
prior Hecuba vidi gravida nec tacui metus
et vana vates ante Cassandram fui.
non cautus ignes Ithacus aut Ithaci comes
nocturnus in vos sparsit aut fallax Sinon:

40 meus ignis iste est, facibus ardetis meis.

I call to witness the spirit of the gods hostile to me
and the ashes of my fatherland, and you, leader of the Phrygians,
whom, buried, Troy covers with her whole kingdom,
and your shade - while you were alive, Ilim stood,
and you, great flocks of my children, smaller shades,
whatever misfortune happened, whatever evils the priestess
of Phoebus, raging with a frenzied mouth, predicted, (though
the god forbade it to be believed) I, Hecuba, saw first, while
pregnant, and I didn’t keep my fears silent, and I was
a futile seer before Cassandra. It was not the cautious Ithacan
or his nocturnal comrade who spread fires among you, nor was
it false Sinon: this is my fire, you are burning with my torches.

Hecuba’s call to witness has a clear predecessor in the Aeneid passage (Fantham 1982, 211; Keulen 2001, 96) in the use of testor and cineres in this Trojan setting; furthermore, both Aeneas and Hecuba seek to explain what they did to help their city: he fought that very night, and she attempted to warn the Trojans after her dream of giving birth to a firebrand while pregnant with Paris. Beyond that, the differences are striking. While Aeneas calls two items as witness (cineres and flamma of his perished people), Hecuba calls on five: the hostile gods (28), the

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93 Hecuba’s dream is in fact attested by Juno in Aeneid 7.319-20 (discussed above in chapter 2) and by Virgil himself at 10.704-5; see also Cassandra’s words at Sen. Agamemnon 706.
cinereus (29), Priam (29-30), Hector (31), and her other dead children, in five and one half
consecutive lines of poetry, as opposed to just more than one line in Virgil. This tendency
toward extension and elaboration within a given locus (i.e. calling the Trojan dead as witness)
can be seen as one way that Seneca expands upon Virgilian precedent; in this case, it also helps
Hecuba emphasize the magnitude of her losses, as opposed to Aeneas, who only witnesses the
collapse of the house of Priam from a certain remove, and, out of his immediate family, only
loses Creusa his wife. Furthermore, Boyle ad loc. notes that Hecuba’s reference to the numen
adversum or hostile gods in 28 has a precedent at Aen. 2.622-23, where Aeneas sees the same
hostile forces of divinity as Troy is falling;94 but Seneca’s Hecuba takes things further by
paradoxically calling on the hostile gods as witness.

The idea of Hecuba as an earlier Cassandra (33-7) suggests the cyclic nature of history so
prominent in this play: so often, things are seen as happening more than once, and, as in this
case, the repetition may be to no avail, or even criminal.95 Finally, the striking notion in line 40
that the fire that is currently burning Troy is Hecuba’s own also suggests this cyclic nature, and
in a sense reverses the notion of innocence that Aeneas had argued for. While Aeneas in book 2
puts much of the blame for the fall of Troy on the trickery of the Greeks, and Sinon in particular,
Hecuba “takes everything upon herself.”96 Hecuba, by saying, meus ignis iste est, facibus ardetis
meis- note the proliferation of s and t sounds, and the emphatic position of meus at the beginning
of the line97 – strongly dissociates herself from any notion that the Greeks were the only
instigators of this tragedy; she acknowledges that she gave birth to fire, and mourns the results.

94 apparent dirae facies inimicaque Troiae / numina deum (“The awful faces and the spirits of
the gods hostile to Troy appear”).
95 In comparing herself to Cassandra, Hecuba also sets up a connection to the Cassandra of
Seneca’s Agamemnon, who, as will be seen, provides an essential perspective in that play.
96 Fantham, 1982, 213.
97 Fantham, 213.
While Virgil’s Aeneas somewhat begs pardon for surviving Troy, Seneca’s Hecuba acknowledges that she is Troy, and that she, as mother, has given birth to destruction – of her children, and, by implication, of everyone else who died at Troy.  

Further in the first ode, the chorus, at Hecuba’s urging (131), mourns Priam in terms that both suggest Virgil and the repetitious nature of life at Troy (132-7):

> Accipe, rector Phrygiae, planctus,  
> accipe fletus, bis capte senex.  
> nil Troia semel te rege tulit,  
> bis pulsari Dardana Graio  
> moenia ferro  
> bisque pharetras passa Herculeas.

Receives, ruler of Phrygia, our lamentations,  
receive our wails, twice captured old man.  
Troy endured nothing once while you were king,  
twice the Trojan walls suffered battering by a Greek sword,  
twice they suffered Herculean arrows.

The chorus’ words here play off of the conceit that Troy, during Priam’s lifetime, was conquered twice: once in Priam’s youth by Hercules, and once by the Greek expedition led by Agamemnon; the Herculean arrows refer to those first used by Hercules and later by Philoctetes.  

The use of pairs in the language here (accipe/accipe, rector/senex, planctus/fletus, bis/bis, ferro/pharetras, etc.) helps reinforce the idea of repetition.  Furthermore, the phrase *bis capte* to describe Priam in 133 is Virgilian (Fantham 229): at *Aeneid* 9.599 and 635, the Trojans are (twice) described as *bis capti Phryges*, first as a taunt by the Trojans’ enemy, Numanus Remulus (Turnus’ brother-in-

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98 This notion of Hecuba as fire also has resonance within the theme of victor vs. victim in this play, discussed in chapter 4.

99 Fantham *ad loc.* notes the precedent in Euripides’ *Troades* 817-18, where the chorus describes Troy falling twice (*δίς*). Andromache employs the same conceit later in her anapaestic monody (718-20): *vidit pueri regis lacrimas /et Troia prior, parvusque minas /trucis Alcidae flexit Priamus* (“Previously Troy saw the tears of a boy king, and little Priam swayed the threats of cruel Alcides”) but unfortunately in this case her words are not able to persuade Ulixes to spare Astyanax.
law), and second as Ascanius mockingly boasts after killing Numanus with his arrows. But Numanus uses the phrase “twice conquered” in a different sense than that in the *Troades*: he refers to the fact that the Trojans were once conquered at home, and now are on the verge of being conquered as their camp in Italy is besieged. The chorus’ words lack the taunting nature of the phrase in Virgil. Seneca thus uses a Virgilian precedent, but turns it back to a uniquely Trojan locale, implicitly denying that there is any future beyond Troy. Put another way, Virgil’s Ascanius proves Numanus’ taunt wrong, whereas Seneca’s Trojans are truly perpetual sufferers.

**The Customary Price**

It is in the second act of the *Troades* that the theme of repeating the past and Virgil truly comes to fruition. As noted, the main event of the play is the sacrifice of Astyanax and Polyxena; it is in act 2 that these sacrifices are decided upon and fully sanctioned by Calchas the Greek seer, and they are done so in a specifically repetitive framework. The victorious Greeks temporarily delay sailing homeward until they can be assured of doing so under favorable auspices; it is for this reason that the herald Talthybius opens the act with these words (164-5):

> O longa Danais semper in portu mora,
> seu petere bellum, petere seu patriam volunt.

Oh long delay, always for the Greeks while in port, whether they wish to head to war – or homeward.

---

100 Williams 1973, 309.
101 However, Priam refers to his own experience of seeing Troy fall twice in *Aen*. 2.642-3, and Helenus, in addressing Anchises in 3.476, calls him *bis Pergamis erepte ruinis* (“twice snatched from the ruins of Pergamum”); there is also Turnus’ pejorative phrase *gentis bis victae*, referring to the Trojans, in 11.402. Nonetheless, the pairing of *bis* with a form of *capere* more immediately suggests the passages from *Aen* 9.
Talthybius here pointedly notes a repetition essential to the play: at Aulis, before the war, the Greeks were prevented from sailing to Troy due to rough seas; now they face another delay before heading home. The solution in both cases is human sacrifice: as Iphigenia, Agamemnon’s daughter, was sacrificed so that the Greeks could sail to Troy, so Astyanax and Polyxena will be sacrificed so that the Greeks can go home. The authority for this repetition comes from two otherworldly sources: first, the words spoken by Achilles’ shade, reported by Talthybius (191-6) and second, the pronouncement of Calchas at the end of the act (360-70). Achilles’ shade, in announcing that Polyxena must be sacrificed to him as a kind of bride in the afterlife, says this (193-4): non parvo luit / iras Achillis Graecia et magno luet (“Greece did not expiate the anger of Achilles at a small price, and she will again at a great price”). Again, we see a conceit based on the mythological and literary tradition: Achilles plays off of his own reputation for wrath as enshrined in the Iliad, using that authority to explain what will come next. The word play of luit vs. luet and non parvo vs. magno again emphasizes temporal repetition.

So also in the extended debate between Pyrrhus and Agamemnon over whether to sacrifice Polyxena (203-359; Pyrrhus is strongly in favor of the sacrifice, Agamemnon strongly against), both warriors repeatedly call upon past precedent in order to construct their arguments. Pyrrhus at one point brings up Iphigenia as a reproach to Agamemnon (248-9): at tuam gnatam parens / Helenae immolasti: solita iam et facta expeto (“But you, a father, sacrificed your own daughter for the sake of Helen: now I am seeking customary things that have precedent”). Pyrrhus himself, in this dispute, seems to relive his father Achilles’ famous hostility toward Agamemnon. Agamemnon, for his part, espouses a newfound sense of clementia toward his Trojan enemies, and in this he seems to be partly inspired by the Aeneid: toward the end of the debate, in arguing for sparing Polyxena, he says (350-1): meus captis quoque / scit parcere ensis
(“My sword also knows how to spare the captured”). His words here recall the famous advice of Anchises in Aeneid 6.851-3: *Romane, memento...parcere subiectis* (“Roman, remember to spare the conquered”). Agamemnon’s words here and throughout the debate suggest that he is inclined to find a way out of the repetitive cycle of violence, and references Virgilian language to support his position.102

Thus it is notable that Agamemnon’s indirect appeal to Virgilian clemency ultimately carries no weight, and that the girl must be killed. In Calchas’ definitive words that bring the act to a close, Pyrrhus’ argument for the customary wins the day (360-1):

\[
\text{Dant fata Danais quo solent pretio viam:} \\
\text{mactanda virgo est Thessali busto ducis;}
\]

The fates give a pathway to the Greeks at the price to which they are accustomed; the virgin must be slaughtered at the tomb of the Thessalian leader;

The fact that Calchas, a seer, confirms the necessary violence suggests that the divine forces in the world of the *Troades* – including the infernal shade of Achilles – approve of and require human sacrifice, and of a repetition of a violent past. As Friedrich has noted (1933, 101-2), these words of Calchas have an informative intertext in this respect with a passage from the beginning of Aeneid 2. At one point in Aeneas’ account of the fall of Troy, Sinon (whom Aeneas quotes) falsely relates how he was marked for human sacrifice by the Greeks, *for much the same reason* as Astyanax and Polyxena are so marked in the *Troades*: Sinon pretends that the Greeks, conceding defeat, had planned to sail homeward, but were prevented by inclement weather, much as they had before experienced in Aulis. In this context, Sinon falsely quotes the pronouncement of the Greek seer Eurypylus (Aeneid 2.116-9):

\[
\text{sanguine placastis ventos et virgine caesa,} \\
\text{cum primum Iliacas, Danai, venistis ad oras;}
\]

102 See chapter 4 for further discussion of these words of Seneca’s Agamemnon.
sanguine quaerendi reditus animaque litandum
Argolica.

By blood, and by killing a virgin, you placated the winds
when you Greeks first came to Trojan shores:
by blood must you seek your return and find favor
by offering a Greek for sacrifice.

Despite the lack of overlap in terms of vocabulary, Virgil’s Eurypylus makes much the same
pronouncement as Seneca’s Calchas. But from there, the differences are notable. First, in the
context of Sinon’s speech, the notion of proposed human sacrifice was intended to, and in fact
did, horrify his Trojan audience: part of the reason Priam and the Trojans take pity upon Sinon,
as Aeneas tells it, was out of revulsion at the notion of human sacrifice. In Seneca’s Troades,
however, that horrific act is in fact sanctioned by Calchas, and in doing so he emphasizes the
specifically repetitive nature of the act. In another sense, that which is a lie in Virgil becomes
truth in Seneca tragicus: the deception that Aeneas’ enemy (Sinon) employed becomes a major
plotline in Seneca’s play. In fact, the notion of deception in Virgil’s epic may “spill over” into
Seneca’s play to such an extent that Calchas’ words can be construed as a lie: thus the sacrifice
of Astyanax and Polyxena that happens in the Troades would be based on oracular deception, so
that the actual deaths described in act 5 become a farce, a politically-sanctioned endorsement of
perverse religious custom. This Seneca-Vigil intertext sums up, I argue, much of the relation
between the two poets: a horrific, ruthlessly repetitive, scenario that is mostly suggested in
Virgilian epic becomes an overwhelming reality in Senecan tragedy; that which is false to
Aeneas becomes true, to a degree, for Seneca’s tragic characters. Furthermore, Senecan tragedy,
through the prophetic authority of Calchas, outdoes the Virgilian precedent in this case, by

103 The Trojans in fact will be proved to have had good reason to abhor human sacrifice, as
Priam their king will soon be sacrificed at the altar of Hercean Jove at the hands of Pyrrhus
(Aeneid 2. 506-558).
suggesting that not one human victim is enough to do the job: besides Polyxena, Astyanax must also be sacrificed, so that the Greek fleet can safely sail (Troades 365-70). Seneca’s inclusion of two sacrificial human deaths within one tragedy conflates the deaths depicted in Euripides’ Hekabe (Polyxena) and Troades (Astyanax).

**Seneca’s Andromache and Intertextual Memory**

In the third act, Andromache vainly attempts to save her son Astyanax from his impending sacrifice. Much of her motivation is inherently political: she wishes to preserve the son of Hector so that there may be an heir to the Trojan throne, in effect accomplishing what Aeneas does in the Aeneid. But therein lies the problem: act 3 recalls the Aeneid to such an extent that her words point out the contrast between the tragic and epic texts. Andromache’s evocations of Virgilian language suggest the utter fruitlessness of her efforts by comparison: Ascanius is given divine favor by the gods (as seen in the omen of the flamma over Ascanius’ head, and the subsequent comet in the sky sent by Jupiter, Aen. 2.679-704), while Astyanax is destined for human sacrifice.

This act has a strong Virgilian precedent, perhaps most prominently in that the motif of the dream of Hector is borrowed from Aeneid 2.104 In Virgil, Hector comes to Aeneas to warn him that Troy is being taken while he sleeps, and that he must flee immediately, taking the penates of Troy with him (Aeneid 2.268-97). In Seneca, the dream of Hector comes to his wife Andromache after Troy has been taken, and urges her to hide Astyanax from the Greeks (438-60). Thus both visions of Hector intend to provide help to their surviving kin; in Seneca’s play the vision is more belated as Troy has already fallen, and this belatedness helps suggest the

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104 Heinze (1993, 199) conjectures that Aeneas’ dream of Hector was an invention of Virgil, i.e. such a dream did not exist in the literary tradition before the Aeneid.
hopelessness of the Senecan vision. Furthermore, Hector in the *Troades* focuses specifically on the child’s safety; thus the Senecan Hector’s appeal is more intimate, husband to wife, whereas in Virgil there is greater emphasis on the survival of Troy through the penates. Above all, the most striking difference in the two accounts is the fact that Virgil’s Hector is able to help save Aeneas, the penates, Anchises, and Ascanius, whereas Seneca’s Hector is completely unable to save Astyanax; Andromache’s efforts are ultimately an exercise in futility. As a result, her recounting of the dream of Hector comes across as a Virgilian nightmare, so to speak – the intercession of Hector leads nowhere, and seems merely a delay before Astyanax’s death. As Zissos (2009, 200) argues, “Seneca’s subversive recontextualization of the Virgilian scene cancels out its original function and signification.”

Furthermore, there is a more fatalistic cast to the scene in Seneca. Both speakers (Aeneas and Andromache) preface the words spoken by a description of Hector’s appearance within the dream. Aeneas lingers on the frightful, hideous appearance of the Trojan hero in *Aen.* 2.270-3:

*maestissimus Hector / visus adesse mihi largosque effundere fletus, / raptatus bigis ut quondam, aterque cruento / pulvere perque pedes traiectus lora tumentis* (“Hector, very sorrowful, seemed to be in my presence and to pour out copious tears / as once he was dragged by the two-horse chariot, and black with gory dust and pierced with straps through his swollen feet”) and 277-8:

*squalentem barbam et concretos sanguine crinis / vulneraque illa gerens, quae circum plurima muros / accepit patrios* (“bearing a filthy beard, hair matted with blood, and those many wounds which he first received around his paternal walls”). Seneca’s Andromache is more restrained in her description (448-50):

105 As Schiesaro (2003, 195) notes, “while Virgil’s Hector will succeed in saving Aeneas and will thus ensure the Trojans a future that is significantly different from their past, he will be denied any such success in the *Troades*, where, it seems, the only permitted form of repetition is *ad litteram.*”
non ille vultus flammeum intendens iubar
sed fessus ac deiectus et fletu gravis
similisque nostro, squalida obtectus coma.

[Hector had] not that face displaying a fiery radiance,
but one tired and downcast and heavy with weeping
and similar to ours, covered with filthy hair.

In this case, it seems that Virgil is more Senecan than Seneca (i.e. in terms of macabre details),
but the reason is clear: Hector is meant to be a frightful warning to Aeneas of the Trojan past
which he now must flee from, whereas in the Troades he is simply like the rest of the Trojans at
this point in his distress; hence similisque nostro in line 450. While Hector’s visit helps
Aeneas get on his way, the dream in Troades is ultimately in vain.

In Andromache’s dream, Hector, in urging his wife to quickly hide their son, reasons
with her thus (454-5): Troia quod cecidit gemis? / utinam iaceret tota. (“Do you mourn that Troy
has fallen? Would that it all were leveled”). This fatalistic wish of Hector undercuts his
injunction to hide their son, in strong contrast to Virgil’s Hector, who emphasizes flight from the
city in possession of the sacred idols. Furthermore, the Senecan Hector’s lack of foresight in
terms of planning for his wife perhaps helps contribute to Andromache’s later desperation, and
her decision to hide her son within Hector’s tomb (483-512). As scholars have noted, by this
funereal act of hiding, Andromache is in effect burying her son. While Virgil’s Hector helps
Aeneas out of Troy, Seneca’s Hector leads Andromache to ensconce her son within the lifeless
Trojan past that is Hector’s tomb. Troy and its fatal associations form a closed world in Seneca’s

106 Note that Andromache had already boldly compared herself to her husband in 413-5, when
she said that it was her limbs (mea membra) that were dragged around Troy by Achilles, playing
off the conceit of Hector as being everything to his wife, as expressed in Iliad 6. 429-30.
107 The words of advice of the Virgilian Hector to Aeneas (heu fuge, nate dea, teque his...eripe
flammis, “alas, flee, son of a goddess, and take yourself away from these flames” 2.289) are later
confirmed by similar words of Venus to her son (eripe, nate, fugam, finemque impone labori,
“son, seize your flight, and place an end to your toil” 2.619).
Troades; one cannot escape except by death. Furthermore, Seneca’s Andromache undercuts the validity of the dream she narrates by describing Hector’s shade, retreating from her at the end of the vision, as a fallax umbra (460). While fallax can simply mean “elusive” (Fantham 154), it also can suggest deception: witness the phrase fallax Sinon (39) quoted above. This suggests a link between Andromache’s dream of Hector and Calchas’ prophecy in act 2: both could be groundless, not based on divine fate, and ultimately meaningless. Seneca thus rewrites Virgil by suggesting that there may be no way out of Troy.

After describing her dream of Hector, Andromache, addressing Astyanax, who is with her onstage, recalls her own Virgilian persona. In Aeneid 3, Virgil’s Andromache, as Aeneas and the Trojans are about to leave Buthrotum, presents gifts to Ascanius and addresses him thus (3.489-91):

    o mihi sola mei super Astyanactis imago.
    sic oculos, sic ille manus, sic ora ferebat;
    et nunc aequali tecum pubesceret aevo.

    O only remaining image of Astyanax that I have now.
    Thus he was in his eyes, his hands, his face:
    even now he would be equally maturing in his youth.

While, as noted above in chapter two, Virgil’s epic Andromache is, like Seneca’s, obsessed with a Trojan past, nonetheless in this instance she finds solace in the presence of Ascanius, as a potential heir to the Trojan throne, something not possible for her own son Astyanax. By contrast, Seneca’s Andromache reverses the situation by associating her son not with his possible future, but with the tragic past that Hector embodies. She begins (461-8):

    O nate, magni certa progenies patris,
    spes una Phrygibus, unica afflictae domus,
    veterisque suboles sanguinis nimium inclita
    nimiumque patri similis. hos vultus meus

109 See also Freas (2010, 99-100) on Andromache’s use here of the word fallax.
habebat Hector, talis incessu fuit
habitue talis, sic tulit fortes manus,
sic celsus umeris, fronte sic torva minax
cervice fusam dissipans iacta comam–

Son, true offspring of a great father,
sole hope for the Trojans, only hope of this unfortunate house,
a too-famous descendant of ancient blood,
too much like your father. My Hector had this
face, so was he in his walk and in his bearing,
thus he bore his strong hands,
thus proud in his shoulders, thus threatening with a cruel visage,
scattering his flowing hair with a toss of his neck–

Here the triple use of *sic* used to describe physical characteristics in 467-8 echoes that in Virgil (3.490);\(^{110}\) this case is particularly interesting in that Seneca’s Andromache is echoing or paraphrasing her own Virgilian self. As in Hecuba’s echo of Aeneas in the prologue discussed above, it is notable in this instance how Seneca expands on Virgil’s one line of hexameter (*sic oculos, sic ille manus, sic ora ferebat*) into four and one-half trimeter lines (464-8), with a vivid description that suggests more a young warrior than a small child; furthermore the detail *fronte torva minax* (“threatening with a cruel visage”) in 467 has a bellicose ring to it, something absent from the bittersweet scene in Virgil.

While Virgil’s Andromache is encouraged by the resemblance of Ascanius to Astyanax, Seneca’s Andromache notes the unfortunate resemblance of Astyanax to his father: he is *nimium patri similis*. As Zissos (2009) well argues, Andromache’s obsession with her dead husband Hector colors much of her speech and actions within the play; Zissos also points out that, from another perspective, the Senecan Andromache’s obsession with Hector spills over into the Buthrotum scene of book 3 of the *Aeneid*, in a form of Barchiesi’s “future reflexive.” But in this instance, while Virgil’s Andromache gives gifts to Ascanius to take with him to Italy, in Seneca

\(^{110}\) Fantham, Boyle, and Keulen *ad loc*.
she will give Astyanax gifts (a lock of hair, tears, and kisses) to bring to Hector in the underworld (799-801, 806-9). The Senecan Andromache’s reference to her Virgilian self is thus troubling, in that it suggests not salvation, but rather makes Astyanax a new Hector, destined, once again, to be killed at Troy.

Seneca’s Andromache continues her address to her son in ways that further recall the *Aeneid* (469-74):

> o nate sero Phrygibus, o matri cito,
> eritne tempus illud ac felix dies
> quo Troici defensor et vindex soli
> recidiva ponas Pergama et sparsos fuga
cives reducas, nomen et patriae suum
Phrygibusque reddas?

Child, born too late for the Phrygians, too soon for your mother, will there be a time and a happy day when, as defender and avenger of Trojan soil you might found a renewed Troy and lead back the citizens scattered by flight, and you might restore its name to the fatherland and to the Phrygians?

As Fantham (283-4) among others notes, the phrase *recidiva Pergama* is Virgilian, appearing three times in the *Aeneid*: 4.344 (*et recidiva manu posuissem Pergama victis*, “and I would have built by hand a reborn Troy for the conquered” - Aeneas explaining his wishes to Dido), 7.322 (*funestaeque iterum recidiva Pergama taedae*, “and deathly nuptials will again take place, in reborn Troy” - Juno’s nefarious plans in Italy), and 10.58 (*dum Latium Teucri recidivaque Pergama quaerunt*, “while the Trojans seek Latium and a reborn Troy” - Venus’ complaints about Aeneas to Jupiter). 111 The word *recidivus*, which does not appear in Latin literature before Virgil, seems to derive from the verb *revido*, as in seeds that fall from a plant and subsequently rise up from the soil (*OLD s.v. recido* 1). This seems favorable enough in the context of Troy

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111 See chapter 2 above on this phrase in the *Aeneid.*
and Aeneas, but the actual use of the phrase *recidiva Pergama* in these three instances is in a somewhat negative context: Aeneas in book 4 (like Seneca’s Andromache) refers to the impossibility of rebuilding Troy on its original site, Juno seeks to recreate Troy in Italy in terms of its past horrors and warfare, and Venus’ words are clouded by her frustration with this very plan of Juno. As discussed in chapter 2, the idea of repeating Troy in the *Aeneid* is a problem, one that Aeneas must overcome. This negative connotation of the phrase in Virgil spills over into Andromache’s words in the *Troades*, actually underlining the futility of her hopes, which are denied by the more basic fact that Astyanax cannot avoid imminent death. Andromache hopes that Troy in the Troad – not in Italy – might rise again, something that is impossible, and that its name might live on (473-4), which is also not fated, and stands in ironic contrast\(^{112}\) to the agreement that Juno and Jupiter make at the end of the *Aeneid*, namely that the *nomen Trojanum* will not survive beyond the generations of Aeneas and Ascanius (12.819-36). 

After Andromache desperately hides Astyanax in Hector’s tomb, she makes an equally dire entreaty to the earth and to Hector (519-521):

*Dehisce tellus,* tuque, coniunx, ultimo specu revulsam scinde tellurem et Stygis sinu profundo conde depositum meum.

Earth, split open, and you, husband, cut the torn earth from its furthest hollow and bury my treasure in the deep gulf of the underworld.

Andromache seems to be truly hoping to bury her son here: Hector is to emerge from the depths and hide Astyanax in the underworld. Seneca *tragicus* employs the phrase *dehisce tellus* two other times (*Phaedra* 1238 and *Oedipus* 868), in both cases to indicate a wish to die, to be

\(^{112}\) Fantham, 284.
swallowed into the earth; Andromache’s use is thus the more shocking by comparison. But the phrase derives from Virgil (Keulen 333); in Aeneid 4, Dido explains her extreme reluctance to be unfaithful to her dead husband Sychaeus, saying that she would prefer death (4.24): *sed mihi vel tellus optem prius ima dehisca* (“but first may I wish for myself that even the deepest earth split open”). Also in Virgil, the notion of the earth splitting open implies death; it is thus very ironic that Andromache should use such language while she is trying to save her child.

Ultimately, Andromache is forced to hand over Astyanax to Ulixes and his men so that he can be sacrificed. Because of her lack of divine favor, as well as her obsession with the Trojan past, Andromache is unable to escape the circular nature of Trojan history; as Ulysses says to her (555) *patere quod victor tulit* (“suffer what the victor bore”), again implying that the death of Astyanax is a needed repetition of the earlier sacrifice of Iphigenia. At one point, as she becomes more desperate, Andromache asks that she be killed first, and then imagines that Hector is actually returning from the dead in her and Astyanax’s defense (680-5):

```
Me, me sternite hic ferro prius.
repellor, heu me. rumpe fatorum moras,
molire terras, Hector: ut Ulixem domes,
vel umbra satis es. arma concussit manu,
iaculatur ignes –cernitis, Danai, Hectorem?
an sola video?
```

Here, lay me low, me, by the sword first. Ah me, I am pushed back. Break through the delays of death, force away the earth, Hector: to subdue Ulixes, even as a shade you are sufficient. He has brandished the arms in his hand, he is hurling torches –do you perceive Hector, Greeks? Or do I alone see him?

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113 See also Schiesaro (2003, 195-7) on the phrase *dehisce tellus* in Seneca’s tragedies.
114 Besides the words of Dido, there is also in the Aeneid the fatalistic thought expressed by both Turnus (10.675-6) and Juturna (12.883-4), using *terra* instead of *tellus*: *aut quae satis ima dehiscat* / *terra mihi?* (“or what deepest earth might sufficiently split open for me?”), as well as in an infernal simile in Aen. 8.243 (*terra dehiscens*).
Once again, Andromache’s echoes of Virgilian language suggest the hopelessness of her efforts. First, Andromache’s plea that she be killed first in line 680 recalls the words of Nisus in Aen. 9.427, who asks that he be killed instead of Euryalus: me, me, adsum qui feci, in me convertite ferrum (“Me, me, here I am, the one who did it, turn the sword against me”), as well as the words of Euryalus’ mother at Aen. 9.493-4: figite me, si qua est pietas, in me omnia tela / conicite, o Rutuli, me primam absomite ferro (“transfix me, if there is any piety, Rutulians, hurl your weapons at me, take me first by the sword”). Andromache’s plea turns out to be as ineffective as that of Nisus and the mother of Euryalus, an intertextual sign of her desperation.115 Second, Andromache’s obsession with the dead Hector leads to delusional hopes that he is returning. The phrase rumpe fatorum moras in 681 has a Virgilian precedent;116 at Aen. 6.882-3, Anchises in the underworld mournfully addresses Marcellus, nephew of Augustus, whose early death precluded any hopes that he would succeed his uncle: heu miserande puer, si qua fata aspera rumpas! / tu Marcellus eris (“Alas, pitiful boy, if in some way you could break through harsh fate! You will be Marcellus”).117 The Senecan Andromache’s allusion to Anchises’ words points out the futility of what she hopes will happen; as Marcellus –note that in Aen. 6 he, like Hector, is in the underworld –did not survive, nor will Astyanax, nor will Hector return from the

115 The overlaps are noted by Keulen (380) as well as Wills (1996, 80). See also Sen. Phoenissae 443-4 (Hirschberg 1989, 112 notes the Virgilian link), in which Jocasta asks that her sons and their armies kill her instead of each other: in me arma et ignes vertite, in me omnis ruat / unam iuventus (“turn your arms and fires against me, let all the youth rush against me alone”); and Phaedra 1159-60, spoken by Phaedra: Me, me, profundi saeve dominator freti / invade, et in me monstra caerulei maris / emitte (“Me, go against me, cruel master of the deep sea, and send against me the monsters of the blue ocean”); compare also Phaedra 682-3.
116 Fantham and Keulen ad loc.
117 See also the chorus’ words at Sen. Hercules Furens 566, addressing Hercules, in hopes that he will return from the underworld: fatum rumpe manu (“break through death by force”), noted by Fitch (1987, 267). See chapter 5 on Sen. Medea 54, rumpe iam segnes moras.
dead. Third, when Andromache imagines that Hector is present, hurling torches, she again is recalling Virgil’s epic, as at Aen. 2.276 Aeneas remembers Hector in his glory, when he was setting fire to the Greek ships: Danaum Phrygios iaculatus puppibus ignis (“he hurled Phrygian torches at the ships of the Greeks”). Thus Andromache is deceived by her memories of Hector and of Virgil, as Hector is simply not present this time.

Grimly repetitive frameworks also appear at the end of act 3 as well as in 4, in this case based on Achilles’ eternal enmity. In her last words to her son, Andromache asks Astyanax to reproach Hector in the underworld for not coming to their rescue; here she addresses her absent husband (805-6): lentus et segnis iaces? / reit Achilles (“Do you lie inert and indifferent? Achilles returned”). The mention of Achilles’ return is a reference to the vision narrated by Talthybius in act 2 (168-202), in which Achilles’ ghost shook the Trojan surroundings and demanded Polyxena’s sacrifice. Similarly, in act 4, when Hecuba hears that her daughter is to be wedded in death to Achilles’ shade, she complains (955-6): Adhuc Achilles vivit in poenas Phrygum? / adhuc rebellat? (“Does Achilles still live to punish the Phrygians? Does he still renew the fight?”). As Henry and Henry (1985, 133) well remark, “The two warriors take the same role in death as in life; Achilles the destroyer, spreading death (and cosmic destruction now); Hector the defender of his home and his people, falling in ignominious defeat. It is the destroyer who prevails, alive and dead.” Thus Hector and Achilles repeat their past roles beyond the grave, and the Trojans suffer again.

Caedes Recidiva

118 Compare the similar wording of Helen and its fatal associations at Tro. 938-9: Utinam iuberet me quoque interpres deum / abrumpere ense lucis invisae moras (“Would that the gods’ interpreter ordered me too to sever by the sword the delays of hateful light”).
119 Fantham and Keulen ad loc.
In act 5 of the *Troades*, a messenger recounts the deaths of Astyanax and Polyxena. These are the climactic events of the play, which were anticipated since act 2; yet once again they produce a strong sense of déjà vu, especially in the case of Astyanax. The messenger’s account is divided into two parts: first, the death of Astyanax (1068-1103) and then, after a brief exchange with Andromache, that of Polyxena (1118-64); this double murder in the way that is narrated further suggests a violent repetition: human sacrifice happens not once, but twice. In both narratives, the messenger is careful to begin with a description of the place where the sacrifices took place, so as to emphasize how the killings were viewed by the witnesses (1068-78 and 1119-26). These extended *ecphrases topou* are characteristic of epic, as Keulen (496) notes, and indeed there are connections to the *Aeneid* in both accounts. Astyanax’s death takes place on a high tower in Priam’s palace overlooking Troy and the nearby battlefields. The messenger begins his description of the tower in a way that recalls the beginning of Aeneas’ narrative of the fall of Troy (I quote only part):

1068  *Est* una magna turris e Troia super….
1075  haec *nota* quondam turris et muri decus,
1076  *nunc* saeva cautes,

There remains one great tower in Troy….
This once famous tower, impressively situated on the wall, now a grim crag,

This recalls Aeneas’ description of Tenedos, the island where the Greek fleet lay in wait before Troy’s fall (*Aen. 2.21-23)*:

*est* in conspectu Tenedos, *notissima* fama
insula, dives opum Priami dum regna manebant,
*nunc* tantum sinus et statio male ōda carinis:

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120 In 1120, after narrating Astyanax’s fate, the messenger calls Polyxena’s death *aliud facinus* (“another crime”).
121 See chapter 4 for extended discussion of the death of Polyxena.
122 Noted by Fantham (369) and Mader (1997, 342 n.58).
There is in sight Tenedos, island of great repute,
wealthy while Priam’s kingdom stood,
now only a bay, an unsafe mooring for ships:

The progression of both narratives from a form of *est* in primary position, to a form of *notus*, and then the adverb *nunc*, also in primary position, suggests that Seneca recalls Virgil here. Both Senecan and Virgilian passages describe places that once were renowned, and then, after being conquered, were reduced to a humble and even precarious state; thus both texts suggest the reversal of fortune involved in Troy’s fall. But Seneca outdoes Virgil in this contrast by emphasizing the stark and ominous nature of the *saeva cautes* where Astyanax will be killed; once again, Seneca’s repetition of the Virgilian past has ominous overtones.

The description of the tower is further enhanced by mention of past activity in this locale. The messenger mentions how Priam used to be accompanied by his young grandson on this tower; from here he would point out Hector in battle: *paterna puero bella monstrabat senex* (“the old man used to show the boy his father’s battles” 1074). Thus Astyanax has been here before; while in the past he witnessed his father’s participation in martial violence, now Astyanax will confront his own violent death. There is also a precedent for this in *Aeneid* 2 in the description of Aeneas’ mounting the roof of Priam’s palace, during which he uses a secret passage, adjacent to the tower, that used to be frequented by Andromache (2.455-7):

\[
\text{infelix qua se, dum regna maneabant,}
\text{saepius Andromache ferre incomitata solebat}
\text{ad soceros et avo puerum Astyanacta trahebat.}
\]

where, while the kingdom stood, unfortunate Andromache, unaccompanied, was very often accustomed to pass to her parents-in-law, and would bring the boy Astyanax to his grandfather.

This image of Andromache bringing Astyanax to the tower in turn has a connection to the actions of Ulixes in the current scene of *Troades*, as the messenger narrates them (1089-91):
incedit Ithacus **parvulum dextra trahens**
Priami nepotem, **nec gradu segni** puer
ad alta pergit moenia.

The Ithacan advances, dragging the little grandson
of Priam by the hand, and not with sluggish step the boy
marches toward the high walls.

With this echo of Virgil’s use of *traho*, Seneca draws a contrast between the peaceful nature of
Astyanax’s earlier visits to this tower (as Virgil tells it) and his final fatal visit as a prisoner of
the Greeks. Moreover, as noted by Boyle (1994, 226), in *Aeneid* 2.723-4, we have another vision
of a grandson of Priam accompanying an adult, namely Ascanius\(^{123}\) with Aeneas, as they escape
from Troy:

\[
\textbf{dextrae se parvus} \text{ Iulus}
\]
implicuit sequiturque patrem **non passibus aequis**.

little Iulus grasped me by the hand
and follows his father, with unequal steps.

Here Iulus/Ascanius is able to survive thanks to his father’s guidance, whereas Astyanax is taken
to his death. Seneca’s phrase **nec gradu segni** seems an echo of Virgil’s **non passibus aequis**,\(^{124}\)
but whereas Ascanius’ haste is understandable, the fact that Astyanax stridently follows Ulixes is
surprising given the circumstances.\(^{125}\) While Ascanius hurries out of Troy, Astyanax hurries to
his death.

In fact, Astyanax dies bravely, jumping off the tower *sponte sua* (“of his own
volition,”\(^{1102}\)); his death thus exemplifies the notion of *libera mors* (willing or freely chosen

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\(^{123}\) Ascanius was grandson to Priam by his mother Creusa, daughter of Priam and Hecuba

\(^{124}\) As noted in chapter 1, Seneca quotes Virgil’s three-word phrase at *Apocolocyntosis* 1.2. See
also *Aen.* 6.263, in which Aeneas is described as following the Sibyl into the cave that leads to
the underworld: *ille ducem haud timidis vadentem passibus aequat* (“He, with bold steps, keeps
pace with her lead as she proceeds”).

\(^{125}\) Busch (2009, 280) points out that Polyxena at the moment of her death acts similarly (1151):
*non tuit retro gradum* (“she did not take a step back”).

80
death) to be discussed in the *Agamemnon* section of this chapter. Note also that, in jumping, he falls to the center of Troy (*in media Priami regna*, 1103); this detail evokes the inescapability of Troy in this play: Astyanax, in his death, falls, in a sense, into the Trojan past. The messenger further explains with gory details how the force of the fall rendered the boy’s corpse unrecognizable (1110-17) and he ends the description thus (1115-17):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{soluta cervix silicis impulsu, } & \text{caput} \\
\text{ruptum cerebro penitus expresso} & \text{iacet} \\
\text{deforme corpus.}
\end{align*}
\]

His neck was broken by the impact of the stone, his head burst open, the brain having been pushed out from within; he lies a disfigured corpse.

Keulen (511) makes the important point that there is a precedent for this description in *Aeneid* 2, in which Aeneas describes Priam’s corpse after he was slaughtered by Pyrrhus (*Aen.* 2.557-8):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{iacet} & \text{ingens litore truncus,} \\
\text{avulsumque umeris caput} & \text{et sine nomine corpus.}
\end{align*}
\]

He lies a huge trunk on the shore, his head torn from his shoulders, and a body without a name.

This connection between Astyanax and Priam, enabled by the Virgilian intertext, shows once again how Troy’s violent history can be construed as repeating itself. The death of the grandson repeats and confirms the death of the grandfather, both taking place during the fall of Troy; Seneca revivifies the Virgilian nightmare of the death of Priam by making it the *telos* of his play, through the figure of Astyanax. Andromache’s chilling, almost humorous rejoinder after the messenger’s description (1117) *Sic quoque est similis patri* (“In this way too he is like

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126 See Most (1992) for an insightful investigation of passages in Senecan tragedy, such as this one, that include graphic dismemberment of the human body.

127 The chorus in *Troades* addresses the dead Priam in the first ode, saying (140-1) *magnoque Iovi victima caesus / Sigea premis litora truncus* (“And cut down as an offering to great Jupiter, you, a trunk, press the Sigean shores.”) Thus here too the chorus remembers Virgil and points out that Priam was a sacrificial victim, much as his grandson will be later.
his father”) also suggests his connection to his deceased father Hector. The annihilation of Troy and its people in the *Troades* is further nuanced by its connections to Virgilian epic; the *Aeneid*’s teleology is, in turn, brought into question. As Schiesaro (2003, 208) argues in discussing the *Thyestes*, “In retrospect, *Thyestes* and other Senecan tragedies question the discursive assumptions on which the *Aeneid* was built, and shatter any optimistic ideals that it may have nurtured.” The theme of repetition of the past in Seneca’s *Troades* is, disturbingly, Virgilian.

3.3 Seneca’s *Agamemnon*.

Like the *Troades*, Seneca’s *Agamemnon* shows a fascination with the memory of Troy and of the *Aeneid*, in particular book 2. While in the *Troades* Troy is the criminally violent past, present and future, in the *Agamemnon* Troy’s memory becomes a source of solace and even victory for the prophetess Cassandra, as she interprets the death of Agamemnon at the hands of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, and ironically, her own imminent death, as a victory for the Trojans. In the *Agamemnon*, as in the *Troades*, characters and choruses provide nuance and point to their words by echoing Virgil’s *Aeneid* in the thematic context of temporal repetition.

The *Agamemnon*, like the *Troades*, affords a multiplicity of perspectives, both Greek and Trojan, on the action at hand. While Clytemnestra’s perspective is important in the first half of the play, that of one of her Trojan victims, Cassandra, dominates in the second. Compared to the *Troades*, the *Agamemnon* is looser and more disjointed in its structure. The prologue is spoken by the ghost of Thyestes, who unwillingly emerges from the underworld and foresees the death of his family. Andromache’s words play off of the mangling of Hector’s corpse as described in *Iliad* 22; her statement can seem darkly humorous to a modern reader in that it sounds like the modern cliché “He’s just like his dad.” Schiesaro (2003, 200 n.66) notes that Andromache’s words are “a poignant reversal” of Catullus 61.214, *sit suo similis patri* (“may he be like his father”).
of Agamemnon. In the second act, Clytemnestra debates – first with her nurse, and second with her lover Aegisthus – whether to murder Agamemnon. The third act is dominated by the speech of Eurybates, Agamemnon’s herald, who narrates the storm at sea that the Greeks recently suffered on their way home from Troy. This is the longest continuous speech in Senecan tragedy (about 155 lines), and its presence in the middle of the play seems to delay and divert attention from the main action of the tragedy, i.e. the murder of Agamemnon. The fourth act shifts focus to Cassandra, newly arrived in Argos as slave to Agamemnon, and her prophetic vision of her master’s murder that she shares with the secondary chorus of Trojan women, and then alludes to in a pointed exchange with Agamemnon himself. The fifth and last act of the play includes Cassandra’s prophetic narration of the murder itself, as well as Electra’s successful arrangements to save the infant Orestes from his mother and Aegisthus, and ends with the defiant statements of both Electra and Cassandra in the face of the now frustrated murderers. While the secondary chorus of Trojan women sings the third ode, dwelling on the blessing of death and the fall of Troy, the primary chorus of Argive women discuss the perilous nature of kingship, power, and wealth in the first ode, and in the second and fourth odes celebrate the Olympian gods and Hercules respectively.

This short overview of the play may suggest the somewhat unfathomable nature of the Agamemnon: it can be difficult to see how the various strains of the play work together. Besides Eurybates’ storm narrative, the odes of the Argive chorus and the very late introduction of Electra in the fifth act do not seem to fit coherently into the action and themes of the rest of the play.\textsuperscript{129} The play seems to be a sophisticated fusion of elements, in which the poet has combined

\textsuperscript{129} Motto and Clark (1985) make the interesting argument that Seneca’s Agamemnon deliberately deploys disjunction, debilitation, and fragmentation in order to question the heroic status of its characters and to undermine its own tragic episodes. While I agree with their argument to a
various mythical plotlines and motifs in a way that offers a repeated shift of focus, and thus draws into question any one reading. Nonetheless, there is a sustained evocation of Virgil throughout the entire play. In this section of the chapter, I will look at themes of repeating the past and Troy, and related instances of repeating Virgil, as in the previous *Troades* section. I will give most of my attention to the second half of the play, as this is the section that deals most with the memory of Troy.

**Hic Epulis Locus**

The *Agamemnon* may be said to be, above all, a play about revenge,\(^{130}\) including the capacity of revenge to endlessly repeat itself in an answering vendetta, such as plagued the house of Atreus starting a generation or two before the Trojan War. Thyestes (Agamemnon’s uncle) had seduced his brother Atreus’ wife and subsequently had stolen the Argive throne from him. In response, Atreus later killed Thyestes’ sons and served them to the unknowing father in the form of a banquet. In speaking the prologue, Thyestes, now a ghost, understands the imminent death of Agamemnon, son of Atreus, as payback for the deaths of his own sons at the hands of Atreus (37-52).\(^{131}\) The fact that Aegisthus, one of the murderers, is Thyestes’ son helps support this perspective. Late in the prologue, Thyestes characterizes the coming action thus (47-8):

\[
iam scelera prope sunt, iam dolus caedes cruor:
parantur epulae!
\]

Now crimes are near, now trickery, slaughter, gore:
a feast is being prepared!

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\(^{130}\) A notion shared by Shelton (1983, 159).

\(^{131}\) As Calder (1976, 32) and Shelton (1983, 159) have pointed out, Seneca’s play affords many diverse points of view on Agamemnon’s death, including those of Thyestes’ ghost, Clytemnestra, Cassandra, etc.
The reference to a feast (epulae) is a pun: it both refers to the meal that will be served to Agamemnon, during which he will be cruelly bludgeoned by Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, as well as to Thyestes’ unspeakable feasting on his children in the past. Thyestes’ ghost thus is cleverly stating how the criminal mythological past will repeat itself. There is also a similar punning on meals nearer the beginning of Thyestes’ prologue that is even more intertextual in nature: in reluctantly surveying the palace of the kings of Argos that Thyestes used to inhabit, he notes these sites (7-11):

hoc est vetustum Pelopiae limen domus;

hinc auspiciari regium capiti decus

mos est Pelasgis, hoc sedent alti toro

10 quibus superba sceptra gestantur manu, locus hic habendae curiae –hic epulis locus.

This is the ancient threshold of the Pelopid house;
from here it is the custom to inaugurate the glory of the royal crown,
high on this throne sit those by whom the scepter is wielded with a proud hand;
here is the place for meetings – here for meals.

Thyestes here remembers not only his own turn at ruling Argos, but also the horrific meal he was served by Atreus: the presence of the phrase hic epulis locus at the very end of the description gives even heavier weight to this sinister allusion, one which at the same time borders on the humorous, as a kind of three-word punch line to the narrative. But this Senecan passage also has a close intertext with a passage from Aeneid 7 in which the palace of Latinus is described, this time by Virgil himself. Virgil, like Seneca, uses repeated forms of the demonstrative hic (7. 173-6):

hic sceptra accipere et primos attolere fascis regibus omen erat; hoc illis curia templum, hae sacris sedes epulis; hic ariete caeso perpetuis soliti patres considere mensis.

Here it was a good omen for kings to receive the scepter and lift the first fasces; this temple was their meeting place,
this the place for sacred meals; here, after the ram was slaughtered, the fathers were accustomed to sit at long tables.

Seneca’s description of the Pelopid palace thus clearly derives from Virgil (Tarrant 1976, 165); both ecphrases progress from the sacred spaces associated with the exercise of kingly power to the place for meals. Both Virgil and Seneca are here anachronistic in their Roman details (curia in Seneca, and fascis and curia in Virgil). But while Virgil’s description evokes the fundamentally Roman nature of Aeneas’ Roman predecessors in a good way (i.e. as places of divinely sanctioned activity), Seneca’s lines turn that description on its head, by pointedly, in comparison to Virgil, alluding to the horrific nature of Thyestes’ meal consisting of his children. The word sacrae present in Virgil’s text to describe the seating is absent from Seneca’s description. Note also the reversal of the Virgilian word order (i.e. from epulis hic to hic epulis); even at this minute linguistic level, Seneca may be said to reverse Virgil. Thus part of Thyestes’ sinister pun is not only based on memories of his unspeakable past, but also on his remembrance of Virgil. Not only will the action of the Agamemnon include a repetition of ghastly meals of the past, it will be more nefarious in comparison to selected passages from Virgil’s epic.

The second act also plays off of repetitive cycles, especially in terms of Agamemnon’s illicit love affairs. Here a passionate Clytemnestra engages in a debate with both her nurse and Aegisthus as to whether she should kill her husband; she is in favor of doing so, in opposition to her nurse; however, after Aegisthus, who is also in favor of the murder, enters, she suddenly reverses herself and expresses doubts. This heated debate parallels that between Pyrrhus and Agamemnon over the fate of Polyxena in the Troades, also in the second act. As in that play, Clytemnestra, the nurse, and Aegistthus repeatedly draw on past precedent in order to support
their viewpoints; they show a somewhat surprising knowledge of the Trojan War.\textsuperscript{132}

Clytemnestra bitterly remembers the sacrifice of her daughter Iphigenia at Aulis accomplished by Agamemnon (158-9, 162-73), the implication being that she will be justified in killing her husband in turn. She also complains of Agamemnon’s paramours while in Troy: first Chryseis, then Briseis, and last Cassandra. Here is how she describes his love for Chryseis (175-7):

\begin{quote}
\textit{amore} captae captus, immotus prece  \\
Zminthea tenuit spolia Phoebei senis,  \\
ardore sacrae virginis iam tum \textit{furens}.
\end{quote}

Caught with love for a captive, unmoved by prayer,  \\
he held the Sminthean spoils of the old man of Apollo,  \\
even then raging with desire for a sacred virgin.

The sense of \textit{iam tum} (“even then”) is completed when we hear Clytemnestra complain of Agamemnon’s most recent love interest, Cassandra (188-9):

\begin{quote}
nunc novum vulnus gerens \textit{amore} Phrygiae vatis \textit{incensus furit}.
\end{quote}

Now bearing a new wound  \\
his rages, on fire with a love for the Phrygian prophetess.

Clytemnestra has thus cleverly suggested that history is repeating itself through Agamemnon’s successive love affairs with women who have religious associations; the similar wording of lines 177 and 189 (ablative of means followed by a genitive of the person loved, and line ending with a form of \textit{furere}) suggests the repetition. Tarrant (209) has noted that line 189 constitutes a reminiscence of \textit{Aeneid} 2, in which the Phrygian Coroebus, ally of Aeneas, is described (2.341-44):

\begin{quote}
iuvenisque Coroebus
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{132} For example, the nurse, in questioning whether Clytemnestra could successfully kill Agamemnon, at one point (207-18) lists ten warriors or gods who were not able to kill him at Troy. But such oddly recent memories of the Trojan War are also found in epic: one thinks of the images on the walls of the temple of Juno seen by Aeneas in \textit{Aen.} 1.453-93.
And the young man Coroebus son of Mygdon – it chanced that in those days he had come to Troy, on fire with a mad love for Cassandra, and, son-in-law to be, was bringing help to Priam and the Phrygians.

Tarrant notes that in Seneca there is “an added note of contempt in Phrygiae vatis” not present in Virgil’s description of Coroebus. Indeed, in Seneca, Clytemnestra suggests that Agamemnon’s love not only constitutes adultery, but also violates religious scruples, whereas Aeneas recounts Coroebus’ devotion to his beloved Cassandra and her family, to the point that he bravely died trying to save her from the Greeks (Aen. 2.403-426). Aeneas also describes Coroebus as a dutiful gener (“son-in-law to be,” Austin 1964,152) providing help to Priam and the Trojans in the war; so does Clytemnestra say of Agamemnon (191), captae maritus remeat et Priami gener (“he returns married to a captive and Priam’s son-in-law”). But of course Clytemnestra’s use of gener is pointed, sarcastic, and perhaps humorous, as Cassandra is now a slave and Priam is dead. The pointedness becomes even greater when we recall the Virgilian description of Coroebus.

However, besides this intertext with Aeneid 2, there is also, I argue, another precedent for Clytemnestra’s words in Aeneid 10. Here, in response to Venus’ complaints to Jupiter, Juno questions Aeneas’ motives in Italy (Aen. 10.65-8):

Aenean hominum quisquam divumque subegit
bella sequi aut hostem regi se inferre Latino?
Italiam petiti fatis auctoribus (esto)
Cassandrae impulsus furriis.

Who among men or gods forced Aeneas to follow wars or to attack King Latinus as an enemy? He sought Italy on the authority of the fates – I grant it – driven on by the ravings of Cassandra.
Juno here, like Clytemnestra in the *Agamemnon*, finds fault with a hero’s association with Cassandra; the use of *furiis* by Juno is answered by Clytemnestra’s use of *furens* (177) and *furit* (189). Both characters seek to prevent what they consider an unjust marriage. Clytemnestra’s rhetorical point about Agamemnon’s philandering is given new weight in light of the words of the Virgilian Juno in a similarly combative and debate-like setting. But Juno will ultimately be unpersuasive in her attempts to block Aeneas’ victory and marriage in Italy, whereas Clytemnestra will murder Agamemnon. In this case too, what is true for a Trojan in Virgil (Coroebus and Aeneas, in their association with Cassandra) becomes true for a Greek (Agamemnon) in Seneca, in a blending of the two sides in the Trojan War (see chapter 4).

In the third act of the *Agamemnon*, as stated above, Eurybates recounts the storm that the Greeks suffered on their way home from Troy. There are in this narrative strong overlaps with Virgil’s *Aeneid*, but I will reserve their discussion for chapter 4 below. At this point, it can be noted that Eurybates’ extended narrative of the storm, as suggested above, seems to destabilize the focus of the play: despite the rich metaphors of waters and seas present in the earlier acts (e.g. 64-70, 138-43), the audience/reader is given little reason to expect Eurybates’ narrative of the storm prior to the third act. Similarly, what follows in the fourth act further destabilizes the viewpoint by focusing on the Trojan captive women, including Cassandra; the murderous plans of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus are realized by the end of the play, but these two characters are not again given speaking roles until rather late in the fifth act (after line 952).

Instead, the next section of the *Agamemnon* is dominated by Trojans, not Greeks. While this has dramatic precedent in the climactic scene of Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* which focuses on Cassandra (1035-1330), Seneca’s Cassandra and the secondary chorus of Trojan women provide a more notably Trojan perspective, in part in the way that they echo the words of Aeneas in
Aeneid 2, as will be seen. Like Virgil in the Aeneid, Seneca furthermore provides a sense of victory for the Trojans after the Trojan War, but in this case without Aeneas, and, perhaps more importantly, it is a victory achieved through death, as opposed to survival and succession, as found in Virgil’s epic.

Libera Mors

In the end of the third act of the Agamemnon, the secondary chorus of Trojan women makes an impassioned plea for the notion of the libera mors (willing or freely-chosen death), and also remember the fatal night when Troy fell. I quote the beginning of their ode, as it is instrumental to both Seneca’s Troades and Agamemnon, and contrasts with the outlook of Virgil’s Aeneid (589-92):

Heu quam dulce malum mortalibus additum
vitae dirus amor, cum pateat malis
effugium et miseris libera mors vocet
portus aeterna placidus quiete.

O what a sweet evil is bestowed on mortals,
the relentless love of life, when an escape from evils
is at hand, and the freedom of death calls the wretched,
a peaceful port of eternal rest.

The phrase libera mors, as Tarrant (287) notes, may imply a death freely chosen, such as suicide, as well as a death that sets one free; the use of portus as a metaphor for death is in line with the nautical imagery earlier in the play. It will be seen that the idea of the libera mors is strongly employed by Cassandra in the fourth and fifth acts, as she bravely anticipates her own death at

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133 The beginning of this ode (589-636) is polymetric; see Tarrant (372-7) for the colometry. The only other play of Seneca to include polymetric odes is the Oedipus.

134 Referring to these lines, Davis (1993, 107 n. 81) notes the similarity of Aeneas’ words to Anchises at Aen. 6.721: quae lucis miseris tam dira cupido? (“Why do the wretched have such a relentless love for the light?”).
the hands of Cassandra and Aegisthus. It can be noted that the notion of *libera mors* is mostly foreign to Virgil’s *Aeneid*, though the attitudes and actions of Dido and Mezentius may be considered partial exceptions. The chorus goes on to emphasize a brave and willing death (604-10):

> Solus servitium perrumpet omne
> **contemptor levium deorum,**
> qui vultus Acherontis atri,
> qui Styga tristem non tristis videt
> audetque vitae ponere finem:
> par ille regi, par superis erit.
> 610 o quam miserum est nescire mori!

Only he will break all servitude,
the despiser of the fickle gods,
who sees the face of dark Acheron,
who sees the grim Styx without sadness,
and dares to place an end to life.
He will be equal to a king, equal to the gods.
Oh how wretched it is to not know how to die!

This section of the play espouses Stoic thoughts on death similar to those found in Seneca’s prose works; the emphasis on one who bravely takes his fate in his own hands recalls the *exemplum* of Marcus Cato to whom Seneca *philosophus* often admiringly refers (e.g. *De Providentia* 1.2.9-10). The phrase *contemptor deorum* in 605 is very bold and seems to border on impiety; nonetheless this type of person is repeatedly held in high esteem by Seneca. In

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135 Compare also the connection between *mors* and *libertas* as found in Seneca *Epistulae Morales* 26.10.1: “Meditate mortem;” *qui hoc dicit, meditare libertatem iubet. Qui mori didicit, servire dedidicit; supra omnem potentiam est, certe extra omnem* (“Meditate on death;” he who said this commands one to meditate on freedom. He who has learned to die has unlearned slavery; he is above all power, certainly beyond all power”).

136 One interesting example from the tragedies is Oilean Ajax, whose defiantly impious death is recounted with some degree of admiration in the storm narrative of act 3 of the *Agamemnon* (to be discussed in chapter 4). On the phrase *levium deorum*, Tarrant (289) comments: “All gods are *leves* in that their favour cannot be relied upon”; hence my translation of *levium* as “fickle,” following Fitch (2004a, 175).
fact, the phrase is used in very similar form to describe Mezentius in the *Aeneid* \(^{137}\): in both 7.648 and 8.7 the Etruscan warrior is described by Virgil as *contemptor deum*. Surely Virgil’s use of the phrase is pejorative compared to Seneca’s; Evander (8.481-501) describes to Aeneas Mezentius’ previous tyrannical rule in Etruria, including use of ghastly forms of torture, which led the Etruscans to rise up against him, after which he obtained exile with Turnus and the Rutulians. In his fatal duel with Aeneas, after Aeneas has killed his son Lausus, Mezentius says of himself (10.880) *nec mortem horremus nec divum parcimus ulli* (“I do not fear death nor do I show consideration for any of the gods.”)\(^{138}\). At the same time, Mezentius’ brave acceptance of death at Aeneas’ hands (10.873-908) is perhaps in line with Seneca’s concept of the *libera mors*.\(^{139}\) In a broader sense, the gods are, on the whole, in favor of *pius Aeneas* in the *Aeneid*, and the characterization of someone as *contemptor divum* is necessarily a sign of disfavor in Virgil,\(^{140}\) whereas in Seneca’s *Agamemnon* it becomes a positive source of admiration.

After this philosophical musing, Seneca’s Trojan women shift to a narrative of the night Troy fell; in this narrative, the chorus may imply that the *libera mors*, to which it just referred, is the only way out for people who, like this chorus, have undergone and continue to suffer from great reversals of fortune, but the connection between the different parts of the ode is never explicitly made clear. The narrative shows a great debt to Aeneas’ own recounting of the fall of

\(^{137}\) A point made by Tarrant (2006, 12).

\(^{138}\) Mezentius’ plurals *horremus* and *parcimus* can also be taken as referring to the Etruscan people in general (i.e. “we” not “I” as subject).

\(^{139}\) Conte (2007, 193-5) argues similarly regarding Virgil’s Mezentius: “Mezentius is practicing a technique of dying, an *ars moriendi*”; Conte goes on to suggest a connection between Mezentius and Roman gladiators.

\(^{140}\) See for example the Sibyl’s advice, quoting Phlegyas, to Aeneas at *Aen.* 6.620, after she has explained the extraordinary punishments that great sinners face in Tartarus: *discite iustitiam moniti et non temnere divos* (“Having been warned, learn to be just and to not despise the gods”).
Troy in *Aeneid* 2. From 613 to 624, the chorus notes that, after ten years of warfare, Troy finally fell in one night due to the Greeks’ treachery:

non illa bello victa, non armis,  
ut quondam Herculea cecidit pharetra;  
615 quam non Pelei Thetidisque natus  
carusque Pelidae nimium feroci  
vicit, acceptis cum fulsit armis  
fuditque Troas falsus Achilles,  
ut cum ipse Pelidae animos feroce  
sustulit luctu celeremque saltu  
Troades summis timuere muris.  
perdidit in malis extremum decus,  
fortiter vinci: restitit annis  
Troia bis quinis unius noctis  
peritura furto.

It [i.e. Troy] was not conquered by war, not by arms,  
as it once fell by the Herculean arrow;  
which not the son of Peleus and Thetis  
nor the one dear to the too fierce son of Peleus  
conquered, when he shone in the received arms  
and routed the Trojans, a false Achilles,  
or when the son of Peleus himself raised his fierce spirit  
in grief, and the Trojan women feared him, swift in his step,  
from the high walls. It lost that last glory in bad fortune,  
to be conquered bravely;  
Troy lasted for twice five years,  
to fall by the deception of one night.

This passage is an extensive elaboration of the summarizing statement of Aeneas at the end of the Sinon episode (*Aen.* 2. 195-8):

Talibus insidiis periurique arte Sinonis  
credita res, captique dolis lacrimisque coactis  
quos neque Tyrides nec Larisaeus Achilles,  
non anni domuere decem, non mille carinæ.

By such deceit and cunning of the lying Sinon  
the matter was believed, and we were captured by tricks and by forced tears,  
whom neither the son of Tydeus nor Achilles of Larissa,

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141 In tragedy, one precedent is Euripides’ *Troades* 511-67, in which a chorus of captive Trojan women recount the fall of Troy.
nor ten years conquered, nor a thousand ships.

The use of negative enumeration (i.e. a succession of phrases which are introduced by negative adverbs, adjectives, or conjunctions such as *non*, *nec* and *nullus*) in both Virgil and Seneca here reinforces the echo between the two texts; both passages state numerous elements that did *not* conquer Troy. But Seneca greatly extends the Virgilian precedent: in particular, he expands Virgil’s line on Diomedes and Achilles (2.197) into eight lines of lyric, detailing the martial exploits of Hercules, Achilles and Patroclus at Troy (614-21). The Trojan chorus also reinforces the act of deception found in Aeneas’ narrative through their description of Patroclus as a *falsus Achilles* in 618; this theme will be important in the killing of Agamemnon, recounted later in Seneca’s tragedy.

In the next part of the ode, the chorus describes the wooden horse and its progress into the city of Troy; we can here again see Seneca reworking and expanding upon Aeneas’ description of the same event. The first few lines of the description focus on the overall description of the horse and the decision to bring it inside the city (625-8):

\[
\text{Vidimus simulata } \text{dona} \\
\text{molis} \text{ immensae, Danaumque} \\
\text{fatale munus } \text{duximus} \text{ nostra} \\
\text{creduli dextra}
\]

We saw the feigned gifts of its huge bulk, and we trustfully led the fatal offering of the Greeks with our right hand

As Calder (1976, 34 n.54) notes, this passage closely echoes *Aeneid* 2.31-33:

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142 For a closely related but even more lengthy case of negative enumeration in Seneca’s *Agamemnon*, see 207-218, on all those who did *not* conquer Agamemnon at Troy; that passage has ominous implications for the king of Argos in light of the words of the Trojan chorus here. On negative enumeration in Senecan tragedy, see Schiesaro (2006, 436). Seneca’s nephew Lucan also makes significant use of this technique, perhaps because of his uncle's influence; see Bramble (1982, 543-8) and Braund (2009a, xxxi).
pars stupet innuptae **donum exitiale** Minervae
et **molem** mirantur equi; primusque Thymoetes
**duci** intra muros hortatur

Part [of the Trojans] gape at the fatal gift of unwed Minerva
and wonder at the horse’s huge bulk; first Thymoetes
urges it to be led within the walls

The overlap in vocabulary and in the progression of the narrative (i.e., first seeing the horse, then
the issue of what to do with it) gives the strong sense that Seneca was remembering Virgil’s lines
here. The chorus then discusses the warning sounds that the hollow horse makes in the presence
of the carefree Trojans (628-36):

```
   tremuitque saepe
limine in primo sonipes cavernis
   conditos reges bellumque gestans.
et licuit dolos versare ut ipsi
fraude sua caderent Pelasgi:
saepe commotae sonuere parmae,
tacitumque murmur percussit aures
630   ut fremuit male subdolo
parens Pyrrhus Ulixi.
```

The horse often trembled
at the beginning of the threshold, bearing
in its hollows hidden kings and war.
And it was possible to reverse the trick so that the Greeks
themselves would fall by their own deception:
often the rattled shields sounded,
and a silent murmur struck the ears
as Pyrrhus grumbled while poorly obeying the
deceptive Ulysses.

This recalls Aeneas’ description of the same event (*Aen. 2. 242-3*):

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   quater ipso in limine portae
substitit atque utero sonitum quater arma dedere;
```

Four times on the very threshold of the gate
it stopped, and four times the arms gave a sound from its womb;
There is a clear overlap in the description of the pause at the limen and the contents of the horse, and the sounds that these contents make; but once again Seneca greatly expands on Virgil, including the amusing description of the men while inside the horse, not present in the Aeneid. One has the sense of rereading Virgil in this Senecan ode, a rereading that includes expansion of elements only briefly mentioned in the Aeneid. Furthermore, the phrase dolos versare in 631 echoes versare dolos from Aeneid 2.62 (Tarrant 292), used in Virgil to describe the behavior of Sinon (‘to practice deceit’). But Seneca seems to change the meaning of versare here to mean “to reverse the trick” (so Fitch 2004a, 177). Seneca thus takes a Virgilian phrase from a similar context and bends the meaning; note also the reversed word order in comparison to Virgil. This detail hints at Agamemnon’s later inability in the play to perceive the deception that his wife Clytemnestra practices when he crosses his own threshold upon his return to Argos; the chorus’ allusion to a Virgilian precedent in this instance suggests that history will repeat itself, in this case to Agamemnon’s great disadvantage.

In the next part of the ode, the Trojan women recount those who take part in the procession of the horse into Troy. Here again Seneca expands on Virgil’s brief, relatively nondescript pueri...innuptaeque puellae (“boys and unmarried girls,” Aen. 2.238) to include description of Astyanax, Polyxena, mothers, fathers, and Hecuba (637-49). The chorus’ assignment to Astyanax and Polyxena of leading roles in the procession (639-42) is particularly ironic, as these two will be marked for sacrifice by the Greeks. At the end of the ode, the chorus presents a familiar image (655-8):

```
    te, magne parens, flent Iliades.
    vidi, vidi, senis in iugulo
telum Pyrrhi vix exiguo
    sanguine tingui.
```

You, great father, the women of Ilium mourn.
I saw, I saw, in the neck of the old man
the weapon of Pyrrhus
barely drenched with scantly blood. 143

As in the *Troades*, the murder of Priam looms large; as will be seen, Agamemnon has a fatal resemblance to Priam in this play. The use of *vidi* twice in line 656 may seem strange in that the chorus are plural (they in fact used *vidimus* twice before in 611 and 625 to describe similar horrific visions at Troy). In fact, as Tarrant (294) points out, this double use of *vidi* has a clear precedent in *Aeneid* 2.499-502, describing nearly the same thing:

```latex
vidi ipse furentem
ciae Neoptolemum geminosque in limine Atridas,
vidi Hecubam centumque nurus Priamumque per aras
sanguine foedantem quos ipse sacraverat ignis.
```

I myself saw Neoptolemus,
rages in slaughter, and the two sons of Atreus on the threshold,
I saw Hecuba and her hundred daughters and daughters-in-law, and Priam by the altars polluting with blood the fires that he himself had consecrated.

In this case, the chorus is briefer than Virgil’s Aeneas; but the important point is that the Trojan women have appropriated for themselves the memories of Aeneas. They remember Virgil, through the use of the verb *video* in this context; intertextually, they see what Virgil’s Aeneas saw. 144

**Troia Resurgens**

The third ode of the *Agamemnon* is thus composed of two main parts: first, a meditation on the *libera mors* and the *contemptor deorum*, ideas mostly at odds with Virgilian epic; second, a narrative of the fall of Troy which strongly echoes and extends the similar narrative of Aeneas

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144 Compare also Sen. *Hercules Furens* 254-7 for repetition of *vidi* in the context of witnessing horrific acts.
in *Aeneid* 2. How do these mostly disparate halves fit together? The answer, I argue, is Cassandra, who has a central presence within the 4th and 5th acts of the play. Cassandra displays a memory of Troy and an openness to a *libera mors* in a way that both recalls and reverses Virgilian poetry.

At the beginning of the fourth act, Cassandra enters and engages in brief dialogue with the chorus of Trojan women; at one point the chorus note with alarm that Cassandra is ripping the sacred bands from her hair, and ask her why she is doing this (692-4). In her first speech of any length (695-709), Cassandra replies that she has suffered so greatly that she no longer fears the gods, and is doubtful that they could harm her any further, as she has lost her country and her entire family. Cassandra thus is a candidate for the *libera mors*, one who no longer has concern for how the gods might look upon her. It is in fact notable that Cassandra in the *Agamemnon* never calls on the gods as witness or for assistance; she only addresses the spirits of her dead family.\(^{145}\)

After this speech, the chorus notes that Cassandra is going into a trance, as her body struggles against prophetic possession (710-19). As Tarrant (306) notes, the description of Cassandra as a *maenas impatiens dei* (“a maenad unwilling to endure the god”) recalls the Sibyl from *Aeneid* 6, who is at one point described as *Phoebi nondum patiens* (“not yet enduring Phoebus,” 6.77); and indeed, as will be seen, there are many links and contrasts between the two prophetesses and their visions, in particular in their relation to the underworld. Seneca’s Cassandra actually gives voice to her complaints against Apollo during her trance (722-5):

```
recede, Phoebe, iam non sum tua,
extingue flammas pectori infixas meo.
cui nunc vagor vesana? cui bacchor furens?
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\(^{145}\) Her address to Apollo (quoted below) in 722 is a request that he withdraw from her, not help her.
iam Troia cecidit – falsa quid vates agor?

Go away, Phoebus, now I am not yours;
put out the flames planted within my breast.
For whom now do I wander, insane? For whom do I run about raving?
Now Troy has fallen; what am I doing, a false prophet?

Cassandra points out that she no longer belongs to Phoebus, as she is now a slave far from Troy.

Most importantly, she points out that Troy has fallen, and so her role as vates should have ended with Troy; however, it turns out that Troy lives on, as the following description of her vision confirms (726-29):

Ubi sum? fugit lux alma et obscurat genas
nox alta et aether abditus tenebris latet.
sed ecce gemino sole praefulget dies
geminumque duplices Argos attollit domus.

Where am I? The dear light flees, and deep night darkens my eyes, and the sky, hidden, is concealed within darkness. But look, the day shines forth with a double sun, and a double Argos raises up twin homes.

Cassandra’s vision has taken a dark turn; nonetheless she sees double suns and a double Argos. Cassandra’s visions of darkness followed by light, as she describes them, suggest that she is undergoing a mental transformation, one perhaps to her benefit. To understand this vision, we must first compare the Virgilian precedent. In Aeneid 4, Dido has a nightmare in the context of which Virgil compares her visions to those of the raving Pentheus (469-70):

Eumenidum veluti demens videt agmina Pentheus
et solem geminum et duplices se ostendere Thebas,

As raving Pentheus sees the band of the Eumenides and a twin sun and Thebes shows itself double,
Seneca’s Cassandra is thus expressing her link to a tragic character (i.e. Pentheus) that Virgil had hinted at for Dido. But this intertext is further nuanced in that Virgil here directly refers back to the words of Pentheus in Euripides’ *Bacchae* 918-19 (καὶ μὴν ὅρην μοι δῶο μὲν ἥλιονς δοκῶ, / δυσσῶς δὲ θῆβας – “And indeed I seem to see two suns, and two Thebes”). Thus seeing (as in the case of *vidi* in the third ode above) suggests also seeing across texts, and the idea of doubling or twinning gains further meaning if we consider the presence of more than one text in this instance. But while the double visions of Euripides’ Pentheus and Virgil’s Dido will have tragic consequences for both characters, the double vision of Cassandra will be a sort of triumph; in fact, I argue that Cassandra’s notion of *geminum Argos* (729) refers to both Argos and Troy, which are soon to become equivalent, as her next lines make clear (730-3):

*Idea cerno nemora*: fatalis sedet
inter potentes arbiter pastor deas.
timete, reges, moneo, furtivum genus:
agrestis iste alumnus evertet domum.

I perceive the groves of Ida: the fatal
shepherd sits as judge between powerful goddesses.
Fear, kings, I warn you, this surreptitious race:
that rustic stepson will overthrow the house.

The idea of double vision and double meanings is continued, as Cassandra imagines herself back within sight of Mount Ida in Troy, and witnessing the judgment of Paris. As Fitch (2004a, 185 n. 38) and Tarrant (308) note, the stand-in for Paris at Argos is Aegisthus, as they were both raised in the backcountry (hence *agrestis*) and they both are part of a *furtivum genus* in that they secretly practice adultery; Aegisthus furthermore was conceived through the stealthy incest undertaken by Thyestes with his daughter Pelopia. Paris and Aegisthus are equated in their

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146 Virgil further compares Dido’s visions to those of Orestes in a tragic context (4.471): *Agamemnonius scaenis agitatus Orestes* (“Orestes, son of Agamemnon, driven about the stage”).
147 In this I agree with Lohikoski (1966, 66).
ability to be destructive to royal houses (Paris to Troy in the past, Aegisthus to Argos in the near future); thus Troy is in danger of repeating itself. The words *Idaea cerno nemora* have, I argue, an interesting intertext with a line in *Aeneid* 2. Toward the end of Aeneas’ narrative of the fall of Troy, after the vision of the *flamma* above Ascanius’ head, Anchises asks Jupiter for confirmation that the survival of Ascanius and Aeneas’ family is divinely sanctioned. He receives a climactic response from the heavens (*Aen.* 2.692-7):

```
Vix ea fatus erat senior, subitoque fragore
intonuit laevum, et de caelo lapsa per umbras
stella facem ducens multa cum luce cucurrit.
illam summa super labentem culmina tecti
cernimus Idaea claram se condere silva
signantemque vias;
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695

Scarcely had the old man spoken these things, when suddenly the left sounded with a crash, and a star, having slipped through the shadows, leading a flame with much light, hastened from the sky. We see it as it glides above the rooftops, and settles, bright, in the Idaean forest, signaling the way;¹⁴⁸

Both passages are prophetic, in particular in their use of the verb *cerno*.¹⁴⁹ For Aeneas and his family, the omen of the shooting star that settles above the forests of Ida points to the way out of Troy, that is, Ascanius is meant to survive, by the will of the gods. By contrast, Cassandra’s vision points the way back to Troy, and, as will be seen, to a repetition of crime and death, one that she paradoxically welcomes. Her vision of the future is also one of the past.¹⁵⁰

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¹⁴⁸ The phrase *signantem vias* can, as Austin notes *ad loc.*, mean either “tracing its own path” (i.e. in the sky) or “showing the way” (i.e. to Aeneas and family); I prefer to take it in the latter sense, especially as the phrase *stella facem ducens* in 694 seems to have already included the former sense.

¹⁴⁹ For other distinctly prophetic uses of the verb *cerno*, compare the words of the Sibyl in *Aeneid* 6.87, and those of *Fortuna* at Petronius *Satyricon* 121.111 and 114.

¹⁵⁰ Cassandra’s words here had further resonance in the first century C.E.: the phrase *idaea cerno nemora* is found in a graffito from Pompeii (Tarrant 1976, 101 and 307). As Ker (2009, 134) notes, the graffito “evokes Cassandra’s feeling that Troy’s story has been moved from Troy to Argos –only now it has been moved one extra step, from Argos to Julio-Claudian Italy.” From a
Cassandra’s delight at her vision is signaled in her following address to the spirits of her
death family, who seem to be calling her, as she is fated to die soon as well (741-9):

Quid me vocatis sospitem solam e meis,
umbrae meorum? te sequor, tota pater
Troia sepulte. frater, auxilium Phrygum
terrorque Danaum, non ego antiquum decus
video aut calentes ratibus exustis manus,
sed lacera membra et saucios vinclo gravi
illos lacertos. te sequor, nimium cito
congresse Achilli Troile; incertos geris,
Deiphobe, vultus, coniugis munus novae.

Why do you call me, the only one unhurt,
shades of my people? I follow you, father buried in all
of Troy. Brother, help of the Phrygians and
terror of the Greeks, I do not see your previous glory, or
your hands hot from the burned ships,
but your mangled limbs, and those arms harmed by the heavy chains.
I follow you, Troilus, who met with too swift Achilles
in battle; Deiphobus, you wear an unrecognizable visage, gift
of your new wife.

These lines form a small catalogue of Cassandra’s male kin who have perished at Troy: her
father Priam, and her brothers Hector, Troilus, and Deiphobus. The fact that she says te sequor
(742 and 747) indicates Cassandra’s happiness at seeing them and her willingness to follow them
in death. Each relative is mentioned with a brief description that often has a clear Virgilian
precedent. Cassandra, like Andromache in the Troades (443-51), uses the same contrast as
Virgil’s Aeneas (Aen. 2.270-80) between Hector’s former glory and his later horrific appearance
in a vision or dream; but unlike Aeneas, Cassandra seems almost happy to see her brother
mangled and disfigured. The description of Troilus as nimium cito / congresse Achilli echoes the
description of him in Aeneid 1.475 as impar congressus Achilli (“unequal match in battle for
Achilles”), as Aeneas sees Troilus’ likeness on the walls of Juno’s temple in Carthage (Tarrant
modern perspective, the graffito curiously brings to mind the resemblance between the fiery end
of Troy and that of Pompeii in 79 C.E.

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Cassandra’s mention of Deiphobus’ unrecognizable face is a reference to his encounter with Aeneas in the underworld (Aen. 6.494-547), in which he is described as *lacerum crudeliter ora* (“mangled cruelly in his face,” 495), so that Aeneas scarcely recognizes him (498). Deiphobus also explains to Aeneas in Aeneid 6 how Helen (his *coniunx nova*) summoned Menelaus to the bedchamber where Deiphobus was sleeping, an act that Deiphobus sarcastically describes as a *munus* or gift to her former husband, so that Menelaus could exact revenge by mutilating and killing Deiphobus (Tarrant 311). But Cassandra shifts the idea of the *munus* by suggesting that it was not a gift to Menelaus, but to Deiphobus himself. Note also that in the case of all three brothers – Hector, Troilus, and Deiphobus – Seneca’s Cassandra is adopting the perspective of Virgil’s Aeneas; that is, she sees the dead brothers in a way similar to how Aeneas saw them in Virgil, but the perspective is transformed by Cassandra’s joy and resignation toward her own death.

This joy becomes clearer in the following lines of the speech, which also reference Virgil (750-8):

> 750  iuvat per ipsos ingredi *Stygios lacus,*
> **iuват videre** Tartari saevum canem avidique regna Ditis! haec hodie ratis Phlegethontis atri regias animas vehet, victamque victricemque. vos, umbrae, precor,
> 755  iurata superis unda, te pariter precor: **reserate** paulum terga nigrantis poli, levis ut Mycenas turba pros piciat Phrygum. spectate, miseri: fata se **vertunt retro**.

It is a delight to walk among the very Stygian lakes,

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151 *Aen. 6.525-7: intra tecta vocat Menelaum et limina pandit, / scilicet id magnum sperans fore munus amanti, / et famam exstingui veterum sic posse malorum* (“She calls Menelaus into the house and opens the doors, no doubt hoping it would be a great gift to her lover, to be able thus to wipe out the remembrance of past misdeeds”). Compare also Sen. Medea 642, where Hercules’ death, accomplished by the poisoned cloak that Deianira gave him, is described as *munere nuptae* (“by the gift of his wife”).
a delight to see the cruel dog of Tartarus
and the kingdom of greedy Dis! Today this ship
of black Phlegethon will carry royal spirits,
of both conquered and conqueror. I pray you, shadows,
water sworn upon by the gods, I pray you too,
unlock the surface of the dark world to a small degree,
so that the insubstantial crowd of Phrygians might look out at Mycenae.\textsuperscript{152}
Behold, wretched ones: the fates are reversing themselves.

Cassandra’s willingness to die is mixed with a desire for revenge: she envisions the coming
death of Agamemnon as a chance for revenge on the part of the Trojans.\textsuperscript{153} Her delight at
visiting Tartarus (750-2), as Tarrant notes (312), recalls the way that the Sibyl casts Aeneas’
desire to visit the underworld (\textit{Aeneid}. 6.133-5):

\begin{quote}
\begin{verbatim}
si tanta cupido est  
bis \textit{Stygios} innare \textbf{lacus}, bis nigra \textbf{videre}  
Tartara, et insano \textbf{iuvat} indulgere labori…. 
\end{verbatim}
\end{quote}

If you have such a desire
to twice sail upon the Stygian lakes, to twice see black
Tartarus, and if it delights to indulge in a mad task….

In this case, Cassandra makes explicit what the Sibyl had suggested was true for Aeneas;
Cassandra actually wishes to die, while Aeneas plans to merely pay a visit to the underworld. A
similar realization in Seneca of a suggestion in Virgil can be seen in lines 754-8: the request that
Cassandra makes of the infernal forces in 756, \textit{reserate paulum terga nigrantis poli}, has a
precedent in \textit{Aeneid} 8, in the story of Hercules and Cacus. As Evander tells the story, Hercules
violently exposes Cacus’ rocky den so as to kill him; in a simile, he compares this action to
uncovering the underworld (8.243-6):

\textsuperscript{152} In this play the place-names Mycenae and Argos are used interchangeably.
\textsuperscript{153} The Cassandra in Euripides’ \textit{Troades} also has a prophetic vision (308-461) in which she sees
that Agamemnon will die, partly because of his passion for her; she furthermore interprets his
death as revenge for the Trojans, throws the sacred bands from her head (451-2), and prepares to
meet her male kin in the underworld (458-61). It can be noted, however, that Euripides’
Cassandra does not imagine Troy resurging or repeating its past history.
Non secus ac si qua penitus vi terra dehiscens
infernas reseret sedes et regna recludat
pallida, dis invisa, superque immane barathrum
cernatur, trepident immisso lumine Manes.

Just as if the earth, splitting apart by some force within,
should uncover the infernal abodes and lay bare the pallid
kingdoms, hated by the gods, and an immense abyss should be perceived
from above, and the shades should be afraid at the infusion of light.

The fact that this is the only time that Virgil uses resero in an infernal context solidifies the
allusion. Note that Cassandra actually wishes for what seems a frightful event in Virgil, and
that while in this case Virgil’s Manes are thought to tremble at the light coming from above, the
shades of Cassandra’s kin are encouraged to cross this normally inviolable boundary and to take
delight in viewing Agamemnon’s murder.

On Cassandra’s exultant statement fata se vertunt retro (758), it can be noted that the
word retro implies both a repetition of the past – thus the fates turn back to an earlier situation,
namely Troy, in this vengeful context – as well as a more general sense of reversal, including
reversal of Virgil’s Aeneid. For as the Aeneid portrays a move away from the memory of
Troy, through Trojan survival and future hegemony in Italy, Cassandra insists on finding delight
in the horrific visions of Troy’s past, one that implies death for her as well as for her Greek
captors. This statement also has an interesting intertext, I argue, with Aeneid 10, in which Jupiter
complains about the rivalry between the gods (including Venus and Juno) in determining
Aeneas’ future in Italy, as a new war is now under way (10.6-7):

caelicolae magni, quianam sententia vobis
versa retro tantumque animis certatis iniquis?

154 Note that Evander’s words here in the Aeneid have a precedent in Iliad 20.61-66, in which
Hades fears that the earth might be split open by Poseidon, revealing the underworld to mortals,
during the battles between the pro-Greek and pro-Trojan gods.
155 See Schiesaro (2003, 203-4) on the polysemous use of the word retro in this play.
Great dwellers in heaven, why has your decision been reversed, and why do you contend with such hostile spirits?

Here too the sense of retro is one of reversal, but also of temporal repetition, as the gods are hostile to one another as previously in the Trojan War. Jupiter’s epic vision, as expected, looks with disfavor on such repetition, whereas Cassandra exults in the same. More broadly, it can be noted that Juno is consistently a force of revenge in the Aeneid, and that her need to repeatedly wreak havoc on Aeneas and the Trojans is a problem that is ultimately overruled by Jupiter in Aeneid 12; whereas Cassandra’s vengeful vision wins out, in a sense, in the Agamemnon.

After the first part of Cassandra’s prophetic vision, the chorus notes how she suddenly loses consciousness (775-8); they employ a Virgilian simile in describing the way she falls to the ground (776-7):

\[
\text{caditque flexo qualis ante aras genu}
\text{cervice taurus vulnus incertum gerens.}^{156}
\]

And she falls like, before the altars, with bended knee, a bull bearing an ill-aimed wound in its neck.

This passage suggests the simile describing the horrific screams of Laocoon and his sons as they are killed by the pair of snakes in Aeneid 2.223-4:

\[
\text{qualis mugitus, fugit cum saucius aram}
\text{taurus et incertam excussit cervice securim.}
\]

Such bellowings, as when a wounded bull has fled the altar and has shaken the ill-aimed axe from its neck.

While Virgil’s Aeneas employs the simile to explain the horrific sounds that accompanied the killing of Laocoon and his sons,Seneca uses it to suggest how Cassandra fell at the altar. Note

\[^{156}\text{See Fitch (2004b, 171) for arguments for this textual reading, found in the E manuscript; instead of incertum, the A manuscript has incisa, agreeing with cervice. Fitch argues convincingly for incertum, in fact in comparison with Aen. 2.223-4, discussed immediately below.}\]
how Seneca transfers the adjective *incertus* (“ill-aimed”), more properly applied to the axe, as in Virgil, to the wound or *vulnus*, in a kind of intertextual hypallage. Seneca’s appropriation of the simile may seem out of place, as one would not necessarily expect a bull who received an ill-aimed wound to fall at the altar; nonetheless the larger religious connection is informative: Laocoon dies while sacrificing to Neptune, with the sacred bands (*vittas, Aen. 2.221*) still on his head, whereas Cassandra throws the sacred bands from her head (*sacratas infulas, Ag. 693*) and actually revives shortly after this incident. While Laocoon’s warnings of the disaster at Troy are fatefuly unheeded and misinterpreted (*Aen. 2.40-53, 199-231*), Cassandra, the prophetess that no one believes, paradoxically has the most commanding and even confident perspective of Seneca’s play.

This perspective of Cassandra is furthermore explored in her pointed exchange in stichomythia with Agamemnon in the next scene. Seneca’s Agamemnon triumphantly enters at this point and seeks to revive and encourage Cassandra, based on his own deluded perspective of the events at hand. She proves him wrong at every instance (789-97):

```
AG.     Suscita sensus tuos:
     optatus ille portus aerumnis adest.
     festus dies est.
CA.   Festus et Troiae fuit.
AG.    Veneremur aras.
CA.   Cecidit ante aras pater.
AG.    Iovem precemur pariter.
CA.    Herceum Iovem?
AG.    Credis te videre Ilium?
CA.   Et Priamum simul.
795 AG.  Hic Troia non est.
CA.   Helena ubi est, Troiam puto.
AG.    Ne metue dominam, famula.
CA.    Libertas adest.
AG.    Secura vive.
CA.   Mihi mori est securitas.
790 AG.  Raise up your spirits; that hoped-for port from troubles is at hand.
```
It is a festive day.
CA. It was also a festive day at Troy.
AG. Let us reverence the altars.
CA. Father fell before the altars.
AG. Let us both pray to Jupiter.
CA. Hercean Jupiter?
AG. Do you believe that you see Troy?
CA. And Priam too.
AG. Here is not Troy.
CA. Where Helen is, I consider Troy. \(^{157}\)
AG. Though a slave, do not fear your mistress.
CA. Freedom is at hand.
AG. Live free from care.
CA. For me, death is freedom from care.

It is clear that Cassandra wins the argument; Agamemnon’s lack of knowledge about what is about to happen (i.e. his murder) allows Cassandra to cleverly play off of his every statement.

Agamemnon sees transformation of the past, whereas Cassandra more correctly envisions a repetition of the crimes at Troy. Agamemnon’s mention of a *portus* that provides an escape from troubles (790) is ironic in light of the words of the Trojan women’s chorus that describe death as the ultimate *portus* (592). Furthermore, Cassandra makes a bold equation between Agamemnon and Priam (792-4), as kings who die or will die in similar circumstances. Agamemnon is certain he has escaped the murderous past of Troy, whereas Cassandra is certain that it will happen again, even necessarily taking her own life in the process (795-7).

At the beginning of the fifth act, Cassandra envisions the murder of Agamemnon that is about to take place (867-80):

> Res agitur intus magna, par annis decem.
> eheu quid hoc est? anime, consurge et cape

\(^{157}\) Cassandra here conflates Helen with Clytemnestra, both daughters of Tyndareus. Clytemnestra herself does nearly the same thing in act 2, when addressing herself, and screwing up her courage to commit crime (123-4): *quid timida loqueris furtur exilium et fugas? / soror ista fecit* (“Why do you fearfully speak of deceit, exile, and flight? Your sister did those things”). Cassandra also later, in recounting the killing of Agamemnon, refers to Clytemnestra as *Helenae soror* (907), again in order to emphasize that criminality is common in their family.
pretium furoris: vicimus victi Phryges.

870 bene est, resurgis, Troia; traxisti iacens pares Mycenas, terga dat victor tuus!
**Tam clara nunquam** providae mentis furorem ostendit oculis: video et intersum et fruor; imago visus dubia non fallit meos.

875 spectemus! epulæ regiae instructæ domo, quales fuerunt ultimæ Phrygibus dapes, celebrantur; ostro lectus Iliaco nitet merumque in auro veteris Assaraci trahunt. et ipse picta veste sublimis iacet,

880 Priami superbas corpore exuvias gerens.

A great matter is under way inside, equal to that of ten years. Ah! What is this? Soul, rise up and seize the reward for your madness: we Phrygians, once conquered, have conquered. It is good, you rise again, Troy; though lying low, you have dragged down Mycenae, now your equal, your victor is retreating! Never has the madness of my prophetic mind shown such clear things to my eyes. I see, I take part, I delight in it; a doubtful image does not deceive my vision. Let us watch! A feast, prepared in the royal home, such as were the last banquets for the Phrygians, is being celebrated; the couch shines with Trojan purple and they drink unmixed wine from gold of ancient Assaracus. And he himself lies exalted in colorful clothing, wearing the proud spoils from the body of Priam.\(^{158}\)

Here Cassandra takes the analogy between Troy and Mycenae to an almost perverse level: she sees the death of Agamemnon as payback for the entire Trojan War (867) and imagines that Troy is rising again (870). Not only this, but she understands the meal being prepared for Agamemnon as a repetition of the feast the Trojans celebrated on the night Troy fell (875-80) and even envisions that it is celebrated with the spoils of Troy, including purple coverlets, gold, and, most notably, Priam’s own clothes, which Agamemnon wears.\(^{159}\) As Joseph (2012, 83-4) notes, in the

\(^{158}\) Or “wearing on his body the proud spoils of Priam.”

\(^{159}\) Seneca follows the Homeric narrative that Agamemnon was killed during a banquet (*Odyssey* 11.409-20). Note that the mention of *epulae* also mirrors the earlier mention of the same earlier at lines 11 and 48 in the prologue; but for Thyestes’ ghost the implied past precedent was the cannibalistic meal that Atreus had served him, not a meal at Troy.
Aeneid, Ilioneus presents king Latinus with gifts, including the Priami gestamen (7.246); Joseph argues that Latinus “will play the part of the helpless, pitiful Priam in this first ‘reliving’ of the fall of Troy.” Thus there is a precedent within the Aeneid for the victimization of Agamemnon in Seneca; but of course Latinus does not die, and Seneca takes things further by depicting, through Cassandra’s words, Agamemon’s actual wearing of the spoils of Priam.

Cassandra’s emphasis on the clarity of her vision (tam clara numquam providae mentis furor numquam ostendit oculis, 872-3) has, as Tarrant notes (337-8) an intriguing intertext with Aeneid 2.589-92. At this point in the narrative, Aeneas is explaining how he was thinking of murdering Helen as she was hiding in Vesta’s shrine, when suddenly his mother Venus appears to him:

cum mihi se, non ante oculis tam clara, videndam obtulit et pura per noctem in luce refulsit alma parens, confessa deam qualisque videri caelicolis et quanta solet,

When, never so clear to my eyes, she showed herself to me and shined with bright light through the night, my dear mother, having revealed herself a goddess, in form and size as she is accustomed to appear to the gods in heaven,

There is a strong overlap in language between Seneca and Virgil here, one that points up the contrast between the two scenes: while Venus subsequently dissuades Aeneas from seeking revenge on Helen, instead convincing him to look after his own immediate family, Cassandra’s vision is specifically one of revenge, in which the gods play no apparent role. Once again Seneca has appropriated Virgilian language for a new and more nefarious context (i.e. from preventing murder to joyfully witnessing murder).

At the end of the play, after Agamemnon has been killed and Orestes saved, Clytemnestra orders the slaves to drag Cassandra away and kill her. Cassandra defiantly replies (1004-11):
ne trahite, vestros ipsa praecedam gradus.

1005 perferre prima nuntium Phrygibus meis propero: repletum ratibus eversis mare,
captas Mycenas, mille ductorem ducum,
ut paria fata Troicis lueret malis,
perisse dono, feminae stupro, dolo.

1010 nihil moramur, rapite, quin grates ago:
iam iam iuveh vixisse post Troiam, iuvat.

Do not drag me, I myself will precede your steps.
I hurry to be the first to bring the news to my Phrygians:
that the sea was filled with overturned ships,
Mycenae captured, that the leader of a thousand leaders,
in order that he might suffer a fate equal to the sufferings at Troy,
perished by a gift, by a woman’s adultery, by a deception.\(^{160}\)
I make no delay, take me, indeed I give thanks:
Now, now it is a delight to have lived past Troy, a delight.

Again, Cassandra makes a clever equation between Mycenae and Troy; line 1009 in particular equates the devious murder of Agamemnon by Clytemnestra to the fall of Troy thanks to Helen’s adultery, and accomplished by the ruse of the wooden horse. As she feels that revenge has been accomplished for the Trojan War, Cassandra is now happy to die: her bravery in fact constitutes a realization of the *libera mors* which the chorus of Trojan women had earlier praised. The repetition and reversal of Troy, in particular Virgil’s Troy, is complete in Cassandra’s eyes.

A larger distinction can also be made between Seneca and Virgil on the issue of prophecy in this context. The most prominent prophetess in the *Aeneid* is the Sibyl in book 6; she, like Cassandra, goes through a physical transformation as she moves into a prophetic state (*Aen.* 6.46-51, 77-80). It is notable that her main prophecy to Aeneas (6.83-97, discussed in chapter 2) is about how Aeneas will be forced to repeat the Trojan War in Italy. The Sibyl characterizes

\(^{160}\) At Troy, the gift was the wooden horse, the woman was Helen, and the deception was the Greeks’ actions on the final day, including those of Sinon. At Argos, the gift is the robe, without openings for head and hands, in which Agamemnon is trapped during his murder, as Cassandra narrates in 881-900; the woman is Clytemnestra, and the deception is the actions of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra leading up to the murder.
these coming events as a struggle for Aeneas; for example, she speaks of the greater dangers (graviora, 84) that await him in Italy after all of his trials at sea, and warns that they will not be happy to have made it there (non et venisse volent, 86). Seneca’s Cassandra also sees a repetition of the Trojan War, but is exultant for that very reason.

In effect, Seneca’s Cassandra argues that repetition of a criminal past can be a source of meaning, and even a basis for a brave and willing death; her viewpoint, I argue, wins out in the Agamemnon. While Cassandra only comes onstage in the second half of the play, her perspective successfully combines various essential elements of the play – revenge, repetition, the memory of Troy, and the libera mors – into a convincing whole. Ironically, the main event of the play, the death of Agamemnon, comes to seem like the work of Cassandra rather than of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus; she foresees, narrates, and gets the last word on his death.161

3.4. Conclusion.

The characters and choruses of Seneca’s Troades and Agamemnon consistently look to the past, in particular the Virgilian past, in order to understand their predicaments, frame their perspectives, and guide their actions. As for Aeneas in the Aeneid, the memory of the Trojan War is unavoidable in these plays of Seneca; but Seneca takes the Virgilian theme to new levels by having his characters constantly refer to past precedents of various sorts, and also by making his characters repeat and reinvent Virgilian language in new and more horrific contexts. Both plays of Seneca emphasize notions of death and dissolution; this is in contrast to Virgil’s emphasis on Aeneas’ survival and the resulting creation of a new political structure that will last

161 By contrast, Seneca’s Clytemnestra and Aegisthus show indecision in their plans to kill Agamemnon in act 2, and act 5 showcases their desperate attempts to control the results of their crime; they at no time express their exultation after the murder, unlike in Aeschylus’ Agamemnon, and unlike Seneca’s Cassandra.
for eternity. In the *Troades*, the narrated deaths of Astyanax and Polyxena mirror the earlier deaths of Priam, Hector, and Iphigenia, and in the *Agamemnon* the death of Agamemnon is explicitly linked to that of Priam; these links are ruthlessly reinforced through reference to the *Aeneid*. While the *Troades*, in its overall structure, more insistently emphasizes these violent, repetitive acts, the *Agamemnon* presents Cassandra, who most clearly verbalizes the same process.
Chapter 4. Victor and Vanquished in Senecan Tragedy.

4.1. Introduction.

As I argued in chapter 2, the theme of victor/vanquished is pronounced in Virgil’s *Aeneid*; in the present chapter I will argue that the same theme is even more persistent in Senecan tragedy, especially in the *Troades* and *Agamemnon*, and partly due to the influence of the *Aeneid* itself. In both the *Aeneid* and these two plays of Seneca, there is a sustained confusion or blending of two opponents in a military struggle, including the Greeks and Trojans of the Trojan War, as well as the two sides of the war in Italy in *Aeneid* 7-12. The roles of victor and vanquished, conqueror and conquered, winner and loser are problematized in these works, so that identities between these two polarities become confused: thus we find victors weeping for victims, as suggested at the beginning of *Aeneid* 2 (2.6-8), and narrated at the end of Seneca’s *Troades* (1119, quoted below), or those vanquished becoming victors, as in the case of Virgil’s Aeneas or Seneca’s Cassandra. Why would authors such as Virgil and Seneca do this?

The primary reason for this blending of victor and defeated derives, I argue, from the poets’ engagement with the literary and poetic tradition. As noted, Hardie (1993, 34) argues for “the collapse of distinctions that results from the play of the literary models.” Seneca and Virgil both include sophisticated echoes of various works of past poetry; it is thus perhaps not surprising that divergent voices become blended in the resulting text. Thus in the *Aeneid* we may find the Trojan Aeneas echoing statements of Homer’s Achilles, or Seneca’s Agamemnon in the *Troades* may echo Virgil’s Anchises; and in fact, as will be argued, part of the interest in these echoes is how they in effect combine multiple and often conflicting perspectives. Given the highly allusive nature of both corpora, there is a sense of crowding of intertextual mythical personas, which Seneca brings out even more fully than Virgil.
Taken further, the notion of blending of two sides of a military struggle can be seen as analogous to the blending of Greek and Roman literary traditions. Both Virgil’s *Aeneid* and Seneca’s tragedies constitute a blending of Greek and Roman material, as both derive strongly from Greek poetry, but are composed in Latin, and often contain markedly Roman aspects. Virgil’s and Seneca’s engagements with Greek precedents constitute an attempt to reinvent, and even rival, the poetic past; as past poetry itself is so much a part of their own new creations, there is necessarily some blending that will happen between the two sides of this literary struggle.

This notion has important connections to Horace’s famous statement *Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit et artis / intulit agresti Latio* (“Captured Greece captured an uncultivated victor and introduced the arts to rustic Latium,” *Epistulae* 2.1.156-7). The Roman political domination of Greece led to a cultural transfusion in which the Romans, by adopting the Greek arts, came to resemble those whom they had vanquished in military conquest. As this example from Horace suggests, linguistic play between the dichotomy of *victor* and *victus* can often lead to a sense of paradox or reversal, notions central to Senecan tragedy.

Furthermore, this example from Horace suggests that the extent of Roman political domination in the early empire may have led to a sense that the distinction between conqueror and conquered was being dissolved, as Rome gradually granted citizenship to more peoples, and as all citizens were reduced, to some degree, to the status of subjects under the emperor’s sway. Seneca himself makes a similar point at one point in the *De Ira*. In arguing that anger should be avoided, in particular toward one’s political associates or enemies, he states (*De Ira* 2.34.4):

> Quid est gloriosius quam iram amicitia mutare? Quos populos Romanus fideliores habet socios quam quos habuit pertinacissimos hostes? Quod hodie esset imperium, nisi salubris providentia victos permiscuisset victoribus?

> What is more glorious than to exchange anger for friendship? What more faithful allies does the Roman people have than those whom it once held as its most
obstinate enemies? What would be the empire today, if beneficial foresight had not intermingled vanquished with victors?

Seneca explicitly casts the early Roman empire as a mixing of conqueror and conquered; thus it may not be surprising to find similar ideas play out in his tragedies, in a perhaps more troubling fashion.

This loss of distinction also evokes thoughts of civil war; in fact, civil war may be thought of as the ultimate scenario in which victor and vanquished can be confused. This is true for the *Aeneid*, especially books 7-12, as the Trojans fight a war with the very people with whom they will later join as a *genus mixtum* (*Aen.* 12.838; cf. Pöschl 1962, 30). While the two Senecan plays that most closely relate to the theme of civil war, the *Phoenissae* and *Thyestes* – both contain violent sibling rivalries, over the thrones of Thebes and Argos respectively – do not appear to explore the blending of victor/vanquished in any significant way, nonetheless it will be seen that in the *Troades*, the way that Seneca depicts the struggle between Greeks and Trojans is in some ways reminiscent of civil war.

As it happens, besides Seneca’s *Phoenissae* and *Thyestes*, both of which may well have been composed during Nero’s reign,¹⁶² Neronian poetry often dwells on the subject of civil war, as Lucan’s *Bellum Civile* and Petronius’ *Satyricon* 119-124 attest. Lucan plays on the blurring of the battle lines early in his epic by promising to sing of *infestis obvia signis / signa, pares aquilas et pilae minantia pilis* (“standards confronting hostile standards, eagles matched against eagles, and javelins threatening javelins” 1.6-7). The fact that these tokens of war, on both sides of the struggle, are all Roman suggests the cataclysmic collapse of distinctions that Pharsalia will

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¹⁶² Tarrant (1985, 12-13), following Fitch (1981); see chapter 1 on the dating of the plays.
come to represent for Seneca’s nephew. So also later in book 1, when describing the looming showdown between Caesar and Pompey, Lucan problematizes the distinction between the two (1.126-8):

\[
\text{quis justius induit arma,}
\]
\[
\text{scire nefas; magno se iudice quisque tuetur:}
\]
\[
\text{victrix causa deis placuit, sed victa Catoni.}
\]

It is an offense to know who put on arms more justly; each supports itself with a high authority: the victor’s side found favor with the gods, but the vanquished with Cato.

These lines suggest a certain ambivalence between Caesar and Pompey as to who was more right to take up arms; while Caesar had the gods on his side, Pompey had Cato, whom Lucan, like Seneca, assimilates with divinity. In fact, the ambivalence must derive from the fact that both Caesar and Pompey were ultimately guilty of engaging in the nefas of civil war. This notion may be compared with Hecuba’s unwillingness to assign Troy’s fall solely to the treachery of the Greeks, as discussed in chapter 3; instead, at one point she attributes Troy’s destruction to her own fire (Tro. 38-40). Furthermore, the mention of Cato brings up the paradox not only of man-as-god but also of the victus victor, as Cato, at the end of his life, saw the whole world enslaved through Caesar’s victories, but attained libertas through his brave suicide. This idea of the

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163 Henderson (1998, 175) speaks of “the ‘civil war’ of Lucan’s text, where opposed senses tear themselves up and rip the signifiers away from signification.”

164 At 9.601-2, Lucan writes of Cato: ecce parens verus patriae, dignissimus aris, / Roma, tuis, per quem numquam iurare pudebit (“Behold a true parent of his country, most worthy of your altars, Rome, by whom it will never be shameful to swear”).

165 At De Providentia 2.10, Seneca, using prosopopoeia, quotes Cato: Licet...omnia in unius dicionem conesserint, custodiantur legionibus terrae, classibus maria, Caesarianus portas miles obsideat; Cato qua exeat habe; una manu latam libertati viam faciet (“Although everything has succumbed to the authority of one man, the lands are guarded by the legions, the seas by fleets, and Caesar’s soldiers besiege the gates, Cato has a way out: with one hand he will make a wide path to freedom”). On the paradox of Cato in civil strife, see also Petronius Satyricon 119.45-6: pellitur a populo victus Cato; tristior ille est, / qui vict, fascesque pudet rapuisse Catoni (“Defeated Cato is rejected by the people; he who won [i.e. Caesar] is sadder,
conquered conqueror will also play out for Astyanax and Polyxena in the *Troades* and for Cassandra in the *Agamemnon*, as will be further argued below.\(^ {166}\)

Seneca, in his *De Clementia*, addressed to the newly-crowned Nero, discusses how Augustus exercised clemency toward those he had recently (and ruthlessly) conquered in civil war (1.9-11); here Seneca argues that Augustus effectively assimilated conqueror and conquered within his new regime.\(^ {167}\) Seneca tells Nero how Augustus pardoned Cinna, who had allegedly plotted his assassination. In his interview with the would-be assassin, Seneca’s Augustus reminds Cinna how he had earlier spared him (1.9.8):

\[
\text{Ego te, Cinna, cum in hostium castris invenisset, non factum tantum mihi inimicum sed natum, servavi, patrimonium tibi omne concessi. Hodie tam felix et tam divus es, ut victo victores invidiunt.}
\]

Cinna, although I found you in the camp of the enemy, one who did not so much become hostile toward me, but was born so, I saved you, I granted you your father’s entire estate. Today you are so fortunate and wealthy that the victors envy you the vanquished.

Seneca’s Augustus here represents himself as one who spared an enemy in civil war – no doubt, we might note, because it was politically expedient. By sparing Cinna, Augustus allowed him to attain a degree of wealth that even some of Augustus’ steadfast allies in civil war did not enjoy; Augustus thus suggests that whatever freedom Cinna may have lost was compensated through his good fortune under Augustus’ rule. After narrating how Augustus and Cinna made peace, Seneca says to Nero (1.10.1):

\[
\text{and is ashamed to have snatched the fasces from Cato”), and Sen. *Epistulae Morales* 71.8-12. On Caesar as victus victor, see Pseudo-Sen. *Octavia* 500-02: invictus acie, gentium domitor, Iovi / aequatus altos saepe per honorum gradus / Caesar nefando civium scelere occidit (“Unconquered in battle, subduer of peoples, made equal to Jupiter through a continual progression of high honors, Caesar fell through the impious crime of his fellow citizens”).}
\]

\(^ {166}\) As noted in chapter 3, Cassandra, like Seneca’s Cato, refers to her coming death as libertas (Ag. 796).

\(^ {167}\) On these passages from the *De Clementia*, see Braund (2009b, 258-90).
Ignovit abavus tuus victis; nam si non ignovisset, quibus imperasset? Sallustium et Cocceios et Deillios et totam cohortem praeae admissionis ex adversornum castris conscripsit; iam Domitios, Messalas, Asinios, Cicerones, quidquid floris erat in civitate, clementiae suae debeat.

Your great-great-grandfather spared the vanquished;¹⁶⁸ indeed, if he had not spared them, over whom would he have ruled? He recruited Sallust, and the Cocceii and the Deillii and the entire staff of his inner circle from the camp of his enemies; now he owed the Domitii, Messalae, Asinii, Cicerones, and all the promise of the state to his own clemency.

Seneca’s note that Augustus spared the vanquished (ignovit victis) casts Augustus as following the advice of Anchises at *Aen.* 6.851-3 (*memento...parcere subiectis*).¹⁶⁹ For our purposes here, it is notable how Augustus effectively rehabilitated his prominent enemies in civil war by placing them and their progeny into the highest ranks of his new regime. Thus the policy of clemency allowed for a profound blending between the victors and vanquished of civil war. In a sense, everyone, on both sides of the earlier civil wars, became allied with the intentions of the emperor.

The blending of victor and vanquished in a civil-war context is also found in literature of the early empire after the Neronian era. As Joseph (2012, 121-5) notes, when Tacitus recounts the civil wars of 68-9 C.E. in his *Histories*, he sometimes juxtaposes or blends victor and vanquished within his descriptions; Joseph in fact argues that, in doing so, Tacitus is sometimes echoing Virgil. For example, as Otho’s forces surrender to those of Vitellius after the battle of

¹⁶⁸ See Augustus’ similar words on his acts of clemency in the *Res Gestae* 3.1-2, including (3.1): *victorque veniam petentibus civibus peperci* (“and as victor I spared those citizens who asked for mercy”). See also pseudo-Seneca’s *Octavia* 472-3, in which Seneca the character advises Nero to be sparing of his subjects: *Pulchrum...est...parcere afflictis* (“It is a beautiful thing to spare the fallen”).

¹⁶⁹ However, as Ker (2011, 57) importantly notes, Seneca undercut this argument at other points in this narrative (e.g. 1.9.1 and 1.11.1) when he “emphasizes that Augustus had arrived at this policy [i.e. of clemency] only after a long habit of using violence.” See also Ovid’s praise of Augustus at *Amores* 1.2.52, *qua vicit, victos protegit ille manu* (“he protects the conquered by the hand with which he conquered”) and *Ex Ponto* 2.123, *qui vicit semper, victis ut parcere posset* (“he who always conquered, in order that he might spare the conquered”).
Bedriacum, Tacitus notes (Histories 2.45): *tum victi victoresque in lacrimas effusi, sortem civilium armorum misera laetitia detestantes* (“Then the conquered and conquerors broke into tears, cursing, in their wretched happiness, the fate of civil war”); the same sharing of emotions between two sides in a military struggle will be seen repeatedly in Seneca’s *Troades* and *Agamemnon*. Joseph (122) here points out the similarity to *Aen*. 10.755-61, including Virgil’s phrase *victores victique* (757) discussed in chapter 2. Shortly thereafter (Hist. 2.46) Tacitus declares the civil war a *bellum atrox, lugubre, incertum victis et victoribus* (“a horrendous, pitiful war, uncertain in outcome for both conquered and conquerors”). Tacitus dwells on how the political and military machine of the early empire was often destructive to itself, to the point that normal distinctions were rendered obsolete, and on how the earlier civil wars before Augustus’ accession had created a significant precedent for this process.

In fact, Joseph (187-9), following Keitel (1984), argues that the circumstances of civil war are also operative in Tacitus’ account, in the *Annales*, of the reigns of the Julio-Claudian emperors, during the *Pax Romana*, when Seneca lived. Among other things, Joseph notes the lengthy discussion of Roman civil-war-like mutinies (those of Pannonia and Germany) within the first book of the *Annales*. Thus Tacitus may suggest some of the abiding weaknesses or tensions within the early principate, in which a Roman army could turn on its own rulers and citizens. Similar tensions are brought out in Tacitus’ account of the Pisonian conspiracy (*Annales* 15.48-72), in which Nero puts to death those Romans and their associates who plotted to kill him, including Seneca and Lucan.\(^{170}\) Seneca’s life, which began in the reign of Augustus

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\(^{170}\) Keitel (1984, 307-8) notes that Tacitus’ account of Nero’s ruthless quashing of the conspiracy at *Ann*. 15.58 casts Nero as besieger of Rome, putting many Romans to death; Tacitus also states here that among the soldiers who carried out this siege of Rome and its environs were Germans whom the Romans had conquered, as Nero trusted them precisely because they were not Roman. Keitel further notes that at *Ann*. 15.72 Tacitus states that, after quashing the conspiracy, Nero
and ended during that of Nero, was in fact bookended by civil war. While we cannot equate the experiences of Seneca and Tacitus, as they lived some fifty years apart, Tacitus’ blending of victor and victus within a Roman civil war context sheds light on Seneca’s treatment of the same theme within his plays, particularly the Troades, as two sides within a political struggle, i.e. Greeks and Trojans, come, and become, uncomfortably close to each other. Indeed the memory of the civil wars of the first century B.C.E. is strongly expressed in the literature of Seneca’s era, partly due to the influence of Virgil; this memory, along with the continued civil discord of the early principate, especially in the highest ranks of Roman society, may have led to the sense that civil war never actually ended.

As these political analogies suggest, the resemblance of victor and vanquished can have interesting and even troubling implications. War, in its brutality, often insists on a reductive “us vs. them” mentality, so that soldiers can justify the violent acts that they commit. In the case of the Aeneid, it can in fact be argued that Virgil often seems to emphasize the criminal nature of Aeneas’ enemies, so as to justify both his loss at Troy and his victory in Italy. In the first half of the Aeneid, the Greek enemies of the Trojans at Troy are always portrayed in a bad light, as essentially deceptive (e.g. Sinon), impious and bloodthirsty (e.g. Pyrrhus), or cowardly (e.g. the Trojan shades who flee from Aeneas in Aen. 6.489-93). Aeneas’ – and Virgil’s – insistence on the objectionable nature of the Greeks who take Troy seems intended to cast negative light on the Greeks’ victory; the implication being, perhaps, that the ancestors of the Romans would awarded honorary triumphs to some of his henchmen, “as if about to announce a military victory” (quasi bello gesta expositurus). Nero’s reaction to the conspiracy, as reported by Tacitus, is of course highly ironic in light of the earlier advice given by Seneca himself to Nero on clemency, as discussed above.

171 One possible exception would be Achaemenides from Aeneid 3.588-691. But his story deals with events after the fall of Troy, during which he is actually abandoned by his leader Ulixes, in pointed contrast to Sinon, who only pretends to be Ulixes’ victim.
never have engaged in such behavior. As a result, when Aeneas and his allies deceptively put on Greek armor during the Sack of Troy (2.386-401), or when Aeneas comes to resemble the Latin mothers, his enemies, who are inflamed with *furor* (12.946-7 and 7.392), there is a troubling sense of blending of good and bad, wherein neither side seems truly worthy to rule over the other. Seneca, I argue, picks up on this sense of blending in the *Aeneid* and makes it all the more pronounced in the *Troades* and *Agamemnon*, as will be argued.\(^{172}\)

Scholarship on the theme of victor and vanquished in Senecan tragedy has been very limited. Apart from very brief statements on the topic,\(^{173}\) Wills (1996, 251-3) remains the most informative, but also very brief, summary with regard to the topic within Latin poetry as a whole. Part of the reason for this dearth of scholarship may be that the topic may have been regarded as, in essence, trite wordplay, or simply reflective of a “commonplace”\(^{174}\) in Latin literature. Polyptoton is definitely an essential part of Seneca’s style,\(^{175}\) and so it is not surprising to find him playing off of distinctions between *victor* and *victus*. However, as will be argued below, Seneca’s *Troades* and *Agamemnon* explore the theme of victor/vanquished in a profound way, one that goes beyond word play. This exploration demonstrates Seneca’s sophisticated

\(^{172}\) The one other play of Seneca that specifically dwells on the blending of *victor* and *victus* is the *Hercules Furens*. At 278, Amphitryon prays to Hercules, *venias victor ad victam domum* (“may you come as victor to a vanquished home”), and Lycus, the usurping tyrant, plays off of the same dichotomy at 368-9, *pacem reduci velle victori expedit, victo necesse est* (“it is advantageous to the victor to want peace restored, it is essential for the vanquished”), and at 409-10, *cum victor arma posuit, et victum deponere odia* (“when the victor has put down his weapons, it is also right for the vanquished to lay aside his hatred”). There is also the larger reversal of Hercules from *victor* over Cerberus and the underworld to victim of his madness, through which he kills his family, as well as the reversal of Lycus from victor over Thebes to victim of Hercules. However, the play does not pursue the blending of victor and vanquished as persistently as do the *Troades* and *Agamemnon*.


\(^{174}\) Tarrant (1976, 337).

\(^{175}\) Wills (1994, 207) argues that the Latin poets fondest of polyptoton are Lucretius, Ovid, Manilius, and Seneca.
interaction with various poetic models, in which perspectives of conqueror and conquered seem to overlap or even collide; it also reflects the political situation of the early empire, when Seneca wrote.

4.2 Seneca’s *Troades*.

Seneca’s *Troades* pushes the blending of the two sides of the Trojan War to a great extent; overlapping literary traditions repeatedly interface within the play in a way that leads one to question the moral and political distinctions between the Greeks and Trojans, especially in light of the *Aeneid*. As Boyle (1994, 22-3) argues, “Among the conceptual distinctions which *Troades* dissolves are precisely those between Greek and Trojan, victor and vanquished, conqueror and captive in respect of the commonality of human suffering and human impotence.” In my discussion, I will give most attention to acts 3 and 5, as these are the acts in which this theme is most fully explored.

As noted, Hecuba in the prologue suggests that her role in the fall of Troy was not so far from that of the Greeks, as she gave birth to the fire that was Paris (38-40). Furthermore, earlier she makes an interesting point about the perspective of the Greek victors over Troy (22-26):

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stat avidus irae victor et lentum Ilium
metitur oculis ac decem tandem ferus
ignoscit annis; horret afflictam quoque,
victamque quamvis videat, haut credit sibi
potuisse vinci.
```

The victor stands greedy in his anger and measures tenacious Troy with his eyes and at last, in his savagery, forgives the ten years; he shudders at her even when she is overthrown, and although he sees her defeated, he does not believe that she was able to be defeated.
While the first part of the passage suggests a cruel and insatiable victor, the phrase *horret afflictam quoque* in 24 shows a reaction on the victor’s part that might be more appropriate for a Trojan; the use of *horreo* is unexpected, and the sense of disbelief at the Greeks’ victory undercuts in part the nature of that victory itself. Such a sentiment is foreign to the Greeks of *Aeneid* book 2; unlike in Virgil, Seneca’s play will give equal time and consideration to both the conquerors and conquered at Troy.

Furthermore, as Pratt (1983, 108) notes, the notion of “felix Priamus” as celebrated by Hecuba and the chorus in 142-63 creates the paradoxical sense that Priam, though perhaps thought of as the ultimate victim in death (Fantham 230), actually comes out on the winning side. Hecuba urges the chorus (143-8):

> non est Priami miseranda mei mors, Iliades.
> “Felix Priamus” dicite cunctae:
> liber manes vadit ad imos,
> nec feret umquam victa Graium cervice iugum;

The death of my Priam is not to be pitied, women of Ilium. Everyone say “happy Priam”: he goes freely to the lowest shades, and will never bear a Greek yoke on his conquered neck;

While, as has been seen, death as freedom is an idea common to Seneca’s writing, and while part of the notion of Priam as fortunate is based on the contrast with the other surviving Trojans, nonetheless, there is a sense of victory associated with the former king. This sense of the good fortune of a violent death at Troy is also found at *Aeneid* 3.321, in which Andromache envies the
dead Polyxena (o felix ante alias Priameia virgo, “O virgin daughter of Priam, happy before others”); Polyxena’s fortune is also paradoxically happy in Seneca’s play, as will be seen.176

**Sparing the Conquered?**

The second act of *Troades*, in which Pyrrhus and Agamemnon debate the fate of Polyxena, is about what constitutes proper behavior for the victor, and what is owed to the defeated, or as Agamemnon puts it, quid facere victor debat, victus pati (257). After the first act, which displayed Hecuba and the chorus of Trojan women, there is a sudden shift to the Greek side of the war, as the only characters onstage are Talthybius (the Greek herald), Pyrrhus, Agamemnon, and Calchas. This shift already suggests how the play is concerned with the outlooks of both victor and vanquished, as will be most fully realized from act 3 onward.177 In the second act, Seneca presents us with a curiously restrained Agamemnon, who argues that Polyxena should be spared, as he argues that such bloodletting would constitute hubris on the part of the Greeks.178 Pyrrhus, on the other side of the debate, argues in favor of the wishes of his father Achilles’ ghost, namely, that Polyxena be given to Achilles as a bride in Elysium. In doing so, he advocates for the unquestionable rights of the victor: as he says at 335, quodcumque

176 There is also Evander’s description of his deceased wife as felix morte tua (*Aen*. 11.159), spoken when he hears of his son Pallas’ death. See also Ovid *Met*. 13.519-21, spoken by Hecuba: quis posse putaret / felicem Priamum post diruta Pergama dici? / felix morte sua est (“Who would think that Priam could be said to be happy after the destruction of Pergamum? He is happy in his death”); this overlap is noted by Boyle (1994, 150).

177 Pratt (1983, 107) convincingly argues regarding the *Troades*: “The purpose of its large scale of characters and events is to interrelate two groups, the Trojans and the Greeks, in their experience of the fleeting and corrupting nature of military and political power.”

178 Agamemnon’s restraint on the issue of Polyxena’s sacrifice is curious because he did not exercise restraint in sacrificing his own daughter Iphigenia in order to take Troy, as Pyrrhus reminds him at 248-9 and 331. In fact, Pyrrhus at one point undercuts Agamemnon’s argument by suggesting that Agamemnon’s wish to spare Polyxena is in fact motivated by lust (304-5). Furthermore, in the *Iliad* Agamemnon shows a complete unwillingness to spare Trojans in his exchange with Menelaus over the fate of Adrestus at *Iliad* 6.37-65.
libuit facere victori decet (“It is fitting for the victor to do whatever he pleases”). Nonetheless, in proudly listing those whom Achilles killed both before and during the Trojan War, he makes an interesting observation about his father’s killing of Memnon, Ethiopian ally to the Trojans, whose mother was Eos, the Dawn goddess (241-2):

suique victor operis exemplum horruit,
didicisque Achilles et dea natos mori.

And the victor [i.e. Achilles] shuddered at the warning of his own deed, and Achilles learned that even those born of a goddess die.

Here Pyrrhus explains that Achilles made a surprising and troubling identification with his enemy Memnon; note again the idea of the victor shuddering (horruit) in victory, as in line 24 discussed above. The notion of both Achilles and Memnon as dea natos is a clever mythological connection, one that equalizes heroes on both sides of the war, but its implications are deeper, as it suggests an Achilles who may have had cause to hesitate in his role as warrior, despite Pyrrhus’ intentions in this speech. Furthermore, the Latin phrase dea natos also recalls another son of a goddess, namely Aeneas, who is frequently addressed in the Aeneid as nate dea.¹⁷⁹ While the phrase in the Aeneid is associated with Aeneas’ ability to survive, as notably used by Hector’s ghost at 2.289, Pyrrhus in the Troades here makes an opposite point about heroes’ mortality, on both sides of the war.

Agamemnon, for his part, in making the argument that Polyxena should be spared, repeatedly makes reference to language spoken by the Trojans, his enemies, in the Aeneid. In so doing, he complicates, intertextually, the distinctions between victor and vanquished, and thus undercuts his own argument. First, in arguing that the Greeks should be restrained in their victory, he says that no one holds violent power for long, whereas moderate power endures

¹⁷⁹ Eleven times in the Aeneid, first at 1.582.
(violent a nemo imperia continuit diu, / moderata durant, 258-9), and that the trappings of
monarchy can vanish in a calamitous instant (273-4): casus haec rapit brevis, / nec mille forsan
ratibus aut annis decem (“a fleeting calamity will steal these things away, perhaps without a
thousand ships or ten years”). The wording of line 274 clearly recalls Aeneas’ language at Aen.
2.197-8, describing how Sinon’s treachery quickly prevailed over the Trojans, whom neither ten
years nor a thousand ships subdued: quos.../ non anni domuere decem, non mille carinae.
(“whom not ten years subdued, not a thousand ships”). By referencing the words of his Trojan
enemy, Agamemnon weakens his argument, especially as Aeneas’ narrative in book 2 of the
Aeneid argues for the fundamentally ruthless and bloodthirsty nature of the Greeks; the Senecan
Agamemnon’s clear and intriguing knowledge of Virgil’s epic in some sense destabilizes the
import of what he says. Second, as noted in chapter 3, Agamemnon at one point in the debate
argues for restraint in dealing with their Trojan captives by using, in 350-1, phrasing that recalls
Virgil’s Anchises (meus captis quoque /scit parcere ensis, recalling Aeneid 6.851-3,
merento...parcere subiectis). This is another example of Barchiesi’s “future reflexive” which
is interesting in that Agamemnon’s argument (like Anchises’) comes to naught, as he defers to
Calchas’ ultimate pronouncement that Polyxena must be sacrificed. Furthermore, at the end of

180 Keulen ad loc.
181 However, the Senecan Agamemnon’s inclination to spare Polyxena has a precedent in
Euripides’ Hekabe, as at 116-40 the chorus says that Agamemnon argued in the Greek assembly
for sparing her, but was successfully opposed in this debate by Odysseus (not by Pyrrhus, as in
Seneca). Furthermore, at 783, 785 and 850-1 of Euripides’ Hekabe, Agamemnon expresses pity
for Hekabe in light of the death of her son Polydorus. Also in Euripides’ play, Hekabe notes at
247 that she once spared Odysseus, her Greek enemy, and so (unsuccssfully) begs Odysseus
that Polyxena be spared. It is furthermore important to note that, regarding Euripides’ Troades,
Talthybius the Greek herald expresses sympathy for Hekabe and the Trojans (710-19, 786-89,
1130-55), and that Hekabe in the same play finds common cause with Menelaus, her Greek
enemy, in his wish to murder Helen (890-4 and 1029-32). Thus Euripides in these plays also
explored the blurring of victor and vanquished in this mythological context; however, as will be
further argued, Seneca takes these ideas further, especially through echoes of Virgilian language,
in this case on the issue of clemency.
the agon, note how Agamemnon asks Calchas to declare the will of the gods on the issue of Polyxena’s fate (353-59): *tu…cui mundi fragor / et stella longa semitam flamma trahens / dant signa fati…quid iubeat deus / effare, Calchas* (“You…to whom the crash of the heavens, and the star, tracing a path with long flame, give the signs of fate…speak, Calchas, what the god orders”). As Keulen (261-2) notes, Agamemnon’s words echo those of Aeneas at *Aen.* 2.692-4, quoted above in chapter 3, in which he describes the comet that fortuitously indicates the way out of Troy (*subitoque fragore / intonuit laevum, et de caelo lapsa per umbras / stella facem ducens multa cum luce cucurrit*). By remembering the lines of Virgil, Agamemnon seems to hope to find a way out of the violence of Troy, such as Aeneas and Anchises found; but again, his reference to the words of his conquered enemy, Aeneas, undermines his intent.\(^\text{182}\) While Agamemnon’s argument is ultimately overruled, the debate over Polyxena in act 2 nonetheless suggests that even the Greeks who fought at Troy can identify with and show pity for the defeated in war. This notion is in direct contrast with Virgil’s *Aeneid* book 2.\(^\text{183}\)

**Fallax Andromache, Pius Ulixes**

The blending of victor and defeated is also strongly present in act 3 of the *Troades*, in which Andromache vainly attempts to save her son Astyanax from Ulixes, who comes to seize him so that he can be killed; Pratt (1983, 109) notes that the third act represents a increase in dramatic tension over the first two acts, as now victor (Ulixes) and vanquished (Andromache)

\(^{182}\) It should also be noted that the Senecan Agamemnon’s willing deferral to Calchas on the fate of Polyxena is in pointed contrast to his almost complete hostility toward Calchas’ pronouncements regarding Chryseis, as expressed in *Iliad* 1.106-15.

\(^{183}\) Furthermore, Littlewood (2004, 101) notes that in Calchas’ declaration that Polyxena must be sacrificed, as Iphigenia was before, “The death of Iphigenia is echoed by the death of Polyxena without reference to a distinction between Greek and Trojan.” Thus the cycle of violence causes the Greek/Trojan dichotomy to be blurred.
come face to face. The blending between winner and loser begins even before Ulixes enters: in recounting her dream of Hector, who urges her to hide Astyanax, Andromache at least twice describes Hector in a way similar to Virgilian descriptions of Aeneas’ enemies; thus the blending of victor and victus here takes place across texts. First, in describing how Hector appeared to her in the dream, she says he was *nec caede multa qualis in Danaos furens / vera ex Achille spolia simulato tulit* (“and not as he was, when, raging with much slaughter against the Greeks, he won true spoils from a false Achilles [i.e. Patroclus],” 446-7). As Ter Haar Romeny (1887, 66) points out, the phrase *caede furens* has a Virgilian precedent in Aeneas’ description of Pyrrhus (also called Neoptolemus), before he slaughtered Priam in *Aen*ed 2.499-500: *vidi ipse furentem / caede Neoptolemum* (“I myself saw Neoptolemus raging in slaughter”). Andromache’s description of Hector thus suggests a Trojan hero who, via Virgil, was, at an earlier point, as bloodthirsty as Pyrrhus, his Greek enemy. Keulen (2001, 309) points out another connection to a Greek enemy of Hector and Aeneas in Andromache’s phrasing: in the ecphrasis of the images on the temple of Juno in Carthage, Aeneas sees Diomedes at Troy, described thus (*Aen*. 1.471): *Tydides multa vastabat caede cruentus* (“The bloody son of Tydeus was ravaging with much slaughter”). Here too Andromache’s description of Hector seems uncomfortably similar to that of a Greek enemy in Virgil; we might be led to question the basis of Andromache’s faith in her vision of Hector. Second, in 451, Andromache describes Hector as *quassans caput* (“shaking his head”). This recalls a Virgilian description of two other enemies of Aeneas: first, Juno is described by Virgil using the same phrase, *quassans caput* (*Aen*.7.292) while she is making her nefarious plans against Aeneas after his arrival in Italy; second, Turnus is described as *caput quassans* during the final duel in *Aen*.12.894 (Keulen 311 and Ter Haar Romeny 67). Thus Andromache’s description of her husband in the dream is unsettling, in “future reflexive”
fashion, in that Hector resembles the enemies of Troy and Aeneas as described by Virgil.

Moreover, the act of shaking the head signals dejection or frustration, in contrast to the image of Hector in Aeneas’ dream in *Aeneid* 2.  

With regard to Andromache’s attempt to save her son, Freas (2010, 56-60) makes the important point that the traditional roles of Andromache and Ulysses are reversed, as it is now Andromache who uses deceit in her attempt to thwart the crafty Ithacan general. She asks herself, in deciding where to hide her son, *quem locum fraudi legam?* (“What place will I choose for deceit?” 482); she first denies to Ulixes that she knows where her son is (556-67) and later, when she becomes more desperate, in 594-7 pretends that Astyanax is already dead.

Andromache’s verbal acts of deception in effect assimilate her with her famously deceptive antagonist. Ulixes, for his part, destabilizes his own reputation for falsehood and craftiness in the exchange with Andromache by calling into question, when he first enters, the very words that he speaks (524-8):

> Durae minister sortis hoc primum peto,  
> ut, ore quamvis verba dicantur meo  
> non esse credas nostra: Graiorum omnium  
> procerumque vox est, petere quos seras domos  
> Hectorea suboles prohibet. hanc fata expetunt.

As the agent of a cruel fate, I first ask this, that, while the words are spoken from my mouth, *you not believe that they are mine;* this is the call of all the Greeks and their leaders, whom the offspring of Hector forbids from seeking their long-overdue homes. The fates demand this.

While Ulixes’ point is that he in fact speaks the pronouncement of all of the Greeks, not just his own, nonetheless his phrasing in 524-6 suggests Ulixes’ own predilection for deception, and thus

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184 Compare also the image of the farmer who is frustrated at his own toils in Lucretius 2.1164-5, which may in turn have been a source for Virgil: *iamque caput quassans grandis suspirat arator /crebrius, incassum magnos cecidisse labores* (“And now the aged farmer, shaking his head, sighs repeatedly that his great toils have been in vain.”)
plays off of this reputation in attempting to persuade Andromache. From a Virgilian perspective, this scene is a reversal of the Sinon episode in Aeneid 2. While Sinon uses clever persuasion to entrap the Trojans into accepting him into Troy—indeed by falsely portraying himself as a victim of the Greeks—Ulixes explains his grim mission without deception, and rather must see through the deceptions of the Trojan Andromache. It is thus, in the world of the Troades, more difficult to assign the reproach of cunning deception to one side of the war, in contrast to Aeneas’ words on Sinon’s ruse in introducing the Sinon episode: *accipe nunc Danaum insidias et crimine ab uno / disce omnis* (“hear now the tricks of the Greeks, and from one act of criminality, become acquainted with them all,” Aen. 2.65-6).

In his debate with Andromache, Seneca’s Ulixes is careful to develop his arguments as to why Astyanax must be surrendered, and it is often notable how he blends Greek and Trojan perspectives in his argument. In elaborating on the fact that the sacrifice of the boy is ordained by the *fata*, Ulixes says (533-5):

\[
\text{augur haec Calchas canit:} \\
\text{et, si taceret augur haec Calchas, tamen} \\
\text{dicebat Hector, cuius et stirpem horreo.}
\]

The seer Calchas proclaims these things: and, if Calchas the seer were silent about these things, nonetheless Hector used to say them, whose offspring I also fear.

\[185\text{ In Euripides, Odysseus himself is said to persuade the Greeks to kill both Astyanax (Troades 721-5) and Polyxena (Hekabe 131-40). Also in Euripides’ Hekabe, Polymestor the Thracian says that he killed Polydorus, son of Priam, so that the boy could not found a resurgent Troy (1138-44), whereas he actually killed him out of greed. Seneca’s Ulixes, by contrast, uses a similar argument about Astyanax, but without any apparent deception.}\]

\[186\text{ However, Ulixes does use deception in 619-41, wherein he pretends that he believes Andromache’s statement that Astyanax is dead.}\]

\[187\text{ Williams *ad loc.* takes Virgil’s omnis to agree with an understood insidias, thus “learn all of their tricks.” Austin, however, comments: “Dido can learn from one man’s villainy what every Greek is like” (1964, 55), thus taking omnis to agree with an understood Danaos. I agree with Austin’s reading: Aeneas emphasizes the Greeks’ general tendency toward deception, not the exemplary nature of Sinon’s act of deception.}\]
The fact that Ulixes uses the words of the Trojan Hector to back up those of Calchas is surprising, as they are on different sides of the war; Ulixes thus reaches across the poetic tradition and in a sense equates Greek and Trojan sentiments on Astyanax. Ulixes further asks that Andromache sympathize with the Greeks’ current plight (546-50) and demands that she free the Greeks from their fears (libera Graios metu, 551). This argument is disconcerting in that Ulixes is asking Andromache to sympathize with the very people who have destroyed her entire family; at the same time, his notion of the Greeks as being preoccupied with fear runs counter to their current position as undisputed victors over Troy. Whether one takes Ulixes’ words as genuine or feigned in some respect, his clear strategy is to equate the concerns of the Greeks with those of the Trojans. Furthermore, in 555 Ulixes claims that, if Calchas had demanded it, he would even have retrieved a Greek child such as Orestes for sacrifice, and further in the same line urges Andromache patere quod victor tulit (“suffer what the victor bore”), implying that, as the Greeks were forced to give up Iphigenia before the war, so must the Trojans now give up Astyanax. Ulixes’ words here can be construed as sophistry, as he omits the fact that the deaths of both children will have been for the benefit of the Greeks, neither for the Trojans. In fact, Ulixes points out in lines 589-90 that the Greeks are like Andromache in their concern for the well-being of their children. But of course while Andromache seeks to preserve her child, Ulixes is intent on his destruction.

Andromache’s attempt to deceive Ulixes is, not surprisingly, unsuccessful. In lines 556-67, she claims, in Ulixes’ presence, to know nothing about her son’s whereabouts; but Ulixes,

188 On the phrase dicebat Hector, I agree with Keulen’s suggestion (339) that it may be a reference to Iliad 6.476-81, in which Hector prays for Astyanax’s future success in battle.

189 In Euripides’ Hekabe, Odysseus, in his agon with Hekabe, when he argues that the dead Achilles must be honored by the sacrifice of Polyxena, states that those Greeks who lost children and husbands are no less pitiable than Hekabe herself (321-5). But while Euripides’ Odysseus looks to past and present sufferings of the Greeks, Seneca’s Ulixes here looks to the future.
seeing through this, remarks (568-9): non facile est tibi / decipere Ulixem (“It is not easy for you to deceive Ulixes”). Ulixes thus reflects on his own capacity for deception, as shown in previous poetry. When he cuts to the chase, asking her (571) ubi natus est? (“Where is your son?”), Andromache replies (571-2):

**Ubi Hector?** ubi cuncti Phryges?
ubi Priamus? unum quaeris; ego quaero omnia.

Where is Hector? Where are all the Phrygians?
Where is Priam? You seek one individual; I seek everything.

Andromache here attempts to dismiss Ulixes’ question by suggesting the larger cataclysm that she and the Trojans face at this point. As Boyle (1994, 188) notes, Seneca’s Andromache in 571 alludes to the words of Virgil’s Andromache at *Aen.* 3.312, who is so shocked by Aeneas’ presence at Buthrotum that she wonders if she is in the underworld, and thus asks Aeneas:

**Hector ubi est?** Thus the Senecan Andromache here appears to play off of her representation in Virgil’s epic in order to convince Ulixes that Astyanax is missing, and most likely dead; but in fact, this Virgilian allusion points out the hopelessness of the Senecan Andromache’s attempts to delude Ulixes and save her son.

As Andromache’s deception is gradually uncovered by Ulixes, and she becomes more desperate, she is driven to the paradoxical situation of calling on her ultimate enemies, Achilles and Pyrrhus, killers of her husband and father respectively, for assistance when Ulixes threatens to destroy Hector’s tomb (665-7).¹⁹⁰ Her rationale is that, as Achilles granted Hector a proper burial (as in *Iliad* 24), so perhaps now he and his son will guard Hector’s tomb. She thus, like Ulixes, reaches across the divide between Greek and Trojan, but her efforts go nowhere. In fact,

¹⁹⁰ *Caelitum appello fidem / fidemque Achillis: Pyrrhe, genitoris tui / munus tuere* (“I call on the pledge of the gods and the pledge of Achilles: Pyrrhus, protect the gift of your father”) in which the *munus* or gift is Hector’s tomb, as Achilles returned Hector’s body.
Andromache’s supplication of Ulixes in 691-703 and 718-35 seems a sad parody of Priam’s supplication of Achilles in the *Iliad*, as she, unlike Priam, is unsuccessful. Andromache makes a convincing case for sparing Astyanax by citing the exemplum of Hercules, who, in conquering Troy, pitied Priam because Hercules, in turn, was conquered by the young Priam’s tears (*hostis parvi victus lacrimis*, 725). She says of Hercules’ conquest of Troy, *hoc fuit illo victore capi* (“This was what it was to be captured by that victor” 729). But Ulixes is simply not persuaded by her appeal. In her frustration, she resorts to taunting Ulixes as a *scelerum artifex* (“contriver of crimes,” 750); as Fantham (1982, 314) notes, this phrase has a Virgilian precedent in *Aeneid* 2.125, in which Sinon falsely describes Ulixes’ intention to have Sinon sacrificed (so that the Greek fleet could sail homeward) as an *artificis scelus* (“a crime of the contriver [i.e. Ulixes]”). In both cases, however, Ulixes is *not* the cunning contriver: in Virgil, it is Sinon who fabricates the entire story, and in Seneca’s *Troades*, as discussed above, Andromache is more deceptive than Ulixes. Andromache further notes in 752-3 that Ulixes’ past schemes are to the detriment of both Greeks and Trojans, thus further blending opposing outlooks on Ulixes.

Thus in the third act of the *Troades*, the perspectives and experiences of the Greek victors and the Trojan vanquished are strongly blended, to the advantage of Ulixes and to the great detriment of Andromache and Astyanax. In the fourth act, the figure of Helen, who comes to prepare Polyxena for her marriage in death to Achilles, further contributes to mixing of identities. Helen is of course a sort of composite of the two sides of the war, in that she is Greek by birth but has married into the Trojan royal family; furthermore, the coming marriage of the

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191 See also *Aeneid* 2.164, in which Sinon describes Ulixes as *scelerum inventor*.
192 *dolis et astu maleficae mentis iacent / etiam Pelasgi* (“by the tricks and cunning of your wicked mind even Pelasgians lie low”). One example of a Greek who was doomed by Ulixes’ cunning is Palamedes, whom he framed as a thief and traitor (*Ovid Met.* 13.56-62); Ulixes used deception to the detriment of all the Trojans when he entered the city disguised as a slave in order to gain information, and in order to kill Trojans (*Odyssey* 4.244-59).
Trojan Polyxena to Achilles’ shade reflects similar blending, and so Helen’s role as *pronuba* (1133) to the “bride” is appropriate, as Helen herself almost sarcastically suggests in 861-3.  

Helen has been instructed by the Greeks to deceive Polyxena and the other Trojan women into believing that Polyxena is to marry Pyrrhus; Helen somewhat feebly plays along, but eventually, when Andromache raises her suspicions, admits freely the nature of her mission. Thus Helen shows allegiance to the Greeks as well as partial sympathy for the Trojan women.  

In condemning Helen, Andromache calls her (892-3) *pestis exitium lues / utriusque populi* (“plague, death and destruction of both peoples”) and says to Helen (896) *tibi fluxit Asiae, fluxit Europae cruor* (“for you the blood of Asia, the blood of Europe flowed”), thus declaring that she was a bane to both Trojans and Greeks; this line recalls Aeneas’ hostile description of Helen at *Aeneid* 2.573 as *Troiae et patriae communis Erinys* (“scourge of both Troy and her fatherland”). Helen complains similarly in her own defense when she says *in me victor et victus furit* (“both victor and vanquished rage against me” 914). Helen’s pronouncements are thus informed by her reputation as bane to both Greeks and Trojans, conqueror and conquered. Toward the end of

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193 Quicumque hymen funestus, inlaetabilis / lamenta caedes sanguinem gemitus habet, / est auspice Helena dignus (“Whatever marriage that is fatal and cheerless, that has lamentations, murder, bloodshed, and groans, is worthy of Helen as witness.”)  
194 In 925-6, Helen, in referring to the upcoming “marriage” of Polyxena to Achilles, says *vix lacrimas queo /retinere* (“I can scarcely hold back the tears”).  
195 Euripides’ Andromache in the *Troades* says the same of Helen at 771: *πολλοῖσι κήρα βαρβάροις Ἕλλησί τε* (“bane to many non-Greeks and Greeks”). Compare also Sen. *Agamemnon* 274 in which Clytemnestra describes Helen similarly: *Europam et Asiam paribus afflixit malis* (“She [i.e. Helen] distressed Europe and Asia with equal evils”). See also Catullus’ description of Troy at 68.89 as *commune sepulcrum Asiae Europaeae* (“the common tomb of Asia and Europe”).  
196 With this idea of rage on both sides towards the same object we might compare the reverse at *Aeneid* 1.458, in which Hector sees, on the walls of Juno’s temple, *Atridas Priamumque et saevum ambobus Achillem* (“the sons of Atreus, and Priam, and Achilles, raging at both”); Seneca in fact quotes *Aeneid* 1.458 at *Epistulae Morales* 104.31, likening Achilles’ attitude to that of Cato towards Caesar and Pompey. While both Greek and Trojan rage at Helen, so Achilles rages at both Greek and Trojan.
the act, Helen reveals the new Greek masters for the various Trojan women. When Hecuba hears that she has been assigned to Ulixes, she complains *quīs matrem Hectoris / armis Achillīs miscet?* (“who mingles the mother of Hector with the arms of Achilles?” 986-7); Hecuba thus complains of another potential confusion between the two sides of the war. 197

**The Arena**

As the fifth act is the climax of the *Troades*, in that the deaths of Astyanax and Polyxena are finally realized, so also does it contain the final climactic statement on the theme of blending of victor and vanquished within the play. The messenger who delivers the account of the two deaths emphasizes not only the actions and comportment of the victims, but also the reactions of the many spectators, both Greek and Trojan, conquerors and conquered, to these sacrifices; the messenger’s account thus incorporates various perspectives within this spectacular ending. As noted, Astyanax in the *Troades* transforms his own death by eagerly mounting the tower, keeping a brave face, and willingly jumping to his death (1090-1103). 198 The Greek audience in attendance is struck by his fortitude (1098-1100):

\[
\textit{moverat vulgum ac duces ipsumque Ulixem. non flet e turba omnium qui fletur;}
\]

He had moved the crowd and the leaders and Ulixes himself. Out of the whole crowd, he does not weep who is wept for;

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197 Ulixes had won the arms of Achilles after Achilles’ death. There is a textual issue in these lines, as some editors have chosen to delete part of the transmitted text. Fantham and Fitch’s texts read (984-6) *quīs arbiter crudelis et miseris gravis / eligere dominos nescit et [saeva manu / dat miseris fata? quīs] matrem Hectoris / armis Achillīs miscet?*

198 See chapter 3 for an extended description of the death of Astyanax.
There is a notable blending of victor and vanquished here, as an audience of Greek soldiers would not be expected to weep for Astyanax, and further it is unexpected that Ulixes of all people would be moved by this spectacle.\(^{199}\) The messenger further lends a sense of remorse to the crowd of Greeks: *flevitque Achivum turba quod fecit nefas* (“and the crowd of Achaians wept because it had committed a crime” 1119); nonetheless they proceed on to the execution of Polyxena (*idem ille populus aliud ad facinus reedit*, “the very same people return to another crime” 1120).

The death of Polyxena takes place at the tomb of Achilles, as she is sacrificed to his shade. The messenger describes the location in detail (1121-5):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{cuius extremum latus} \\
\text{Rhoetea leni verberant fluctu vada;} \\
\text{adversa } \text{cingit campus, } \text{et clivo levi} \\
\text{erecta } \text{medium vallis includens locum} \\
\text{crescit theatri more.}
\end{align*}
\]

whose furthest side
the Rhoetean waters beat with a gentle wave.
A plain surrounds the opposite sides, and with a brief slope
an elevated valley enclosing the middle area
rises in the manner of a theater.\(^{200}\)

The messenger’s description has close connections to the description of the place for the footrace and other games in honor of Anchises at *Aeneid* 5.287-9:

\(^{199}\) At Euripides’ *Hekabe* 571-80, Talthybius describes how the Greeks admired Polyxena’s bravery in death. But the notions are taken much further in Seneca’s play; for example, the Greeks in Euripides do not weep for Polyxena, especially not Odysseus.\(^{200}\) It is notable that, while Astyanax’s death is depicted by the messenger as something that the audience looked *upward* to witness, as he fell from the tower (see chapter 3), the death of Polyxena is contrastingly described as an event in which the spectators looked *downward*, as one does in a theater. Mader (1997, 343) interestingly argues that Astanax’s death is a form of “inverted teichoskopia,” that is, instead of his looking down at a spectacle of battle (as suggested in 1074), the soldiers look up at the spectacle of his sacrifice. As teichoskopiai derive from epic (as in *Iliad* 3.161-242 and 22.405-13 and 462-5), this is another instance in which Senecan tragedy may be said to reinvent epic precedents.
gramineum in campum, quem collibus undique curvis
cingebant silvae, mediaque in valle theatri
circus erat;

onto a grassy plain, which the forests on sloping hills
on all sides surrounded, and in the middle valley
there was the circuit of a theater;

Seneca clearly borrows the notion of a natural theater from these lines of Virgil (Keulen 514-5); but in contrast to the good-natured competition that follows in the Aeneid, in the Troades there is a human sacrifice. Furthermore, in both works the place that is described represents a new locale from the last spectacle: in Virgil, Aeneas and the Trojans move from the site of the ship-race to that of the foot-race and the other competitions, while in Seneca the crowd moves from the killing of Astyanax to that of Polyxena. While both authors emphasize notions of spectatorship, particularly in the mention of a theatrum, Seneca’s depiction of the human sacrifices more closely resembles events such as occurred in Roman arenas in Seneca’s day, wherein gladiators fought to the death and convicted criminals were killed. 201

Unlike the death of Astyanax, both Greeks and Trojans attend Polyxena’s sacrifice: as the messenger comments paradoxically, nec Troes minus / suum frequentant funus (‘no less do the Trojans crowd their own funeral’ 1129-30). 202 Polyxena’s death thus rivals that of Astyanax in

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201 See Shelton 2000 for an informative discussion of how act 5 of the Troades relates to events that took place in the Roman arena in the first century C.E. Shelton further argues in this article that Seneca’s play does not question the justice of the killing of Astyanax and Polyxena; instead she argues that a Roman audience would accept this killing of victims much as it accepted the deaths of gladiators and convicted criminals in the arena. She proposes “an interpretation which recognizes the similarities between the Roman audience and the triumphant Greeks, who are re-establishing order and confirming their superiority” (102). While I agree with Shelton’s argument to a degree, I feel that Seneca’s play does show admiration for the Trojan victims of the Greeks in a way that calls into question whether or not the deaths were actually warranted. On the importance of gladiatorial matches in Roman society, see Barton (1993, 11-46).

202 This is in pointed contrast to the depiction of Polyxena’s death in Euripides’ Hekabe 521-80, where only the Greek army is in attendance.
terms of the blending of victor and vanquished. The messenger notes that the Greeks and Trojans become similarly emotionally involved in the spectacle: *terror attonitos tenet / utrosque populos* (“terror seizes both astonished peoples” 1136-7). Polyxena, like Astyanax, shows great bravery in her death203 (1146, 1151-3) to the point that the normally bloodthirsty Pyrrhus, who fatally wounds her, hesitates (*Pyrrhus ad caedem piger*, “Pyrrhus, slow to kill,” 1154). After she dies, falling proudly and angrily onto Achilles’ tomb,204 the messenger once more notes the blending of emotions between the two sides (1160-1):

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uterque flevit coetus; at timidum Phryges
misere gemitum, clarius victor gemit.
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Both assemblies wept; but the Phrygians gave forth a faint-hearted groaning, while the victor groans more loudly.

Contrary to what might be expected, the Greeks appear more upset than the Trojans at the death of Polyxena. This may be because of the guilt they feel at killing Polyxena, as was expressed after Astyanax’s death (*flevit…turba quod fecit nefas*, 1119); in both cases, we find victors sympathizing with their victims.

Mader (1997, 323-6) makes the important point that the spectacle of Astyanax and Polyxena’s deaths, witnessed by a large crowd, has a further Virgilian counterpart in the duel between Aeneas and Turnus at the end of the *Aeneid*. This intertext is immediately intriguing as both scenes provide a shocking end to the works in question: Virgil’s audience is led to contemplate the death of Turnus, much as Seneca’s audience is led to consider the deaths of Astyanax and Polyxena. Furthermore, the idea of human sacrifice is prominent in both the *Troades* and the end of the *Aeneid*: Aeneas styles his killing of Turnus as a human sacrifice

203 In this, she is like Euripides’ Polyxena in *Hekabe* 546-70.
204 D. and E. Henry (1985, 134) note the relative lack of passive verbs in the messenger’s accounts of the two deaths, and argue that “Polyxena and Astyanax achieve rather than suffer death.”
through his use of *immolare* (*Pallas te hoc vulnere, Pallas / immolat*, “Pallas sacrifices you with this wound, Pallas,” 12.948-9). What is more, the mention of Pyrrhus hesitating in his killing of Polyxena (*Pyrrhus ad caedem piger* 1154, noted above) recalls Aeneas’ hesitation in killing Turnus (12.939-46). As at the scene in *Troades*, both sides of the war witness this final duel. This is how Virgil first describes the perspective of the spectators (*Aen.* 12.704-5):

> iam vero et Rutuli certatim et Troes et omnes convertere oculos Itali,

> Now truly the Rutulians and the Trojans, and all the Italians, eagerly turned their eyes,

As in Seneca, this spectacle is witnessed by both sides; Virgil’s mention of *omnes Itali* points up the relative lack of distance between the identities of Trojan and Rutulian, as these two most immediate adversaries in the duel will soon be merged into one Italian stock, the *genus mixtum*, as described by Jupiter at 12.838. The spectators in Virgil are thus witnessing a fusion of Trojan and Italian blood, symbolized by Aeneas’ marriage to Lavinia, and the elimination of his principal rival to that marriage, Turnus. In Seneca, this idea of marriage and consequent perpetuation of a race is turned on its head, through the shocking spectacle of deaths of children, including Polyxena’s marriage in death; their deaths do not suggest future continuation of Trojan stock, but rather its obliteration. While in Virgil, an audience for a climactic duel seems reasonable, given the drama and the uncertainty of the outcome, in the *Troades* the soldiers seem bloodthirsty in their eagerness to watch the sacrifices (Mader, 330-1). And of course, while there is divine discussion and intervention in the duel of *Aeneid* 12, the only spirit that is present in the

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205 Conte (2007, 154-5) argues of this use of the verb in the *Aeneid*, “*Immolare* is exactly *thuein*: essentially Aeneas in the last scene of the poem is a *thuter*, a sacrificing priest. Thus Turnus’ blood becomes blood consecrated to Pallas.”

206 Ronnie Ancona pointed this out to me through personal communication.
Troades spectacle is that of Achilles, whose tomb actively drinks in Polyxena’s sacrificial blood (1162-4).

The fact that Seneca’s messenger is at pains to show how both sides were affected by this final and climactic event suggests just how important the theme of blending of victor and vanquished is in this tragedy. As in Virgil’s Aeneid book 2, the story of the fall of Troy in the Troades depicts the suffering and death of the Trojans. But Seneca complicates the issue by portraying the Greeks as reluctant or even repentant victors; the mixing of the perspectives of the two sides of the war suggests both literary blending as well as a new viewpoint on military conquest. Furthermore, the brave deaths of Astyanax and Polyxena transform their identities as pathetic victims into Stoic victors over fortune. As Pratt (1983, 111) well remarks, “The boy and the maiden are moral gladiators, not captives but free, not victims but victors.”

4.3. Seneca’s Agamemnon.

The blending of victor and vanquished is also pronounced in the Agamemnon. As in the Troades, the two sides of the Trojan War are assimilated in their experiences; this is further enhanced by the strong element of revenge in the play, as was discussed in chapter 3. Much of the play turns upon a reversal of Troy: in particular, characters in the play understand the death of Agamemnon as a turning of the tables, as the victorious Greek general becomes a helpless victim. Prior to his murder, the extended narrative of the storm in the third act of this play, in which the Greek fleet is buffeted by the hostile forces of nature, most fully explores the blending of victor and vanquished, as will be argued.

Already in the second act, Clytemnestra casts her husband in a way that sets up his later total victimization by murder. In her passionate speech in which she condemns Agamemnon’s
philandering (162-202), she characterizes him as a slave to lust, more Trojan than Greek. As noted in chapter 3, she says of his taking of Chryseis that he was *amore captae captus* (“captured with love for a captive” 175).\(^{207}\) On his stealing of Briseis from Achilles, she pointedly remarks *en Paridis hostem!* (“look at this enemy of Paris!” 188), and regarding his most recent lust for Cassandra, as noted above, she styles him *Priami gener* (“son-in-law of Priam” 191). These notions of Agamemnon, as one enthralled by his passions who succumbs to the temptations of Troy, help Clytemnestra rationalize the murder, which, as noted, later takes place when he is surrounded by luxurious Trojan spoils (875-80).

**The (Poetic) Storm**

The third act is dominated – and indeed the entire play is almost overwhelmed – by the storm narrative of Eurybates, which stretches to approximately 157 lines, the longest continuous speech in Senecan tragedy. It is thus far longer than the herald’s corresponding account of the storm in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* (636-80). As I have argued that the *Agamemnon* is very much about revenge, one might expect that Eurybates would emphasize that the storm was divine vengeance for Ajax’s rape of Cassandra in the temple of Athena. In fact, this is only somewhat vaguely stated in half of one line at the end of the account (*litatum est Ilio*, “there was atonement for Troy” 577). Instead, the storm narrative casts a more general sense of ill omen over the rest of the play in anticipation of the death of Agamemnon. Seneca also appears more interested in developing the full horror of the storm for its own sake; the speech is a set piece in which the

\(^{207}\) Wills (1996, 252-3) notes the similarity of this phrase to Livy 30.12.18, *amore captivae victor captus* (“the victor captured with love for a captive”), a reference to the Numidian king Masinissa’s love for the Carthaginian noblewoman Sophonisba. Wills lists other examples of polyptoton of *vincere* and *capere* in an erotic context, usually in elegy, such as Propertius 3.11.16, *vicit victorem candida forma virum* (“her splendid appearance conquered the conqueror,” on Penthesilea and Achilles).
tragedian takes on the storm motif and pulls out all the stops. Storm narratives were popular in the rhetorical schools, as is attested in Seneca the Elder’s *Controversiae* 7.1.4, 7.1.10, 7.1.26, 8.6.2, *Suasoriae* 1.15, 3.2 and pseudo-Dionysius of Halicarnassus’ *Ars Rhetorica* 10.17, but they also were popular in poetry; in fact, Morford (1967, 22-26) refers to the storm at the beginning of Virgil’s *Aeneid* (1.50-156) as the classic example of the storm in Latin poetry, which later writers sought to equal or rival; one example contemporary to Seneca is Lucan’s *Bellum Civile* 5.504-677. Indeed, the influence of Virgil’s great storm at the beginning of his epic can be firmly felt in the Senecan narrative, as will be shown; nonetheless, other narratives from Virgilian epic loom large, including, once again, the sack of Troy in book 2. Furthermore, the sheer length of Eurybates’ narrative, and its great attention to detail, suggest an affinity with extended descriptions or ecphrases in epic, such as found in the storms of the *Aeneid*. Indeed, as will be seen, at certain points Seneca’s Eurybates seems intent on rivaling or outdoing Virgil’s previous storm narratives.

Even before Eurybates begins the rhesis itself, there are Virgilian echoes. In response to Clytemnestra’s questions about whether Menelaus is alive and where her sister Helen is, the herald explains that the fleet was widely scattered by the storm, and notes this of Agamemnon (410-14):

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quin ipse Atrides aequore immenso vagus

graviōra pelago damna quam bello tulit

remeatque victo similis, exiguas trahens

lacerasque victor classe de tanta rates.
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Indeed, the son of Atreus himself, wandering on the wide sea,

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208 This list is partly taken from Tietze-Larson (1994, 90).

209 The storm in *Aeneid* 1 is not the only one in the epic; there are also sea storms at 3.192-208 and 5.8-34. Otis (1964, 234 and 309) furthermore discusses the connections between the storm of book 1 and the storm on land in book 4, also caused by Juno, that leads Aeneas and Dido to their fateful union in the cave (4.160-72).
bore heavier harm on the ocean than in war,
and he returns similar to one conquered, a conqueror bringing with him
a few damaged ships, out of so great a fleet.

Eurybates’ prefatory words already hint that Agamemnon is more *victus* than *victor* in his
supposedly triumphant return from Troy, an ominous suggestion that will later be realized in the
tragedy. But the mention of *graviora damna* in 411 also suggests, I argue, an interesting
intertext with *Aeneid* 6.83-7, in which the Sibyl prophesies Aeneas’ future in Italy:

83 o tandem magnis *pelagi* defuncte periclis
84 (sed terrae *graviora* manent)…
86-7 …*bella*, horrida *bella*…cerno.

you who have finally finished with the great dangers of the sea
(but greater dangers await you on land)…
……I see wars, frightful wars.

Seneca’s lines constitute a neat reversal of the original conceit in Virgil: for Aeneas, the war in
Italy, his final home, will be worse than the arduous journey there; for Agamemnon, Aeneas’
enemy, the sailing homeward was worse than the war in Troy.

When Clytemnestra asks for further details about the storm, Eurybates hesitates in a very
Virgilian way (416-8):

> Acerba fatu poscis, *infaustum iubes*
> miscere laeto nuntium. *refugit* loqui
> *mens* aegra tantis atque *inhorrescit* malis.

You demand things bitter to tell, you order me to mix
ill-omened news with happy. My troubled mind avoids
speaking and shudders at such unfortunate matters.

While, as Tarrant (1976, 254) notes, there is a strong similarity between 416-7 and the words of
the herald in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* in the very same circumstances, i.e. before describing the
storm (πῶς κεδόνα τοῖς κακοῖς συμμείξω; “how will I mix joyful things with unfortunate ones?”
416-8 are also, as Tarrant and Giomini (1956, 113) note, a clear echo of the famous beginning of Aeneas’ narrative of the sack of Troy in *Aeneid* book 2 (2.3 and 2.12-3):

3 *Infandum*, regina, *iubes* renovare dolorem…
12 quamquam *animus* meminisse *horret* luctuque *refugit*,
13 incipiam.

Queen, you order me to renew an unspeakable grief…. Although my mind shudders to remember and has recoiled in sorrow, I will begin.

Both Eurybates and Aeneas shudder at recounting such past events, yet nonetheless comply in the end. We can notice here direct word matches between the two authors (*iubes* and *refugit* in both), close matches (*infandum* vs. *inaustum*, *horret* vs. *inhorrescit*), and the use of synonyms (*mens* for *animus*). In this instance, Seneca’s close allusion to Virgil makes sense in that both Eurybates and Aeneas are beginning very long narratives of disaster; but it is also important to remember that Eurybates the Greek herald is Aeneas’ recent enemy at Troy. Thus Eurybates, by appropriating Aeneas’ words, creates a certain amount of blending of victor and vanquished, on an intertextual level.

After this hesitation, and further encouragement from Clytemnestra, Eurybates finally begins his narrative by describing the division of booty at Troy and the subsequent launching of the thousand ships (421-30). Eurybates notes that the voyage began with calm seas and mild winds (431-3), thus drawing an ominous contrast to what comes later; the calm before the storm.

In 434 Eurybates provides an arresting image of the initial launching of the ships, in which the many ships actually become the ocean, so to speak:

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210 Compare also similar wording in Seneca *Hercules Furens* 650-1, where Theseus hesitates before his long description of his journey to the underworld: *Memorare cogis acta securae quoque / horrenda menti* (“You force me to recount deeds to be shunned even by a carefree mind.”) Austin (1964, 32) argues that the opening lines of *Aeneid* 2 must have been famous early on, and notes that Pliny quotes *Aen.* 2.12-3 at *Epistulae* 6.20.1 before recounting the death of his uncle during the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius.
splendetque classe pelagus et pariter latet.

The sea glistens with the fleet and likewise is hidden [i.e. by the fleet].

For this line, I argue that there are at least two Virgilian intertexts. First, the wording suggests *Aeneid* 7.9, in which the meteorological circumstances of the launching of Aeneas’ ships from Cumae on their way to the Tiber are described, under moonlight:

**splendet tremulo sub lumine pontus.**

The sea glistens under the quivering light [i.e. of the moon].

Not only are there linguistic overlaps, but also the peaceful nature of the launching is emphasized. Seneca here transfers the visual effect of light on the water in Virgil to the ships themselves. Second, we can compare *Aeneid* 4.582, in which Aeneas’ fleet weighs anchor from Carthage, abandoning Dido and Carthage:

litora deseruere, *latet* sub *classibus aequor*,

They deserted the shores, the sea is hidden under the ships,

In this case, there is the same emphasis on the fact that a large departing fleet made it difficult to see the sea itself.211 Thus Seneca has combined in one line of the *Agamemnon* at least two Virgilian passages that similarly describe the departure of a large fleet, this time from the vantage point of Aeneas’ enemies, the Greeks.

In 435-6, Eurybates describes the view of Troy as seen by the Greeks as they are departing by ship:

iuvat videre nuda Troiae litora,
iuvat relictis sola Sigei loca.

It is a delight to see the empty shores of Troy, a delight to see the lonely spaces of abandoned Sigeum.

211 It can further be noted that Aeneas’ fleet, on leaving Carthage, also face a storm (*Aen.* 5.8-34); but they escape it by heading for Sicily.
Eurybates’ words here are somewhat curious.\(^{212}\) Why exactly do the empty spaces of Troy produce a feeling of delight on the part of the Greeks? Presumably, the Greeks feel delight at the fact that the shores are no longer populated by Trojans, who have been killed or taken prisoner, and their city destroyed; and the Greeks also presumably feel delight that they themselves no longer inhabit these same places, as their military objectives have now been accomplished. But the very absence of activity on the shores would seem unlikely to produce a feeling of delight; nor would those taking part in a launch of a thousand ships necessarily be afforded the chance to see the lands behind them, given the great number of surrounding vessels that would likely obscure the view; nor do the immediately surrounding lines of Eurybates’ narrative give any further suggestion on this matter. In fact, I argue that the explanation can be found in a Virgilian intertext, namely *Aeneid* 2.27-8. At this point in Aeneas’ narrative (also early on, as in the *Agamemnon*), the Greeks have feigned departure from Troy and left the wooden horse behind:

\[
panduntur portae, \textit{iuvat ire et Dorica castra} \\
\textit{desertosque videre locos litusque relictum}.
\]

The gates are opened, it is a delight to go and see the Greek camp and the deserted spaces and the abandoned shore.

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\(^{212}\) Seneca’s *Agamemnon* and *Troades* employ the notion of the view of Troy as seen by one departing on ship not only here, but also below in *Ag*. 444-5, 456-9 and in *Tro*. 1047-55; compare also *Medea* 303. Seneca’s interest in this subject may in part derive from *Aeneid* 3.72, in which Aeneas describes departure from Thrace (*provehimur portu, terraeque urbesque recedunt*, “we sail on from the port, and the lands and cities recede”); Seneca actually quotes this line at *Epistulae Morales* 28 and 70. Compare also *Aeneid* 3.192-3, *postquam altum tenuere rates nec iam amplius ullae / apparent terrae* (“After the ships reached deep seas, and no longer do the lands appear”). The latter instance is further significant in that it precedes another storm narrative (194-208). See also Euripides’ *Hekabe* 939, in which the Trojan chorus describes their act of looking back at Troy when being led away captive (*πόλιν τ᾽ ἀποσκοποῦσι*). This notion of looking back at places of one’s past is also intertextual, in that one may, in the process, look back at earlier texts, as Eurybates does here.
There is a clear linguistic overlap between the two passages, as outlined in bold lettering above. In the case of the *Aeneid*, the sense of delight at the act of desertion seems to make more sense. One can immediately understand why the Trojans would be (falsely) delighted at the desertion of the Greek camp and the absence of the Greek ships from the shore, as Aeneas narrates it; the Trojans’ homeland has been seemingly spared. Seneca thus borrowed these Virgilian notions and transferred them to the Greeks, Aeneas’ enemies, as they *actually* depart from Troy by ship; but the sense of delight does not translate as well in the case of the Greeks, as noted above. From another perspective, we can see how both Senecan and Virgilian passages express a sense of delusion on the part of those viewing the desolate spaces. Just as the Trojans’ sense of delight is fatally proved wrong as the Greeks, with the help of the wooden horse, return that very night and take Troy, so the Greeks’ delight at leaving Troy will be upended at two points: first, that night, as they face a catastrophic storm on sea, payback for their crimes at Troy, and second, when they arrive at Mycenae and are further victimized through the death of Agamemnon, whose murder is pointedly interpreted by Cassandra as a reversal of the Trojan War, as discussed in chapter 3. Taken further, not only is there a sense of blending of victor and vanquished in each case; but also Eurybates’ perspective is blended with his enemy’s, that of Aeneas, intertextually. Thus Seneca’s Greeks are put in the (improbable) position of being haunted by their own past victory, whereas Aeneas in the *Aeneid* is haunted by his defeat in the same war.

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213 Among scholars, only Caviglia (1987, 146-7), who is followed by Baertschi (2010, 262), appears to have noted this intertext.

214 As Caviglia (147) notes: “La memoria Virgiliana qui è densa di significato proprio in riferimento a uno dei temi portanti della ῥῆσις e dell’intera tragedia: questi Greci sono descritti da Seneca così come Virgilio descriveva i Troiani storditi di vittoria dopo la finta partenza del nemico; partecipano d’analogia illusione, sono attesi da identica sventura. È già a questo punto che i victores incominciano ad identificarsi con i victi, nel falso riposo di una memoria che si appaga, di un terrore ormai creduto remoto.”
As the seemingly peaceful voyage of the Greeks gets under way, the soldiers onboard spend part of their leisure time recounting the recent Trojan War. The brief description of these accounts further suggests a blending of victor and victim (444-8):

444 miles…
446 bella narrat: Hectoris fortis minas
447 currusque et empto redditum corpus rogo,
448 sparsum cruore regis Herceum Iovem.

The soldiers…
recount the war: brave Hector’s threats,
and the chariot, and his body returned and buried at a price,
Hercean Jupiter sprinkled with the blood of a king.

It is notable how this abbreviated version of the Trojan War makes little direct mention of Greeks, but rather focuses on Trojans, namely Hector (446-7), who is described as brave, and Priam (the rex in 448). The notion that Priam “bought” his son Hector’s body from Achilles (empto rogo, 447) has a precedent in Virgil’s Aeneid 1.483-4, in which Aeneas sees images from Troy on the walls of temple of Juno in Carthage:

    ter circum Iliacos raptaverat Hectora muros
    exanimumque auro corpus vendebat Achilles.

    Three times Achilles had dragged Hector around the walls of Troy,
    and was selling his lifeless body for gold.

As Williams (1972, 198) notes, the notion that Achilles dragged Hector around Troy is post-Homeric, as in the Iliad he only drags him around the tomb of Patroclus;\(^{215}\) Achilles is thus portrayed in Virgil as more vicious in his vengeance than in Homer, and the notion of Achilles

\(^{215}\) Williams further notes that the action of Achilles dragging (not chasing) Hector around Troy has one precedent in Euripides Andromache 107-8: "Εκτορα, τὸν περὶ τείχη ἐλκυσε διφρεύον
παῖς ἄλιας Θέτιδος ("Hector, whom the chariot-driving son of Thetis of the sea dragged around the walls").
selling Hector’s body to Priam suggests the shamelessness of Achilles’ actions.\(^{216}\) Furthermore, the image of the altar of Hercean Jupiter spattered with Priam’s blood seems a particularly heinous detail for the Greek soldiers to mention; as Tarrant (259) suggests, this detail is “an ominous reminder of the punishment that will follow such a sacrilege,” namely the storm and the death of Agamemnon. Taken as a whole, this brief ecphrasis puts the Greeks in an unflattering light, one that emphasizes their mercilessness in dealing with the vanquished Trojans; the same is also notably true of Aeneas’ portrayal of the Greeks, his enemies, in the account of the sack of Troy in \textit{Aeneid} 2.

After sunset, the storm gradually approaches, until it becomes a full gale. It is notable that, at the inception of the storm, Seneca’s Eurybates never clearly explains that it was caused by divine intervention, in contrast to the storm in \textit{Aeneid} 1, which is prefaced by Juno’s hostile introductory speech (37-49) and the digression in which she enlists Aeolus (50-80). In Seneca, the storm is dissociated from any clear divine beginnings, though Minerva and Neptune do make a later entrance within Eurybates’ narrative, but mainly in order to destroy Oilean Ajax (528-56). In fact, when the storm is at its peak, the narrator notes (485-7):

\begin{verbatim}
  mundum revelli sedibus totum suis
  ipsoque rupto crederes caelo deos
de cidere et atrum rebus induci chaos.
\end{verbatim}

You would think that the whole world was being heaved from its seat, and that the gods themselves were falling from the ruptured heaven, and that black chaos was being drawn over the universe.\(^{217}\)

\(^{216}\) The same sense is also brought out in Seneca \textit{Troades} 663, in which, when Ulixes threatens to demolish Hector’s tomb, Andromache antagonistically replies, \textit{qua vendidistis?} (“the one that you sold?”).

\(^{217}\) Cf. Ovid \textit{Met.} 11.517, also in a storm description: \textit{inque fretum credas totum descendere caelum} (“you would think that all of heaven is falling into the sea”).
The magnitude of the storm leads the narrator to question to some degree the capacity of the gods to control the universe amid such great upheaval. It can also be noted that the Senecan storm is not clearly ended by any divine force, whereas Neptune dramatically ends the storm in *Aeneid* 1.124-56. The relative lack of divine agency in Seneca’s storm may suggest a world where divine forces are more elusive, and, in this case, always hostile in nature, as will be further demonstrated.\(^{218}\)

However, the winds and other forces of nature do play a significant part in Eurybates’ storm narrative. Here is how Eurybates initially describes the onslaught of the winds (474-6):

\begin{quote}
undique *incumbunt* simul
rapiuntque *pelagus infimo* *eversum* solo
adversus *Euro* Zephyrus et Boreae *Notus*.
\end{quote}

The west wind, opposed to the east, and the south, opposed to north rush in on all sides at once, and they carry away the sea driven out from its lowest bottoms.

These lines closely echo a passage on the winds in the *Aeneid*’s great storm (1.84-6):

\begin{quote}
*incubuere* mari totumque a *sedibus imis*
una *Eurus*que *Notus*que ruunt creberque procellis Africus,
\end{quote}

Together the east and south winds, and the south-west abounding in storms, swept onto the sea and upheave it from its lowest bottoms.

It seems clear that Seneca is remembering Virgil here, given the close overlaps in wording (Tarrant 264); note also that in both passages the winds, which are subject, come relatively late in the sentence.\(^{219}\) In Seneca, the winds appear more at war with each other; note the use of *adversus* and the juxtaposition of the four winds within line 476, in opposite pairs. Eurybates

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\(^{218}\) There is also, as Dunsch (2014, 54) points out, a lack of divine agency in the storm that envelops Ceyx in Ovid *Met.* 11.474-569.

\(^{219}\) Seneca actually quotes these lines of Virgil (85-6) in his *Naturales Quaestiones* 5.16.2 while discussing winds.
furthermore goes on to name, in lines 479-484, three more winds involved in the storm: the Aquilo, Auster, and the Corus, to make a total of seven. Virgil by contrast only gives three winds, but a fourth, the Aquilo or north wind, is later added in Aen. 1.102. Seneca in this case thus expands upon Virgilian precedent in order to emphasize the cataclysmic nature of the storm, as well as to outdo Virgil.

In describing the plight of the ships, Eurybates actually notes how the ships were destructive to each other (497-8): ipsa se classis premit / et prora prorae nocuit et lateri latus (“the very fleet presses hard upon itself, and prow did damage to prow, side to side”); the polyptoton of prora prorae and lateri latus in close succession reinforces this notion, as allied ships paradoxically become their own enemies. This detail is not found in Virgil’s storms, but it does appear in Aeschylus’ Agamemnon 654-5: ναὸς γὰρ πρὸς ἀλλήλαις Θρῆκιαι πνοαὶ / ἥρεικον (“for the Thracian winds dashed the ships against each other”); nonetheless the wording is much more insistent in Seneca, as the ships themselves do the harm, not the winds. Furthermore, the same notion is brought out late in the storm in 574-5, when the ships are being dashed on the rocks: hanc alia retro spatia relegent / et fracta frangit (“another ship strikes this one as it is moving backward and, though shattered, shatters”). These images of the fleet harming itself are redolent of the theme of civil war, as in Lucan’s Bellum Civile 1.6-7, infestisque obvia signa / signis, quoted above.

In describing the desperation of the sailors during the storm, Seneca’s narrator surprisingly blends victor and vanquished (510-11):

in vota miseros ultimus cogit timor
eademque superos Troes et Danai rogant.

Fear of death forces the wretched to prayers, and the Trojans and Greeks ask the gods for the same things.
We are now reminded that Trojan slaves are onboard the ships as well; this leads to the paradoxical point that the two sides of the recent war are united in their prayers. This blending continues in the following lines (512-16), which explore the *topos* of those in a sea storm who wish they had died previously, namely at Troy. Before looking at the lines, I would like to consider the two important epic precedents. The *topos* is first found in Homer’s *Odyssey* 5.306-7. Poseidon causes a terrible storm for the lone Odysseus after he sets out from Calypso’s island.

In his speech during the storm, Odysseus makes this exclamation:

> τρἰς μάκαρες Δαναοὶ καὶ τετράκις, οἴ τῶ́ ὀλοντο Τροιὴ ἐν εὐρείῃ χάριν Ατρείδησι φέροντες.

Three and four times blessed are the Greeks, who then perished in wide Troy, conferring favor on the sons of Atreus.

Homer’s Odysseus envies those *Greeks*, not specifically named, who died at Troy in the defense of their leaders’ cause. Virgil then borrows from and transforms Odysseus’ words in shaping Aeneas’ climactic speech during the storm in *Aeneid* 1.94-101:

> O terque quaterque beati,
quis ante ora patrum Troiae sub moenibus altis contigit oppetere! o Danaum fortissime gentis Tydide! mene Iliacis occumbere campis non potuisse tuaque animam hanc effundere dextra, saevus ubi Aeacidae telo iacet Hector, ubi ingens Sarpedon, ubi tot Simois correpta sub undis scuta virum galeasque et fortia corpora volvit!

> O three and four times blessed, for whom death came at Troy, before their fathers’ faces, under the high walls! O son of Tydeus, bravest of the race of the Greeks! Was it not possible for me to fall on the Trojan plains, and to pour out this soul by your hand, where ferocious Hector lies by the weapon of Achilles, where huge Sarpedon, where the Simois churned with so many shields of men, and helmets, and brave bodies, seized under the waves?
Virgil’s Aeneas, in contrast to Odysseus, envies the Trojans and their allies, including Hector and Sarpedon, who died at Troy, and includes an address to Diomedes, Aeneas’ former enemy, complaining that Diomedes did not kill him then (cf. Iliad 5.297-318).\textsuperscript{220} Aeneas’ description, in contrast to Odysseus’, specifically gives the names of those who are to be envied. Now to return to Seneca: the corresponding lines are narrated by Eurybates (512-16):

\begin{quote}
\begin{align*}
\text{quid fata possunt! invidet Pyrrhus patri,} \\
\text{Aiaci Ulixes, Hectori Atrides minor,} \\
\text{Agamemno Priamo: quisquis ad Troiam iacet} \\
\text{felix vocatur, cadere qui meruit gradu,} \\
\text{quem fama servat, victa quem tellus tegit.}
\end{align*}
\end{quote}

What the fates can do! Pyrrhus envies his father, Ulixes envies Ajax, the younger son of Atreus envies Hector, Agamemnon, Priam: whoever lies at Troy is called fortunate, the one who earned the right to fall at his station, he whom fame preserves, he whom the conquered earth covers.

Lines 512-14 present an intertextual crowding of sorts, as no less than eight figures from Troy are mentioned, twice Virgil’s four. But Seneca also outdoes both Virgil and Homer in this case by including both Trojans and Greeks as those to be envied during a post-Trojan-War sea storm.

While in Homer, there is the perspective of a warrior (i.e. Odysseus) returning from a voyage to a hostile land, Virgil’s Aeneas represents the opposite, as a refugee from a land from which he was driven by invaders. Seneca’s Eurybates combines both perspectives. The instances of envy in 513-14 are furthermore pointed in nature: Ulixes was the rival of Telamonian Ajax in the contest for the arms of Achilles, after which Ajax tragically committed suicide; it is therefore

\textsuperscript{220} Seneca quotes the beginning of this passage (1.94-6) in Epistulae Morales 67. See also Sen. Phaedra 694-6 for a strong allusion to this passage, as noted by Segal (1986, 108); here an outraged Hippolytus speaks after Phaedra has confessed her passion for him: \textit{o ter quaterque prospero fato dati / quos hausit et peremit et leto dedit / odio dolusque} (“O three and four times given to a prosperous fate are those whom hatred and deceit have devoured and destroyed and given to death”). Hippolytus’ dark and extremely bitter tone is in marked contrast to that of Aeneas.
puzzling to imagine Ulixes envying him. Further in 513, Menelaus envies his Trojan enemy Hector; and Agamemnon’s envy for the Trojan king Priam in 514 is even more ironic in nature, as Priam was butchered by Pyrrhus, much as Agamemnon himself will be by Clytemnestra and Aegisthus at the end of the play. The indiscriminate nature of the *exempla* here mentioned is further brought out by the use of *quisquis* in the same line; note also the paradox of the one being blessed whose remains are covered by a *victa tellus* in 516.\(^{221}\) It can also be noted that many of the major Greeks who fought in Troy are caught in this one storm, whereas in the *Odyssey* Agamemnon, Menelaus, and Odysseus sail separately from Troy.\(^{222}\) Seneca’s storm thus not only heaves the ships into confusion; it is also a literary confusion of sorts, in which various elements from different traditions, Greek and Roman, are juxtaposed.

Immediately after these lines, we do get a direct speech, but the speaker is not named by Eurybates; in the speech, the speaker repeatedly blends victor and victim (519-26):

```
quisquis es, nondum malis
520  satiate tantis, caelitum, tandem tuum
numen serena: cladibus nostris daret
vel Troia lacrimas. odia si durant tua
placetque mitti Doricum exitio genus,
quid hos simul perire nobiscum iuvat,
525  quibus perimus? sistite infestum mare:
vehit ista Danaos classis? et Troas vehit!
```

```
Whoever you are of the gods, not yet satisfied
with so many misfortunes, at last make serene
your divine presence: for our disasters even Troy
would shed tears. If your hatred endures, and
if it is determined that the Greek race be sent to death,
why does it please you that these people also perish with us,
```

\(^{221}\) Tarrant (273) notes that Aeschylus “has this idea in equally pointed form” at *Agamemnon* 452-5: οι δ’ αυτοί περὶ τεῖχος θήκας Ἱλιάδος γὰς εὔμορφοι κατέχουσιν, ἐξ- / θρα δ’ ἐχοντας ἐκρυψαν (“and there by the wall, the comely [Greeks] have graves of Trojan soil, hostile soil has covered those who possess it”).

\(^{222}\) Cf. *Odyssey* 3.141-158; in Homer, when Odysseus, because of the storm, envies the Greeks who died at Troy, he is, as noted, alone.
with whom we perish? Put an end to the hostile seas:
Does this fleet carry Greeks? It also carries Trojans!

In this address to the gods, the anonymous speaker emphasizes the hostility of the divinities and
their own anonymity (hence \textit{quisquis es} in 519).\footnote{Tarrant (274) mentions the use of the phrase \textit{quisquis es}, also referring to a god, in \textit{Aeneid} 4.576-7 (\textit{sequimur te, sancte deorum, / quisquis es}, “we follow you, venerable god, whoever you are”), at which point Aeneas is reacting to Mercury’s recent visit, in which he encouraged Aeneas to leave Carthage quickly. We might further note the contrast: in Virgil, the hero shows obeisance to a beneficent god; in Seneca, the speaker shows frustration with a hostile god.}

The idea that Troy would shed tears for the Greeks’ current plight recalls Virgil’s \textit{Aeneid} 2.6-8 (\textit{quis talia fando / Myrmidonum Dolopumve aut duri miles Ulix / temperet a lacrimis?} “who, when speaking such things, whether a Myrmidon, Dolopian, or soldier of cruel Ulysses, could hold back the tears?”), but from the reversed perspective, as it would now be the Trojans pitying the Greeks. In lines 524-6, the speaker further plays off of the presence of both Greeks and Trojans onboard, again producing a sense of crowding of victor and vanquished, as well as of the indiscriminate nature of the divine enmity.\footnote{Tarrant points out \textit{ad loc.} that there is an important precedent (but one without the victor/vanquished aspect) in Ovid \textit{Tristia} 1.2.57-8, in which the exiled poet, while facing a storm at sea on his way to Pontus, addresses the gods: \textit{fingite me dignum tali nece, non ego solus / hic vehor. inneritos cur mea poena trahit?} (“Though you may consider me worthy of such a death, I am not the only one here onboard; why does my punishment drag down the innocent?”).}

Even during these extreme circumstances, the blending of victor and victim is a prominent theme, one that the speaker in this case actually uses to attempt to persuade the hostile gods.\footnote{In the \textit{Consolatio ad Helviam}, Seneca similarly notes that the Trojan War resulted in the exile of Greeks and Trojans alike (7.6): \textit{Quid Diomeden aliosque, quos Trojanum bellum victos simul victoresque per alienas terras dissipavit?} (“What of Diomedes and the others, whom the Trojan War scattered, vanquished as well as victors, throughout lands not their own?”).}

The one person who is specifically described as dying during the storm, and specifically through divine agency, is Oilean Ajax, who raped Cassandra at Minerva’s temple on the night Troy fell. Despite the fact that this crime of Ajax is associated with the entire storm, as in Juno’s
account of his death in *Aeneid* 1.39-45;\(^{226}\) the account of his death in the *Agamemnon* (528-56) borders on admiration: he is, ironically, the “hero” of the storm, as he does not succumb to praying to the gods, but is openly defiant of them. Ajax’s death is accomplished by Minerva and Neptune; Minerva is described as hurling, at Ajax and the rest of the Greek fleet, thunderbolts that she borrowed from her father Jupiter, as in *Aeneid* 1.42; from an intertextual perspective, this borrowing may suggest the borrowing of one poet from another, as suggested most pointedly in 537, *imitata patrem* (“having imitated her father”). In the midst of this dramatic divine attack, Ajax is described as *solus invictus malis* (“alone unconquered in misfortune” 532); he seems to almost gain strength from Minerva’s attack by lightning, at one point becoming, almost comically, a source of light for the rest of the sailors after he catches fire (*conlucet Aiax; omne resplendent fretum* “Ajax glows; the whole sea shines back” 543). He appears similar to a Stoic hero who is not only immune to great misfortunes; these misfortunes actually afford him the best

\(^{226}\) *Aen.* 1.39-45, spoken by Juno:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Pallasne exurere classem} \\
40 \quad \text{Argivum atque ipos potuit summergere ponto}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{unius ob noxam et furias Aiacis Oilei?} \\
\text{ipsa lovis rapidum iaculata e nubibus ignem}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{disiecit rates evertitque aequora ventis;}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{illum exspirantem transfixo pectore flammamas}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{turbine corripuit scopuloque infixit acuto;}
\end{align*}
\]

Was Pallas able to burn the fleet of the Argives and submerge the men themselves in the sea because of the crime of one man, and the ragings of Oilean Ajax? She herself hurled the rapid fire of Jupiter from the clouds and destroyed the ships, and overturned the seas with the winds; she seized him up in a whirlwind as he was breathing out flames from his transfixed chest and impaled him on a sharp crag;

That Ajax’s crime at Troy is the cause of the storm is also stated in Euripides’ *Troades* 61-98, in which Athena plans the storm as vengeance for Ajax’s outrage at her temple, and also receives Poseidon’s support.
chance to display his virtue. Here is how Ajax is described after suffering a direct hit from Minerva’s borrowed lightning (539-41):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{nil ille motus, ardua ut cautes, salo} \\
\text{ambustus extat, dirimit insanum mare} \\
\text{fluctusque rumpit pectore}
\end{align*}
\]

Moved in no way, like a steep crag, burned, he stands out from the sea, he cleaves the raging ocean and breaks the waves with his chest

Ajax here seems a force of nature, one that Eurybates compares to a steep crag (\textit{ardua cautes}). Tarrant (277) notes the resemblance between this simile and three other similes in the \textit{Aeneid}, all demonstrating human steadfastness: first, 10.693, in which Mezentius is raging in battle (\textit{velut rupes vastum quae prodit in aequor}, “like a rock which projects into the vast sea”); second, 7.586, in which Latinus is unmoved by the other Latins’ calls for war against the Trojans (\textit{ille velut pelago rupes immota resistit}, “he like a motionless rock in the sea resists”), and third, 6.470-1, when Dido in the underworld ignores Aeneas’ pleas for conversation (\textit{nec magis…sermone movetur / quam si dura silex aut stet Marpesia cautes}, “and is not more moved by his speech than if she were hard flint or Marpesian rock”). While the simile from book 6, like that of Seneca’s, contains the word \textit{cautes}, the first two examples might be said to be closer, as Mezentius and Latinus are likened to rocks that are in the sea. In fact, the difference to note in Seneca’s simile is that Ajax actually \textit{is} in the sea: thus the simile has a strange resemblance to what is actually happening in the narrative, despite the fact that it may seem a stretch to compare a person afloat in the ocean to a steep crag. Motto and Clark (1985, 143) also note the irony that Ajax is compared to the very thing that will soon kill him (i.e. the \textit{rupem} in 553).

\footnote{In the last instance, we might further note that Virgil is assimilating Dido’s silence with that of Telamonian Ajax, who ignores Odysseus in the underworld (\textit{Odyssey} 11.543-567). However, the Ajax in Seneca’s storm is the son of Oileus, not of Telamon.}
After being scorched and capsized by Minerva, Ajax takes to a rock to deliver a raging speech in defiance of the gods (544):

\[ \text{Tandem occupata rupe furibundum intonat:} \]

At last, having occupied a rock, he furiously thunders:

First, note the verb *intono*, used of Ajax’s coming speech: despite having just been struck by lightning, he defiantly thunders back. Second, Seneca’s language implies that Ajax willingly moved to the rock in order to give his speech. Note the contrast to Virgil, as Juno describes his punishment (*Aeneid* 1.44-5):

\[ \text{illum exspirantem transfixo pectore flammis} \]
\[ \text{turbine corripuit scopuloque infixit acuto;} \]

She [i.e. Minerva] seized him up in a whirlwind as he was breathing out flames from his transfixed chest, and impaled him on a sharp crag;

Seneca reverses the Virgilian precedent by making his final punishment the place for his ultimate, willing act of defiance; he is not impaled on the rock; he climbs the rock himself. His last impious words reflect not one who is the ultimate victim, but rather a victor. He begins (545-6):

\[ \text{superasse nunc pelagus atque ignes iuvat,}^{228} \]
\[ \text{vicisse caelum Palladem fulmen mare.} \]

It delights to have now prevailed over sea and fire, to have conquered the sky, Pallas, thunder, the sea.

Despite his desperate position, Ajax is defiant to the end, further claiming that he conquered both Trojans and their allied gods at Troy (550), taunting Minerva for borrowing her father’s

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228 The verb form *iuvat* appears eleven times in the *Agamemnon* (among Seneca’s plays, the *Thyestes* comes second with six uses); it is often used to express a paradoxical delight, as in this case, as well as when spoken by Cassandra (750, 751, and 1011), and, notably, Seneca’s Medea in her own play, when she expresses delight at having killed her brother Absyrtus and Pelias (911-13), discussed in chapter 5.
thunderbolts, and even challenging Jupiter to hurl one himself (550-52). This leads Neptune to dislodge the crag on which Ajax is standing, so that he falls into the sea and is killed (552-56):

\[
\text{plura cum auderet furens,}
\text{tridente rupem subruit pulsam pater}
\text{Neptunus imis exerens undis caput}
\text{solvitque montem; quem cadens secum tuit}
\text{terraque et igne victus et pelago iacet.}
\]

As he was daring to say more in his rage, father Neptune, thrusting his head from the deepest waves, overthrew the rock, pushed by his trident, and loosened the crag; which he, falling, brought with him, and he lies conquered by land and fire and sea.

As Tarrant (280) points out, this action of Neptune has a precedent in Aeneid 1.124-7, in which the sea god brings an end to the storm that was ravaging Aeneas and his fleet:

\[
\text{Interea magno misceri murmure pontum}
\text{emissamque hiemem sensit Neptunus et imis}
\text{stagna refusa vadis, graviter commotus, et alto}
\text{prospiciens summa placidum caput extulit unda.}
\]

Meanwhile Neptune, very upset, sensed that the sea was disturbed, and that a storm had been released, and that the still waters were moved from their lowest depths, and looking over the sea, he raised his serene head over the surface of the ocean.

While Tarrant notes the connection, he does not comment on the contrast: while in Virgil Neptune rises from the sea to quell the storm and bring peace, effectively preserving Aeneas and the Trojans, in Seneca he rises up to destroy Ajax. The overlaps in language in bold lettering above only make the contrast the more pointed. Taken further, the gods can often have a benevolent presence in Virgil’s epic, but in Senecan tragedy they are almost always hostile and

\[229\text{ Baertschi (2010, 266) makes the point that Ajax’s speech is “an inversion or perverted variation of the usual lamentation of the epic hero caught in a storm”; Seneca’s Ajax thus can be seen as drawing a contrast to the famous words of Aeneas and Odysseus, spoken mid-storm, quoted above.}
\[230\text{ However, the contrast is noted by Baertschi (2010, 266); see also Schindler (2000, 146).}
violent. While Ajax in the storm is ultimately defeated (*victus*, 556) by these hostile divinities, he does cut an impressive figure, one that is also similar to Cassandra who appears late in the play; though Ajax is much more wicked in that he raped Cassandra, they both are to some degree *contemptores deorum* in their bold defiance.\(^{231}\) While in some ways both are archetypal losers, Ajax and Cassandra both “win” in Seneca’s *Agamemnon* in terms of their bravery in the face of death.

The last episode of the storm narrative is the treachery of Nauplius (557-76). Nauplius was father of Palamedes, who had been framed by Ulixes for theft and treason during the Trojan War (Ovid, *Met*. 13.56-60). The Greeks put Palamedes to death; as a result Nauplius gets revenge by lighting deceptive beacons off of treacherous Cape Caphereus, with the result that many Greek ships were dashed against the rocks. It can be noted here that the Greeks in this case were vanquished by one of their own fellow Greeks, in a further confusion of victor and vanquished.

At the conclusion of Eurybates’ storm narrative, Clytemnestra questions aloud whether she should grieve for the Greeks’ losses at sea, or be happy at the return of her husband. In her deception, she calls for festivity (583):

> Nunc omne laeta fronde veletur caput,

> Now let every head be covered with a festive wreath,

This image of festivity before further disaster recalls, I argue, *Aeneid* 2.248-9, wherein the Trojans welcome the wooden horse into their city:

> nos delubra deum miseri, quibus ultimus esset
> ille dies, *festa velamus fronde* per urbem.

\(^{231}\) Davis (1993, 108-9) convincingly argues that both Cassandra and Ajax exemplify the ideal of the *libera mors*, as celebrated by the chorus at 589-610 (see chapter 3).
We wretched ones, for whom that day was the last, 
cover the temples of the gods with festive wreaths throughout the city.

The celebration that Clytemnestra argues for in Seneca would be as misguided as the celebration proved to be at Virgil’s Troy; note also the reversal, as it would now be the victorious Greeks celebrating in Mycenae, and not the vanquished Trojans. Indeed, as soon as Clytemnestra finishes speaking, the secondary chorus of Trojan women enters and narrate the fall of Troy. The fact that their narrative, like that of Eurybates, shows the defeat of a great power suggests that further ominous things await Agamemnon the king.

As much of the remainder of the Agamemnon has already been discussed in chapter 3 above under the subject of repetition of the past, a theme which relates closely to that of victor vs. vanquished, especially in a scenario of revenge, my discussion will be brief. If Ajax is the surprising hero of the storm narrative, the same can be said for Cassandra in the remaining half of the play. As noted, in her prophetic vision of acts 4 and 5, Cassandra imagines that Troy is resurging in Mycenae, and, paradoxically, she exults that the king of Troy will be killed again – only this time that king will be Agamemnon, Troy’s conqueror, as he is surrounded by Priam’s spoils. She also welcomes her own death, in a way similar to the abandon of Ajax in the storm. This is how she imagines the upcoming labors of Charon in the underworld; note the continuation of nautical imagery (752-4):

haec hodie ratis
Phlegethontis atri regias animas vehet,
victamque victricemque.

Today this ship
of black Phlegethon will carry royal souls,
conqueror and conquered.

The phrase victamque victricemque refers, in order, to Cassandra, daughter of Priam, and to Agamemnon. Cassandra not only looks forward to Agamemnon’s death; she also finds solace in
her own death. The same phrase also recalls *Aeneid* 10.756-7, quoted in chapter 2, describing the heated battle at the end of which Aeneas kills Lausus and Mezentius: *caedebant pariter pariterque ruebant* / *victores victique*.

At the beginning of the 5th act, Cassandra likewise uses polypotent of *vincere* to suggest the blending and reversal about to take place (868-71):

```
anime, consurge et cape
pretium furoris: *vicimus victi* Phryges.
bene est, resurgis, Troia; traxisti iacens
pares Mycenas, terga dat victor tuus!
```

```
Soul, rise up and seize the reward
for your madness: we Phrygians, once conquered, have conquered.
It is good, you rise again, Troy; though lying low, you have dragged
down Mycenae, now your equal; your victor is retreating!
```

Here Cassandra comes to the climactic summary of her prophecy, one that situates both Greeks and Trojans within a vengeful world, with the result that both sides will be conquered and fall.\(^{232}\)

The crucial difference between Agamemnon and Cassandra is that the king will suffer his death completely against his will, whereas Cassandra welcomes hers. Cassandra’s specific words here recall Ovid *Fasti* 1.523 (*victa tamen vinces eversaque, Troia, resurges*, “Troy, though conquered, nonetheless you will conquer, and, though overturned, you will rise again”). But here Ovid’s Carmentis (goddess of childbirth and prophecy), following Virgil, is thinking of Aeneas’ victory in Italy; Seneca’s Cassandra more pointedly finds victory within the confines of Greece itself, before her own death. Put another way, Senecan tragedy reframes Virgilian ideas of victor and vanquished within the more restricted, and consequently more paradoxical, context of the Greek world.

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\(^{232}\) As Lefèvre (1966, 491) notes, “Diese beiden Pole [i.e. victor and vanquished] charakterisieren selbstverständlich nur relative Positionen, in Wahrheit sind beide Parteien die Verlierer, indem sie dasselbe Schicksal erlitten haben.”
4.4 Conclusion.

Seneca’s *Troades* and *Agamemnon*, both individually and in tandem, present a sophisticated merging of perspectives, one that questions accepted notions of *victor* and *victus*. As has been seen, one of the essential traits of Senecan tragedy is a striving for pointed language, that is, language that refers to an earlier precedent in a new and vivid fashion. The dichotomy of *victor* and *victus*, in part because it has a strong tradition in Roman culture, particularly in tragedy and epic (but also in elegy and in history, as has been noted), provides ample material for Seneca to rework in his Trojan War plays. Seneca’s vigorous negotiation with past poetic precedents enhances this process in a sophisticated fashion; for example, to model the storm that the Greeks suffered on the storms of the *Aeneid* gives Seneca the opportunity to collide poetic precedents in a cataclysmic and almost comic fashion.

Of the two plays, the *Troades* deals more subtly with the political issues of *victor* and *victus*, particularly on the (Virgilian) issue of how to treat one’s conquered enemy. The Greek victors Pyrrhus and Ulixes argue, ultimately, for state-sponsored savagery, and thus a continuation of the retributive violence they recently exercised against the Trojans in war. Agamemnon’s arguments against this type of violence seem somewhat hollow, especially in the way he repeatedly references Virgilian epic language on clemency and political survival, yet automatically defers to Calchas. On the Trojan side, any resistance to this process is compromised by Hecuba’s own statement of guilt (38-40) and by Andromache’s use of deception in her encounter with the deceptive Ulixes. The actual sacrifices of Astyanax and Polyxena at the end of the play reenact Aeneas’ inability to spare the conquered Turnus at the end of the *Aeneid*, also in the presence of a large crowd of viewers from both sides of the war.
But while Aeneas’ killing of Turnus may have positive political implications (i.e. it might lead to political stability, especially in the form of the principate), the killings of Astyanax and Polyxena in the *Troades* seem like a meaningless repetition of violence. And yet, Seneca is at pains to show that the very *victims* of this overwhelming violence can triumph in the act of death, much like Cato.

The crowd of conquerors and conquered who witness Polyxena’s death in the *Troades* is the same crowd that is caught in the storm in the *Agamemnon*: Greek soldiers and their Trojan captives. But in the *Agamemnon* the conquerors atone for their past. Now the victorious Greeks—and their Trojan slaves—suffer a massive storm at sea in payback for the violence committed at Troy. The storm is in fact only one part of Agamemnon the king’s transition in the play from *victor* to *victus*. His slave Cassandra moves in the opposite direction, as she vividly enacts, in her words, the message that the conquered have conquered. But her victory in death associates her more closely with Virgil’s Mezentius as opposed to his Aeneas.

As was also true for my argument on repetition of the past in Senecan tragedy, Seneca’s allusion to Virgil in the context of the theme of victor and vanquished in effect expresses his distance from the idea that poetry can embody a successful political program, such as is found in the structure of the *Aeneid*. Seneca’s tragedies, especially the *Troades*, offer an image of dissolution, in which death is preeminent. While the divine machinery of the *Aeneid* in the end assures Aeneas of his Roman future, what divine forces there are in Senecan tragedy are unrelentingly ruthless. The ideas of revenge and conquest, as found in the *Aeneid*, are given a further hearing in Senecan tragedy, in a bleak and paradoxical fashion.
Chapter 5 – Maius Nefas in Senecan Tragedy.

5.1. Introduction.

In this chapter I will argue for the profound importance of the theme of maius nefas, or greater crime, in Senecan tragedy, with a focus on the Medea. It was argued in chapter 2 that this theme is important in the Aeneid; in fact, the phrase maius nefas is first attested in Latin literature in the Aeneid, at the important point when Allecto spurs on Amata (maius adorta nefas maioremque orsa furorem, “having embarked upon a greater crime, and having initiated a greater furor” 7.386). As was argued, Virgil’s intention of creating a maius opus becomes closely associated with the idea of maius nefas; this programmatic connection between poetry and nefas is, as will be seen, even more essential in Senecan tragedy.\footnote{In discussing the connections between Seneca’s Thyestes and Virgil’s Aeneid on these issues, Schiesaro (2003, 35) argues: “it is precisely this tale of horrors [i.e. Aeneid books 7-12] which is Virgil’s ‘greater work’ (maius opus, 7.45), his ‘higher order of things’ (maior rerum….ordo, 7.44), or, indeed, the maius nefas of Amata (7.386) which Atreus [in the Thyestes], too, will strive to emulate.”} In the Aeneid, the phrase maius nefas, employed in 7.386, as was suggested, is somewhat ambiguous (i.e. in what sense does Amata begin a greater crime – greater compared to what exactly?); however, in Senecan tragedy, crimes are specifically defined as maius in comparison to those previous. In other words, while Virgil rather obliquely suggests a connection between maius nefas and his maius opus, Senecan tragedy takes the Virgilian notion of maius nefas and runs with it,\footnote{I borrow the figure of speech from Joseph (2012, 6).} in the process explicating what may be understood as maius in human wickedness, and in poetry. Furthermore, while, as noted in chapter 2, Virgil’s use of the comparative maior/maius is sometimes positive in nature, as it is at times associated with Aeneas’ glorious future, in Senecan tragedy it is almost always associated with crime and wickedness.
The indeclinable Latin noun *nefas* denotes the opposite of *fas*, about which Ernout and Meillet (1932, 217) argue: “Le sens de *fas* est ‘permission ou ordre des dieux,’ ‘droit divin’ par opposition à *ius*, ‘droit humain.’” *Nefas* thus essentially implies an offence against divine law, but more generally a wicked act or crime (*OLD* s.v. *nefas* 1-2). *Nefas* may obtain the further sense of something “unspeakable” through its supposed etymology from *fari*.235 *Nefas* appears 18 times in the *Aeneid*, whereas it appears in the 8 tragedies of Seneca 65 times, at least 3 times in each play. The two other mostly synonymous substantives denoting crime, *scelus* and *facinus*, have similar statistics within each body of work: *scelus*, 20 times in the *Aeneid*, and 181 times in Senecan tragedy; *facinus*, 0 times in the *Aeneid*, and 37 times in Seneca’s plays.236 These numbers hint at the comparative “explosion of evil” that Herington (1966, 449) finds present in the plays; they are very much about crime and human wickedness. Similarly, Wills (1996, 220) calls *scelus* or crime “the signature of a Senecan play.” We have already seen this in the case of *Troades* and *Agamemnon*, as both plays look forward to the final *nefas* of murder (*Troades* – Astyanax and Polyxena; *Agamemnon* – Agamemnon and Cassandra), albeit in different ways, and including many perspectives.

More specifically, in both Seneca’s *Troades* and *Agamemnon* characters at times cast an act of violence or crime as *maius*. In the prologue of the *Troades*, Hecuba describes the killing of Priam at the altar of Hercean Jove as a *maius scelus* in comparison to Ajax’s rape of Cassandra (45-6); presumably the crime is *maius* because Priam is killed by Pyrrhus at the altars

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235 Bettini (2008, 329-30) defines *nefas* as “a monstrous (almost unspeakable) act” and notes (330 n.28) that the derivation of *fas* from *fari*, while disputed among modern etymologists, was accepted without question by the ancients. See also Dupont (1995, 60).

236 *Facinus* can sometimes simply mean “deed” without a pejorative sense (*OLD* s.v. *facinus* 1), as is possible in *Hercules Furens* 247 and 1183, *Medea* 561, and *Thyestes* 662; but almost always in Senecan tragedy it denotes a horrific or criminal act. *Nefas* and *facinus* are equated by Medea at Sen. *Medea* 931, discussed below, and *facinus* and *scelus* are equated by Atreus at *Thyestes* 234.
themselves (ipsasque ad aras, 45), as also in in Aeneid 2.550-1 (altaria ad ipsa trementem / traxit, “[Pyrrhus] dragged trembling [Priam] to the altars themselves”), whereas Cassandra is dragged from the temple of Minerva and then raped (as in Aen. 2.403-4, ecce trahebatur passis Priameia virgo / crinibus a templo Cassandra adytisque Minervae, “look, the maiden daughter of Priam, Cassandra, with disheveled hair, was being dragged from the temple and shrine of Minerva”). Thus the death of Priam seems an even greater act of sacrilege. Later in the Troades, Andromache, having been forewarned by her dead husband Hector in the dream, foresees that soon her sufferings will only get worse (427-8):

Exoritur aliquod maius e magno malum.
nondum ruentis Ilii fatum stetit.

Out of great evil, some greater evil is arising.
Not yet has the doom of collapsing Ilium come to rest.

For Andromache, the death of Astyanax (and Polyxena) will constitute a maius malum on top of all her other sufferings associated with the fall of Troy; note the use of exoritur in 427, akin to the participles in Aen. 7.386 (maius adorta nefas maioremque orsa furorem). Similarly, she later casts Astanax’s coming murder thus (784-5): flebilius aliquid Hectoris magni nece / muri videbunt (“the walls will see something more pitiful than the killing of great Hector”).

Andromache notes that the deaths of Hector and Astyanax are both situated in the vicinity of the walls of Troy, but Astyanax’s death will be even worse, presumably because of Astyanax’s age. Also in the Agamemnon, the notion of maius nefas is significant. In the prologue, the ghost of Thyestes calls his incest with his daughter Pelopia a maius scelus (29) in comparison with his

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previous crimes. Later, Clytemnestra, in planning her revenge on her husband, reasons in this way with herself (123-4):

Quid timida loqueris furta et exilium et fugas? soror ista fecit; te decet maius nefas.

Why, frightened one, do you speak of deceit, exile, and flight? Your sister did such things; a greater crime suits you.

Here the Senecan heroine expresses a need to outdo crimes of the (poetic) past, namely those of her sister Helen; she will achieve this by not only being unfaithful to her husband, through her affair with Aegisthus, but also by murdering Agamemnon.

The *Troades* and *Agamemnon* are not unique among Senecan plays in exploring the idea of *maius nefas*; this theme is in fact spread throughout the tragedies. For example, in the *Oedipus*, Oedipus had been warned by the Delphic oracle that he would commit a *scelus* that is *maius* in comparison to killing his father (17); in the *Phoenissae*, Oedipus identifies this *maius scelus*, in retrospect, as incest with his mother (269). In the *Phaedra*, when the nurse hears of Phaedra’s desire to seduce Hippolytus, her stepson, she says to her (142-3):

quo, misera, pergis? quid domum infamem aggravas superasque matrem? maius est monstro nefas;

Where are you headed, wretched one? Why do you weigh down your ill-famed house and surpass your mother? This is a crime more than monstrous;

The nurse thus casts Phaedra’s intended *nefas* as greater than that committed by Pasiphae, Phaedra’s mother, who mated with the bull and bore the Minotaur. Later, when Hippolytus hears Phaedra’s plea to requite her desire, he says the same to her (688): *o maius ausa matre monstrifera malum* (“o you who have dared a greater evil than your monster-bearing mother”),

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238 Compare Ovid *Met*. 10.314-5, in which Myrrha’s incestuous passion for her father is also described as a *maius scelus*: *scelus est odisse parentem, / hic amor est odio maius scelus* (“it is a crime to hate a parent; this passion is a crime greater than hate”).
and, in addressing his father Theseus in absentia, even compares her unflatteringly with Medea and her crimes (696-7): genitor, invideo tibi: / Colchide noverca maius hoc, maius malum est (“Father, I envy you: this is greater, a greater evil than your stepmother from Colchis”). Here Hippolytus plays off of the fact that Theseus had earlier almost been killed through the machinations of Medea (Ovid, Met. 7.404-24); in comparison, he finds Phaedra’s, his own stepmother’s, erotic intentions even more objectionable.

Before going further, it will be useful to ask why the theme of maius nefas is so important in Seneca’s plays. The theme is fundamentally comparative, as the adjective maius suggests; but in comparison to what? As all the examples given so far indicate, a nefas is greater in comparison to earlier acts of nefas within the poetic and mythological tradition. Thus the issue—like repetition of the past and victor and vanquished—is implicitly intertextual; when Clytemnestra in the Agamemnon seeks a maius nefas that will rival that of her sister Helen, she is seeking to outdo past poetry in terms of human wickedness. So also in the Troades, as has been seen, the deaths of Astyanax and Polyxena are seen not only to repeat, but also rival, in their cruelty, those of Priam, Iphigenia, and others, as portrayed in earlier poetry, including Virgil’s Aeneid. Thus the theme of maius nefas has a competitive aspect, as Seneca the poet seeks to rival past accounts of nefas, and in fact draws the comparison and contrast with those earlier accounts.239

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239 Seidensticker has published an article (1985) not on maius nefas, but on the very similar issue of what he terms the maius motif or comparativus Senecanus in Senecan tragedy, with particular focus on the Thyestes. He puts forward three main reasons for the prevalence of this motif in the tragedies: the rhetorical style of Seneca’s poetry, the influence of Stoic thought regarding the passions, and the taste in the early empire for novelty and excessive display of wealth. Seidensticker’s argument is persuasive as far as it goes, but overlooks questions of intertextuality.
The theme of *maius nefas*, including this intertextual aspect, is arguably most fully realized in the *Medea* and *Thyestes* of Seneca. Both plays contain a protagonist, Medea and Atreus respectively, who meditates on, plans, and achieves unspeakable acts of revenge (both including the murder of children, as in the *Troades*), acts that will specifically rival those of the past, and thus be *maiora*. These protagonists’ intentions of creating *nefas* are analogous to the poetic aims of Seneca *tragicus*.

To take briefly the example of Atreus in the *Thyestes*: before carrying through his revenge on his brother Thyestes, Atreus gives a speech in the presence of his *satelles* (assistant) that reflects the importance of *maius nefas* in the play, in intertextual terms (267-75):

Nescioquid animus *maius* et solito amplius
supraque fines moris humani tumet
instatque pigris manibus –aud quid sit scio,
270
sed grande quiddam est. ita sit. hoc, anime, occupa
(dignum est Thyeste facinus et dignum Atreo,
quod uterque faciat): vidit infandas domus
Odrysia mensas – fateor, immane est scelus,
sed occupatum: *maius* hoc aliquid dolor
275
inveniat.

My mind swells with something greater and larger than normal
and beyond the bounds of human custom
and presses on my sluggish hands. What it is I know not,
but it is something great. Let it be so. Seize it, my soul
(it is a deed worthy of Thyestes and worthy of Atreus,
which either might do): the Odrysian house saw unspeakable meals
-I confess it, the crime is monstrous, but taken; let my
resentment find something greater than this.

As noted above, Clytemnestra in the *Agamemnon* is also such a protagonist; but in comparison to Atreus and Medea, her role is relatively circumscribed: she only states her intentions to commit a *maius nefas* in act 2, but later in the same act expresses to Aegisthus strong misgivings about their plans; and in act 5, after killing Agamennon, she does not, unlike Medea and Atreus, proclaim her triumph through crime, but rather seems overwhelmed by the consequences of her nefarious actions.
In planning his revenge on his brother Thyestes (because Thyestes had stolen Atreus’ wife, and subsequently, the throne of Argos), Atreus has an almost mystical experience in which he contemplates the enormity of the outrage he will commit. The phrase *vidit infandas domus / Odrysia mensas* in 272-3 is a reference to the myth of Tereus, Procne, and Philomela, recounted at length in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* 6.401-674. Procne served her son Itys’ flesh to the unknowing Tereus, Itys’ father, in revenge for Tereus’ rape of Procne’s sister Philomela. Atreus here wishes to imitate the previous Thracian crime, but also to outdo it by finding something *maius*.

*Maius nefas* is here specifically constructed as something that is intertextual in nature; as Tarrant (1985, 130) puts it, “In his overt awareness of the Procne-Tereus story, and particularly in his desire to surpass it, [Atreus] resembles Seneca himself in his relationship to Ovid. The challenge and anxiety of *imitatio* are shared by author and character.”

Indeed, Seneca’s *Thyestes* contains many echoes of Ovidian and Virgilian language, where we find Seneca trying to outdo Ovid in terms of horror, or reinventing Virgilian language in this nefarious context, the latter of which have been well explored by Tarrant (1985) and Schiesaro (2003).

### 5.2 Seneca’s *Medea*

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241 The Fury predicts in the prologue to the *Thyestes* (56-7) that Atreus will commit a *nefas* that is *maiore numero* (greater in number) than that committed by Procne, as Atreus will murder the three sons of Thyestes, whereas Procne murdered only one son, Itys. This is thus one way of understanding Atreus’ crime as *maius*.

242 Littlewood (2004, 105) concurs: “Atreus’ decision to imitate and surpass the revenge of Procne…parallels Seneca’s decision to imitate Ovid’s version in the *Metamorphoses*. Characters like Atreus view their actions in the context of a wider mythological tradition, and their struggles to establish a place in that tradition is [sic] productively read as images of the genesis of Senecan tragedy.”

172
While Atreus’ outlook and presence is central to the *Thyestes*, the same is even truer for Medea in the *Medea*. She speaks over half the lines of the entire play,\(^2^{43}\) including the prologue, and, as in Euripides’ play of the same name, makes a dramatic exit only at the very end; over the course of the play, she delivers six major speeches (i.e. of 30 lines or more; the last two are closer to 100 lines). Whereas in the *Thyestes*, Atreus and other characters are in effect inspired by the intervention of the Furia and the ghost of Tantalus who appear in the prologue, Seneca’s Medea defers to no one; the play is hers, and in this role she is analogous to Seneca the playwright in creating a *maius nefas*.\(^2^{44}\)

Seneca’s *Medea*, I argue, fully explores the theme of *maius nefas*, and, in its attempt to create a *maius nefas*, consistently invites comparison with Virgil’s *Aeneid*, often on a close linguistic level. Furthermore, the theme of *maius nefas* in the *Medea* has close links to the theme of repetition of the past in Senecan tragedy, which was discussed in chapter 3; the tension between simple repetition and that which is *maius* is central to understanding this and other plays of Seneca, as will be argued. The connections between Seneca’s *Medea* and Virgil’s *Aeneid* have been understudied; most scholars have looked for comparisons with Seneca’s tragedy in Euripides’ *Medea*, and in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and *Heroides*, as Medea plays a role in these works.\(^2^{45}\)

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\(^2^{43}\) Hine (2000, 18 n.28) notes that in his edition she speaks 540 of 1027 lines, thus 53%.

\(^2^{44}\) Commenting on the prologue to Seneca’s *Medea*, Schiesaro (2003, 17) similarly argues: “Medea seeks to transform the storm of her emotions (*mens intus agitat*, 47) into a revenge-plot. In doing this she is the prime mover of the play, and thus already close to embodying a quasi-authorial function. Medea’s decision to find a ‘way’ (*viam*, 40) for her revenge and, later, her selection of the most appropriate means to do so, and her careful realization of her plans – all constitute the decision to create and represent a tragedy.” See also Boyle (2014, cvii-cxviii) for a convincing argument for Medea as poet in Seneca’s tragedy.

\(^2^{45}\) For example, Gill (1987), Hinds (1993 and 2011), and Trinacty (2007). Fantham (1975), in discussing the connections between Virgil’s Dido and Seneca’s tragic heroines, only gives two examples from Seneca’s *Medea*, and provides very little explanation for either.
Seneca’s *Medea*, like the *Troades* and *Agamemnon*, is preoccupied with the theme of revenge, specifically Medea’s revenge on her husband Jason. As noted in chapter 1, the play follows the same overall dramatic trajectory as Euripides’ *Medea*, a play that must be counted as a significant source for Seneca’s.246 The first act of Seneca’s play opens with a defiant Medea who expresses her outrage at the fact that Jason is leaving her for Creusa, daughter of Creon, king of Corinth, and begins to form an ambitious plan of revenge. While Medea in the prologue prays to the gods for help in achieving her revenge, in the first ode, the chorus of Corinthians prays for divine favor for the new marriage of Jason and Creusa, which is currently taking place offstage. In the second act, Medea debates with her nurse on the appropriateness of revenge, and later deceptively convinces Creon to allow her to stay in Corinth for one more day before going into exile. The second ode is on the hubris of navigation, including the recent voyage of the Argo, which, the chorus notes, has resulted in the unwelcome presence of Medea in Greece. In the third act, Medea speaks with Jason, asking for him to renege on his new marriage; when she is unsuccessful, she begins to plan further her revenge. The third ode is an extension on the second, as the chorus grimly recounts the deaths of all the members of the Argo, in atonement for their cosmic transgression of seafaring, and asks the gods to spare Jason. The fourth act contains an extended narration by the nurse of Medea’s incantations in order to tincture the clothes and jewelry intended for Creusa; afterward, Medea enters and prays to Hecate in completion of the rites of magic, and the sons of Medea and Jason bring the poisoned items to Creusa. In the fourth and final ode, the chorus briefly expresses grave concern about what Medea might be intending. The fifth act contains a brief narration by a messenger of the deaths of

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246 Costa 1973, 8.
Creusa and Creon; then Medea enters, triumphant, and, though experiencing moments of doubt, kills both her sons, the second in Jason’s presence, and flies away on a chariot of serpents.

This brief outline suggests the dominance of Medea in the play: she is present in every act, and the other characters mostly react to who she is and what she is planning; even the chorus, after their first ode celebrating Jason’s new marriage, is ultimately led to contemplate the evil that Medea represents. While the events of the play take place before the Trojan War, nonetheless there are clear avenues of comparison with Virgil’s Aeneid, particularly through the figure of Medea. Medea is the archetype of the raging, abandoned woman in classical mythology: her conviction that Jason has radically violated the terms of their marriage motivates her, in both Euripides and Seneca, to commit revenge. Seneca’s play is thus very much about marriage: the same can be said for the Aeneid, as the ultimate telos of the epic is Aeneas’ marriage to Lavinia, which will confirm the Trojans’ position in Latium and allow the Trojans to mix their blood with the Italian peoples. As argued in chapter 2, the loss of Aeneas’ first wife Creusa at Troy is important in that it allows for this new marriage in Italy; furthermore, Aeneas’ abandonment of Dido at Carthage is essential for the same reason. While Dido, the raging abandoned woman of Virgilian epic, is the most clear Virgilian analogue to Medea, Amata’s outrage at Aeneas’ plans to marry Lavinia is also important, especially as she is the one who is most closely associated with the creation of the maius nefas in Aen. 7.386. Furthermore, consideration of Amata leads back to the role of Juno, goddess of marriage, in the epic. Juno to a great degree determines the action of the Aeneid, as she initiates the storm in book 1, which leads to Aeneas’ detour in Carthage (books 1 to 4), and as she causes the war in Italy, with the help of Allecto (books 7 to 12); in executing the latter, she specifically states her intention to complicate
Aeneas’ and Lavinia’s marriage by spattering it with the blood of war (7.317-22).^{247} Both actions are predicated upon Juno’s perennial need to get revenge on the Trojans, the people of Paris; Juno’s outrage and her need for revenge are analogous to the same qualities of Seneca’s Medea. As suggested above, Seneca’s Medea drives the plot of her play, performing a role similar to the almost authorial one of Juno in the *Aeneid*; that is, their dominance in controlling the plot is analogous to the role of a poet or author. But while Juno must ultimately concede to Jupiter’s will, Medea concedes to no one. Similarly, while Dido seeks, and appears to attain, at least partially, revenge on Aeneas through her final curse (4.607-29)^{248}, she is completely outdone by the revenge Medea achieves on Jason.

As these comparisons suggest, the most striking Virgilian referents for Seneca’s Medea are women or female divinities. This is not surprising, as Medea is female, and has some divine features, especially as granddaughter of Titan, the sun god. But also implicit in this connection is the related idea of women as creators, first and foremost of children, but also of poetry.^{249} This idea of creation can take a subversive turn toward the creation of vengeful nefas, as seen both in Virgil and in Senecan tragedy; Schiesaro (2003, 77) speaks of “the ‘Bacchic’ paradigm that endows women and goddesses with a subversive creative power such as that of Juno in the

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^{247} Furthermore, at *Aen.* 12.804-5, as the war draws to a conclusion, Jupiter notes to Juno, *potuisti…luctu miscere hymenaeos* (“you were able to mix marriage rites with grief”).

^{248} In her curse in book 4, Dido prays that the following misfortunes may befall Aeneas: 1) a difficult and costly war in Italy (615-18); 2) an early and pitiful death for Aeneas himself (618-20); and 3) perpetual enmity between the Carthaginians and the Romans (622-29). While it can be argued that Dido is successful on all three counts, Virgil does not make this clear in the later books of the epic. For example, the first misfortune could be more properly attributed to Juno’s agency in book 7, and the second and third are not discussed for the most part.

^{249} See especially Sen. *Medea* 25-6, spoken by Medea, and discussed below: *parta ultio est / peperi* (“My revenge has been born; I have given birth”).
Furthermore, women are associated with creation of *nefas* through their powers as witches and sorceresses; most of the significant precedents in Latin literature for the sorcery of Seneca’s Medea are female, including the Massylian *sacerdos* who assists Dido (*Aen. 4.483-521*), discussed below, Amaryllis in Virgil’s 8th Eclogue (77-102), Canidia in Horace’s *Epodes 5* and 17 and *Satires 1.8*, Medea herself in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (7.1-424), and (contemporary to Seneca) Erichtho in Lucan’s *Bellum Civile* (6.413-830). Regarding Erichtho, scholars have argued that her creation of *nefas* by means of magic is essential to the larger program of Lucan’s epic; I will argue for a similar role for Medea within Seneca’s play. Medea’s female identity is essential to her creation of *maius nefas* in the play, and in this she attempts to rival her feminine poetic predecessors. At the same time, we can not push Medea’s identity as female too far; she at times seems like a Stoic hero, a notion which associates her more with the male, as Stoicism is about cultivating *virtus*, and the Stoic heroes that Seneca lauds in his prose works, such as Cato, are all male. And unlike in Euripides (*Medea 231-66*), Seneca’s Medea gives no speech about the plight of women, and in line 42 of the prologue, in contemplating her revenge, she exhorts herself to cast off womanish fears (*pelle femineos metus*). Seneca’s Medea explicitly relates

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250 Note also that in Seneca’s *Troades*, as discussed in chapter 3, Hecuba styles herself in the prologue as the one who gave birth to the firebrand that destroyed Troy, namely Paris (Sen. *Tro. 33-40*), a detail also significantly mentioned by Juno at *Aen. 7.319-20*.

251 See Johnson (1987, 19-33) and Masters (1992, 179-215) on the importance of Erichtho in Lucan’s poem.

252 Seneca’s Medea employs the word *virtus* regarding her own self and actions at 161 and 977. See also *De Constantia Sapientis* 1.1, in which Seneca likens Stoicism to the male (he speaks of the *virilem viam* that the Stoics undertake), and other schools of philosophy, by comparison, to the female (Craig Williams pointed this out to me).

253 Besides the *Medea*, the tragedy of Seneca that most fully explores the status of women in society is the *Phaedra*. Unlike Medea, Phaedra seems to regret her female identity, and Hippolytus condemns women, most notably at 558-64.
her revenge to her role as wife and mother, but in her drive to erase these two roles for herself, she also defies clear gender identity.\textsuperscript{254}

Compared to Virgilian characters, Medea’s plight in the play most clearly suggests that of Dido in \textit{Aeneid} 1 and 4, as Dido falls madly in love with Aeneas and is later abandoned by him at the end of book 4. This is not mere coincidence: indeed Virgil, in crafting his Dido, undoubtedly had Medea, as found in Euripides’ play, and more importantly, in Apollonius’ \textit{Argonautica}, in mind; Dido herself references Medea’s ruthless killing of Apsyrtus, asking herself why she did not do the same to Aeneas (\textit{Aen}. 4.600-1).\textsuperscript{255} But Virgil’s Dido in turn provides an essential point of reference in understanding Seneca’s Medea.\textsuperscript{256} In particular, Dido’s final curse on Aeneas and his people has resonance with the Senecan Medea’s success in upending the fortunes of Jason. Furthermore, the Virgilian Juno’s drive to repeat the past, especially in recreating the Trojan War for Aeneas and the Trojans, will be seen as analogous to the Senecan Medea’s need to recreate her own criminal past in order to torment Jason. My discussion going forward will highlight these connections between the Senecan Medea and the Virgilian Dido and Juno, as well as the contrast between Dido and Juno’s ultimate failure in

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\textsuperscript{254} Boyle (2014, xcv) argues: “The scale of [Medea’s] sense of outrage matches that of Seneca’s strongest tragic women, as she paradoxically both ungenders herself…and deploys her own maternity…in pursuit of recompense for broken \textit{fides}.” On the Virgilian side, it must be remembered that Dido, the Senecan Medea’s most striking Virgilian precedent, is not a mother, and thus her experience can only partially overlap with that of Medea.

\textsuperscript{255} See Nelis (2001, 125-185) on the connections between Apollonius’ Medea and Virgil’s Dido; also Clausen (1987, 40-60) on connections between Virgil’s Dido narrative and Greek epic and tragedy, and Panoussi (2009, 45-56, 133-38, and 182-98) on Greek tragedy and Virgil’s Dido. To be clear, I in no way suggest that Medea was the sole literary influence for the character of Virgil’s Dido: others include Euripides’ \textit{Phaedra}, Sophocles’ \textit{Ajax}, and Catullus’ \textit{Ariadne}.

\textsuperscript{256} Schiesaro (2008, 222) agrees, and further argues: “The heuristic value of this retroactive form of intertextuality [i.e. considering Virgil’s Dido as a model for Seneca’s Medea, as opposed to considering Euripides’ Medea as a model for Virgil’s Dido] will be no less noteworthy, for it may well show that such exceptional readers of Vergil [i.e. Seneca and Ovid] were disposed to acknowledge the similarities between the two characters.”

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preventing the progress of Aeneas and the Senecan Medea’s success in thwarting Jason. Put another way, the success of Seneca’s Medea in creating a *maius nefas* is in pointed contrast to the relatively limited success of Dido and Juno in creating problems for Aeneas.\(^{257}\)

**Medea Sets the Stage**

Seneca’s *Medea* opens with an extended prayer spoken by Medea, in which she asks many gods to help her in bringing about her revenge; the prayer sets the tone for the rest of the play. The beginning of the prayer is notable for its extensive list of divine powers, as well as its inclination toward the infernal (1-18):

\[
\begin{align*}
& \text{Di coniugales tuque genialis tori,} \\
& \text{Lucina, custos, quaeque domituram freta} \\
& \text{Tiphyn novam frenare docuisti ratem,} \\
& \text{et tu, profundi saeve dominator maris,} \\
& \text{claramque Titan dividens orbi diem,} \\
& \text{tacitisque praebens conscium sacris iubar} \\
& \text{Hecate triformis, quosque iuravit mihi} \\
& \text{deos Iason, quosque Medeae magis} \\
& \text{fas est precari: noctis aeternae chaos,} \\
& \text{aversa superis regna manesque impios} \\
& \text{dominumque regni tristis et dominam fide} \\
& \text{meliore raptam, voce non fausta precor.} \\
& \text{nunc, nunc adeste sceleris ultrices deae,} \\
& \text{crinem solutis squalidae serpentibus,} \\
& \text{atram cruentis manibus amplexae facem,} \\
& \text{adeste, thalamis horridae quondam meis} \\
& \text{quales stetistis: coniugi letum novae} \\
& \text{letumque socero et regiae stirpi date.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

Gods of marriage, and you, Lucina, guardian of the bridal bed, and you who taught Tiphys to steer the first ship that would subdue the seas, and you, stern ruler of the deep sea, and Titan, allotting the bright day to the world,

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\(^{257}\) Littelwood (2004, 168) similarly argues of Seneca’s *Medea*: “The conflict of the *Aeneid* is restaged as the fury of Juno and Dido, reborn in Medea and now victorious, punishes the imperial Argonauts.”
and triform Hecate, providing your witnessing light to the silent rites, and the gods on which Jason swore to me, and those whom it is more proper for Medea to entreat: chaos of eternal night, realms removed from the upper world, and wicked shades and the master of the gloomy kingdom, and its mistress, stolen with greater faith,\(^\text{258}\) I pray you with an ill-omened voice. Now, now be present, goddesses who avenge crime, your hair filthy with hanging snakes, having embraced a black torch in your bloody hands, be present, as, frightful, you once stood at my marriage bed: give death to his new wife and death to her father and to the royal lineage.

In making the prayer, Medea invokes no less than twelve different divine forces, from Olympian gods such as Minerva and Neptune (2-4) to chthonic deities such as Pluto and Proserpina (11-12) and the Furies (13-17). Lengthy invocations are associated with nefarious prayers, as in Ovid’s \textit{Ibis} 66-84 (at least twenty forces invoked) and Virgil’s \textit{Aeneid} 4.509-11, in which the sorceress assisting Dido calls on more than three hundred gods.\(^\text{259}\) At the same time, a significant part of Seneca’s play is its exhaustiveness, its tendency to employ every element at its disposal, as will later especially be seen in Medea’s incantations in act 4; this idea of exhaustiveness is parallel to the creation of something \textit{maius}. Furthermore, this catalogue of divine forces in the prologue helps set out the various spheres that Medea’s tragedy touches upon: marriage (1, 7-8, 11-12, 16-18), childbirth (1-2)\(^\text{260}\), seafaring (2-4), Medea’s divine lineage (Titan, her grandfather, in 5), magic (7-8), and all the powers of the underworld, including the avenging Furies (8-17).

\(^{258}\) I.e. Dis ultimately showed greater faith to Proserpina than Jason did to Medea.

\(^{259}\) \textit{crinis effusa sacerdos / ter centum tonat ore deos, Erebumque Chaosque / tergeminamque Hecaten, tria virginis ora Dianae} (“The priestess, with streaming hair, thunderously invokes three hundred gods, and Erebus, and Chaos, and three-form Hecate, the three faces of maiden Diana ”).

\(^{260}\) Here I follow Costa in taking \textit{Lucina} in 2 to refer to Juno Lucina; Hine (112) argues that it may refer to Juno or Diana, or another goddess.
Medea here also reflects on her own character by saying, paradoxically, that it is *magis fas* (8-9) for her to pray to the fearful spirits of the underworld, as she is a witch; with her statement, we might compare Juno’s famous pronouncement *flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo* (*Aen. 7.312*). Medea, like Virgil’s Juno, exploits the dichotomy of *superi* and *inferi*, and makes greater use of the latter. Furthermore, the reflexive use of *Medeae* in 8 (i.e. used by Medea to refer to herself) sets up Medea’s preoccupation with her (notorious) persona, which will be explored further in the play; here as well as later, Medea seems to reflect on her own role in the poetic tradition, and attempts to fashion herself accordingly. The inversion of *fas* that Medea represents is further punctuated by the phrase with which she ends the first part of her prayer: *voce non fausta precor* (12). To pray in such a manner is contrary to Roman religious practice, which included the command to worshippers, *favete linguis* (“be favorable with respect to your tongues”). The notion of an infernal marriage will have resonance throughout the play. The idea of the Furies assisting at an ill-fated marriage is also in Sen. *Oedipus* 644 (on Oedipus and Jocasta’s marriage), and is found in Ovid, including two passages from the *Heroides*: 6.45-6, in which Hypsipyle of Lemnos bemoans her own marriage with Jason (*mihi…tristis Erinys /praetulit infaustas sanguinolenta faces*, “the gloomy, bloodstained Fury...

[^261]: Hine and Boyle *ad loc.*; cf. *OLD* s.v. *faveo* 5. Seneca himself mentions the phrase *favete linguis* in *De Vita Beata* 26.7, and explains what it means: *Hoc verbum non, ut plerique existimant, a favore trahirit, sed imperat silentium, ut rite peragi possit sacrum nulla voce mala obstrepente* (“This phrase is not, like most think, derived from ‘applause,’ but commands silence, in order that the rite may be accomplished properly, with no ill-omened voice intruding”). Somewhat contrary to Seneca’s view, there is at *Paul. Fest.* 78.14 the statement *favere enim est bona fari* (“for to give favor is to speak good things”). While *faveo* and *fas* are not etymologically related (*faveo* has a short *a*, in *fas* the *a* is long), they are both associated with acts of speaking and reverence. See Bettini (2008) on religious aspects of the verb *fari.*
bore before me the ill-omened torches”) and 7.95-6, in which Ovid’s Dido bitterly remembers the day of her union with Aeneas: *audieram vocem: nymphas ululasse putavi – / Eumenides fati signa dedere met!* (“I heard a voice: I thought the nymphs had howled –the Furies gave signs of my doom!).262 Here Ovid’s Dido rereads the stormy marriage scene of Dido and Aeneas in *Aeneid* 4.160-72, especially 168: *summoque ulularunt vertice nymphae* (“and the nymphs howled from the mountain-top”). Ovid rightly saw something ominous in this Virgilian detail of the nymphs howling, and he expanded upon this ominous sense by making the Furies *pronubae*, and Seneca followed suit in his tragedies.263 Furthermore, there is another Virgilian precedent in *Aeneid* 7.318-9, as Juno angrily addresses Lavinia before stirring up trouble in Latium, enlisting Bellona, the war goddess, in the marriage plans: *sanguine Troiano et Rutulo dotabere, virgo, / et Bellona manet te pronuba* (“your dowry, maiden, will be Trojan and Rutulian blood, and Bellona awaits you as bridesmaid”). But Seneca’s Medea arguably outdoes them all by imagining *herself* as pronuba at Jason and Creusa’s wedding, later in the prologue (37-40):

Hoc restat unum, pronubam thalamo feram
ut ipsa pinum postque sacrificas preces
caedam dicatis victimas altaribus.
per viscera ipsa quaere supplicio viam,

This one thing remains, that I myself bear the wedding torch to the bedroom, and after sacrificial prayers that I slay the victims at the consecrated altars. Through the entrails themselves seek a path for punishment,

Thus, in contemplating her revenge, Medea sees a reversal of her past, as she is no longer the victim of an ill-fated marriage but rather the aggressor, who will ruin Jason and Creusa’s

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262 Costa, 64.
263 A similar idea is found in Seneca’s *Troades*, where Helen, whom Aeneas refers to as a *communis Erinys* at *Aeneid* 2.573, serves as *pronuba* to Polyxena for her marriage in death to Achilles, as discussed above in chapter 4; see especially Helen’s words at *Tro.* 861-3.
marriage in a particularly shocking way. While Medea’s words here are somewhat vague (Costa ad loc. asks “Who or what are the victims?”), I take the *pronubam pinum* to foreshadow the fiery gifts that Medea will give to Creusa; the *victimas* refer to Creusa and her father Creon, and also may hint at Medea’s children. These lines also more broadly suggest the sense of perverted ritual strongly present throughout Seneca’s *Medea*.

Medea also expresses in the prologue a hostile wish for Jason that has Virgilian overtones (19-21):

> Est peius aliquid? quod precer sponso malum? 
> vivat; per urbes errat ignotas egens 
> exul pavens invisus incerti laris,

Is there something worse? What evil might I pray for the bridegroom? let him live. May he wander through unknown cities, needy, an exile, fearing, hated, with no fixed home,

The comparative adjective *peius* (repeated in 24) suggests the magnitude of the *nefas* she plans, here with the pointed reversal of *vivat*. Her wish that Jason experience miserable wandering recalls the trials of Aeneas in the first half of the *Aeneid*; in fact Aeneas describes himself very similarly at *Aen*. 1.384 as *ipse ignotus, egens*, a very close echo of *ignotas egens* in 20.

Furthermore, Dido, in her dying curse on Aeneas and his people, at one point asks that he be

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264 Pseudo-Seneca in the *Octavia*, perhaps in imitation of this passage, has the ghost of Agrippina cast herself as deathly *pronuba* to Nero and Poppaea’s imminent marriage (594-7); Boyle (2008, 221), in discussing the *Octavia* passage, also cites Seneca the Elder *Controversiae* 6.6: *subiectae rogo felices faces* (“the felicitous wedding torches were put to the funeral pyre”).

265 Medea does not fully conceive of murdering the children until quite late in the play (921-25), but there are hints at it earlier: 549-50, 808-10, and 848.

266 The idea of perverted ritual is found throughout Senecan tragedy, including the sacrifices of Astyanax and Polyxena in the *Troades*, discussed in chapters 3 and 4; the extispicy and necromancy scenes in the *Oedipus*; and Atreus’ murderous rites in the *Thyestes*. See Putnam (1995c) for issues of sacrifice in Senecan tragedy as they relate to the *Aeneid*.

267 Costa, 64. Note that later in his agon with Medea, Jason says that he was moved by *pietas* (438) to leave Medea and marry Creusa, in consideration of his children’s safety. As Lawall notes (1979, 423-4), the mention of *pietas* recalls Aeneas and his need to protect Ascanius, despite the wishes of Dido, as he expresses in *Aen*. 4.354-5.
finibus extorris (“exiled from his territory” 4.616)<sup>268</sup>. In fact, much of the curse spoken by Dido in *Aen.* 4.607-29 can be understood as a model for Medea’s prologue: both heroines wish for terrible things to happen to the men who abandon them; more specifically, four of the five divine forces that Dido invokes at the beginning of her curse (Sol, Juno, Hecate, and the Furies) are also invoked by Medea.<sup>269</sup> Furthermore, as Littlewood (2004, 151-2) notes, both Dido and Medea speak their damning words in relative isolation: Dido has recently seen the Trojan fleet’s departure, and is led to prepare her suicide without her own sister’s knowledge; Medea, for her part, has no allies in Corinth except for her nurse (the chorus in Seneca’s play, unlike Euripides’, is hostile to Medea). But at least one contrast can be drawn: Dido curses Aeneas at the end of her life, just before her suicide, whereas Seneca’s Medea begins the play with her dire prayer. Thus, what is an end for Virgil’s Dido is just the beginning for Seneca’s Medea; as Medea says in 25-6, *parta iam, parta ultio est: peperi.* (“Now born, my revenge has been born; I have given birth”). This notion fits well with Putnam’s (1995c) important idea that the unresolved tensions found in Virgil’s epic are given new life in Senecan tragedy: the desperation with which Dido ends her life provides, for Seneca’s Medea, a roadmap for her coming revenge. Furthermore,

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<sup>268</sup> Dido’s words praying that Aeneas should be “exiled from his territory” in the future refers, I believe, to an understanding of his status in Italy as an exile, as some of his Italian enemies, including Amata (*Aen.* 7.359), use the term *exsul* to disparage Aeneas and the Trojans.

<sup>269</sup> Boyle (2014, 101). McGill (2002, 158) makes the interesting point that Hosidius Geta’s Virgilian cento *Medea*, which is a reworking of Virgilian verses according to Medea’s tragedy, begins, like Seneca’s play, with a prayer by Medea that includes excerpts from the invocation and curse of Virgil’s Dido, including the phrase *et Dirae ultrices* (line 2) from *Aen.* 4.610; McGill argues that Geta is here using Virgil to allude to Seneca’s text, as Geta presumably saw the connection between the Virgilian and Senecan Medeas in this instance. Geta also quotes *Aen.* 4.611 at line 7. On Hosidius Geta’s *Medea*, see Rondholz (2012), which includes text and commentary.
these words of Medea in 25-6 cement the connection between Medea’s capacity for both human reproduction and revenge.\(^{270}\)

The closing 14 lines of Medea’s prologue (42-55) shed light on the theme of *maius nefas* in the play, again with Virgilian connections. She addresses herself:

\[
\text{pelle femineos metus}
\]
\[
\text{et inhospitalem Caucasum mente indue.}
\]
\[
\text{quodcumque vidit Phasis aut Pontus nefas,}
\]
\[
\text{videbit Isthmos. effera ignota horrida,}
\]
\[
\text{tremenda caelo pariter ac terris mala}
\]
\[
\text{mens intus agitat: vulnera et caedem et vagum}
\]
\[
\text{funus per artus –levia memoravi nimis;}
\]
\[
\text{haec virgo feci; gravior exsurgat dolor:}
\]
\[
\text{maiora iam me scelera post partus decent.}
\]
\[
\text{accingere ira teque in exitium para}
\]
\[
\text{furore toto. paria narrentur tua}
\]
\[
\text{repudia thalamis. quo virum linques modo?}
\]
\[
\text{hoc quo secuta es. rumpe iam segnes moras:}
\]
\[
\text{quae scelere parta est, scelere linquenda est domus.}
\]

Cast off your womanly fears,
and take on in your mind hostile Caucasus.  
Whatever crime Phasis or Pontus saw,
the Isthmus will see. My mind within deliberates on wild, unknown, horrific things to be feared by heaven and earth alike: wounds, murder, and death creeping through limbs.  
I have mentioned things that are too trivial: I did these as a maiden. Let a greater resentment rise up.

After birth, greater crimes now befit me.  
Gird yourself with anger, and prepare yourself for murder with complete furor. May your divorce be recounted as equal to your marriage. How will you leave your husband? The same way you followed him. Break off now sluggish delays:

that home which was born with crime is to be abandoned with crime.

This passage features shifts and reversals in thought as Medea contemplates her revenge; above all we see here the tension between the *maius scelus* and simple repetition of a criminal past.\(^{271}\)

\(^{270}\) An essential precedent for these words is Ovid *Heroides* 12.208, also spoken by Medea: *ingentis parturit ira minas* (“My anger is giving birth to mighty threats”).
Here Medea dwells very much on her past, and seeks to both repeat that past, as well as outdo it through revenge. Her command to herself to take on the character of hostile Caucasus (43) suggests a reversion to her past, as this is where she came from.\textsuperscript{272} There is also here a notable contrast to \textit{Aeneid} 4.366-7, in which an enraged Dido exclaims to Aeneas: \textit{duris genuit te cautibus horrens / Caucasus} (“Fearful Caucasus with its sharp crags gave you birth”). What in Virgil is an exaggerated accusation becomes a wish for Medea: she is driven to rediscover her wild, uncivilized nature.\textsuperscript{273}

Lines 44-45 and 52-55 show an insistent drive for Medea to repeat the past, specifically her own criminal past. This idea seems aligned with traditional notions of revenge, i.e. “I’ll do to him whatever he did to me,”\textsuperscript{274} but Medea takes it further by specifically expressing a need to repeat her own past. While scholars have noted this, few have come to grips with the issue.\textsuperscript{275} As will be argued further regarding acts 4 and 5, Medea seems driven to revert to an earlier stage

\textsuperscript{271} A passage from Accius’ \textit{Atreus} (frag. 29-32, Dangel), part of which was quoted in chapter 2, helps illustrate the connection between repetition and \textit{maius nefas} in a tragic context, also involving revenge. Atreus is speaking: \textit{iterum Thystes Atreum adtractatum advenit; / iterum iam adgreeditur me et quietum exsuscat. / maior mihi moles, maius miscendum est malum / qui illius acerbum cor contundam et comprimam} (“Again Thyeste arrives to assault Atreus; now again he approaches me and stirs up my peaceful self. A greater labor, a greater evil must be prepared by me in order that I may crush and subdue his hard heart”). Atreus’ need to commit a greater evil is specifically predicated on the repetitive nature of his hostile interactions with his brother, as he understands them. The problem, as for Medea, is whether he will actually do something \textit{maius}, or rather just repeat his own behavior.

\textsuperscript{272} On line 43, see Shelton (1979, 49-50).

\textsuperscript{273} The overlap between the Senecan and Virgilian passages is noted by Costa (68), but he does not note the contrast. The actual phrase \textit{inhospitalem Caucasum} appears twice in Horace (\textit{Odes} 1.22.6-7 and \textit{Epodes} 1.12), but without the damning sense found in the Virgilian passage.

\textsuperscript{274} An interesting example along these lines is Ariadne’s curse of Theseus in Catullus 64.200-1: \textit{quali solam Theseus me mente reliquit, tali mente, deae, fineset seque suosque} (“With what mind Theseus abandoned me, with the same mind, goddesses, may he pollute with death himself and his people”); but Theseus, unlike Medea, will repeat himself unwillingly, to his own detriment, as his father Aegeus dies. Juno in Seneca’s \textit{Hercules Furens} wills a similar fate for Hercules; see esp. lines 90-1 and 120-1.

\textsuperscript{275} Schiesaro (2003, 208-14) is one exception.
in her life, namely, before she was wife or mother, as she had been in her native Colchis, before meeting Jason. As most of her earlier crimes were predicated on her love for Jason, her later crimes in the play will allow her to prove her complete independence from him. More specifically, by killing Creusa and Creon, to whom Jason is now bound by marriage, she will annul her own past marriage to Jason; and by killing her children with Jason, she will in effect restore her virginity, which she lost to him. It is important to note that this is very much an interior, psychological process for Medea, and in this she is like Cassandra in the Agamemnon; while 52-3 show Medea’s need for outside recognition of her new crimes (paria narrentur tua / repudia thalamis), much of the passage shows a concern with her own psyche, as in the mention of Medea’s mens (43, 47), and her dolor (49), ira (51) and furor (52).

But at the same time, Medea’s need to repeat the past is intertextual: she relies on past scenarios, recounted in earlier poetry, to direct her course for the future. In this, she is like Virgil’s Juno, who plays a central role in forcing Aeneas and the Trojans to repeat the Trojan War in Italy in the second half of the Aeneid. Thus Virgil’s Juno might have said, like Medea in 44-45, quodcumque vidit Troia nefas videbit Latium. Seneca’s Medea and Virgil’s Juno are productive of nefas, in similar ways; but Medea in her play seems driven to outdo Juno’s, and Dido’s, examples. In fact, at the same time, Medea laces her repetitive wishes with a desire for a maius nefas, one that specifically rivals her own past criminality: in lines 48-50, Medea suddenly expresses a wish to outdo her past crimes. Again, this wish seems based on her status as wife and mother: she must rival what she did as virgo (49), now that she has given birth (50). As Littlewood (2004, 151) notes, line 50 hints also at what will be, most clearly, Medea’s maiora

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276 As expressed in 984, to be discussed below.
277 On Medea’s dolor in the play, see Henry and Walker (1967, 175-6) and Schiesaro (2008, 216-7).
scelera, namely the killing of her children. But this drive toward a maius scelus is partly undercut by the return to strictly repetitive language in 52-55. As the play as a whole testifies, there is no resolution to this issue of repetition vs. maius. Thus the status of both Virgil’s maius opus, and the maius nefas willed by Seneca’s characters, is always open to question, based on their essentially repetitive and comparative framework.

Medea’s injunction to herself in 54, *rumpe iam segnes moras*, is distinctly Virgilian in its phrasing. Intriguingly, it recalls Mercury’s injunction to Aeneas to leave Carthage (and Dido) quickly: *age, rumpe moras* (*Aen. 4.569*); once again, Medea is seen to reverse the dynamics of the Aeneas-Dido relationship, as she, not Jason, will take the initiative. Also Iris, another divine emissary, tells Turnus to take the Trojan camp with all haste in the same way (*rumpe moras omnis*, 9.13). But the closest overlap is with Virgil’s *Georgics* 3.42-3 (*age, segnis / rumpe moras*), especially as Virgil the poet here, like Medea, is addressing himself; furthermore, as Boyle notes *ad loc.*, Virgil’s need to get on with *Georgics* 3 and end the proem lends a programmatic aspect to Medea’s words, as she needs to get on with her play, and end her prologue.279

In the second act, Medea delivers another extensive speech (116-49) that activates notions of maius nefas. She announces that she has heard the wedding hymn for Creusa and Jason (which was just delivered by the chorus in the first ode), and cannot believe her ears. In contemplating the murder of Creusa, she states (126-9):

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hoc meis satis est malis?
si quod Pelasgae, si quod urbes barbarae
novere facinus quod tuae ignorant manus,
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278 Costa, 70.
279 See also Sen. *Troades* 682-3, discussed in chapter 3, where Andromache vainly hopes that the deceased Hector will rescue her and Astyanax: *rumpe fatorum moras, / molire terras, Hector!* ("Break through the delays of death, force away the earth, Hector!").
nunc est parandum.

Is this [i.e. killing Creusa] enough for my misfortunes?  
If there is some crime that the Greek or barbarian cities know  
which your hands are unaware of;  
now it must be prepared.

The adjective *satis* is an important word in the exhaustive program of Senecan criminality; it  
often seems that there can never be enough, and that is the point.\(^{280}\) Immediately after these  
words Medea again reverts to repetition (129-30): *scelera te hortentur tua / et cuncta redeant*  
(“May your crimes encourage you and may they all return”); she then lists her past crimes (130-34): stealing the golden fleece, killing her brother Apsyrtus and spreading his remains on the sea  
in his father Aeetes’ face,\(^{281}\) and the murder of Jason’s uncle Pelias in Iolchus, which she  
accomplished by convincing his daughters to cut him up and boil his flesh, in their vain hopes of  
restoring his youth. At the end of the list, she reflects (134-6):

\[
\text{funestum impie} \\
\text{quam saepe fudi sanguinem – et nullum scelus} \\
\text{irata feci: saevit infelix amor.}
\]

How often  
I impiously shed fatal blood – and I did no crime  
while angry: my unhappy love raged.

Again we find Medea contemplating her past, in this case pointing out her previous lack of *ira*;  
the implication being that her newfound anger will lead her to commit greater crimes than those  
of the past. The word *saepe* in 135 has a metapoetic feel, especially since she only strictly shed

\(^{280}\) Compare Atreus’ words in *Thyestes* 256: *nullum relinquam facinus et nullum est satis* (“I will  
leave no crime behind, and no crime is enough”).

\(^{281}\) Note that Dido’s brother Pygmalion had killed her husband Sychaeus, an act that led Dido to  
flee Tyre (*Aen*. 1.346-64); whereas Medea killed her own brother while fleeing home. Hosidius  
Geta in his Virgilian cento *Medea* plays off of this by quoting *Aen*. 4.21 at line 9, spoken by  
Medea, *et sparsos fraterna caede penatis* (“and the penates sprinkled with my brother’s blood”)  
and at 263. Seneca’s Medea herself uses the corresponding phrase *fraternus cruor* at 452 to  
describe her act.
blood twice (that of Apsyrtus and Pelias); it is as if Medea is reflecting on the numerous accounts of her crimes in the poetic tradition. The phrase *saevit amor* also has a Virgilian precedent at *Aen.* 4.532, describing Dido’s love for Aeneas, though Virgil’s *saevit* is present and Seneca’s perfect.\(^{282}\) In fact, the tense shift works well: it is as if Medea considers the story of Dido (anachronistically) as part of her own past, which she will now rival thanks to *ira.*\(^{283}\)

### The Stoic Medea?

After the speech, the nurse remonstrates with Medea. As often in Senecan tragedy, the protagonist intent on committing *scelus* is in no way dissuaded by discussion with a nurse or assistant;\(^{284}\) rather, the quick verbal exchanges, including stichomythia, allow Medea to screw up

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\(^{282}\) Costa *ad loc.* takes Seneca’s *saevit* as present, but here I agree with Hine (and Nussbaum 1994, 458) that it must be perfect; note the preceding perfects *fudi* and *feci.* Medea’s point, I believe, is that in the past she was motivated by *infelix amor,* whereas she gives little indication that in her current circumstances she is still in love with Jason. See Guastella 2001, 205, who, in discussing lines 135-6, notes: “The *scelera* of the past were prompted by *amor,* but from now on it is no longer love but wrath, *ira,* which will drive Medea’s revenge.” However, Guastella curiously takes *saevit* as present. For similar language, see the chorus’ words on Medea at 849-51: *quonam cruenta maenas / praeceps amore saevo / rapitur?* (To where is the bloodstained maenad driven headlong by cruel love?). The chorus’ words here, as in all of its odes, evince a relative lack of understanding of Medea’s intentions; Davis (1993, 37) speculates that the chorus is absent from the stage during all the episodes of the play, except for act 5, scene 1. Above all, Seneca’s Medea does not seek to renew her past love, but rather her past criminal nature; moreover, lines 397-8, quoted below, show that Medea is no longer motivated by *amor,* but rather *odium*; compare also 897-8. Virgil’s Eclogues 8.47 also contains the phrase *saevus amor,* specifically referring to Medea and the killing of her children.

\(^{283}\) Note also that *infelix,* with which Medea modifies her past *amor,* is a word very closely associated with Virgil’s Dido: it appears as an epithet for Dido eight times in the *Aeneid.*

\(^{284}\) E.g. the Clytemnestra-nurse scene in the *Agamemnon;* the Phaedra-nurse scene in the *Phaedra,* and the Atreus-satelles scene in the *Thyestes.* D. and E. Henry (1985, 72) make the interesting point that the ineffectual roles of these nurses and attendants in Senecan drama parallel the ineffectual role of Seneca in his encounters with Nero, as recounted in Tacitus’ *Annals,* including 14.7, 14.14, and 14.52-6. However, problems with seeing these experiences of Seneca as inspiring such episodes in his tragedies include the fact that some or all of the plays may have been written before Nero’s reign (see chapter 1), and the related issue of whether Nero is to be understood as a historical counterpart to Seneca’s Medea, Clytemnestra, Phaedra, or
her courage and sharpen her rhetoric. We might draw the contrast with Dido’s interview with her sister Anna at the beginning of *Aeneid* 4: Anna encourages Dido to make a decision that will prove fatal, and Dido quickly accepts Anna’s words as justification, to the point that she later accuses (an absent) Anna of first setting her on her disastrous route (548-9). Unlike Dido, Medea will not allow herself to be persuaded by anyone other than herself.

In the Senecan debate between Medea and the nurse, there is often a strong Stoic overtone to Medea’s defiant and sententious statements. This is in keeping with Medea’s focus on her psyche: in fact, in the *Epistulae Morales*, Seneca the Stoic often urges Lucilius to focus on his own inner self, as opposed to exposing himself to the vagaries of an outer world that is inherently criminal and bent on its own destruction. What is surprising is the apparent disjuncture between the Stoic ideal of *apatheia* and the Senecan Medea’s apparent surrender to her emotions, including *dolor*, *furor*, and *ira*; furthermore, Seneca in his prose works never, of course, advocates committing *nefas*, but instead recommends cultivating Stoic virtue. For the Stoic Seneca, *scelus* is indicative of the weakness of human beings, and the fundamentally wicked nature of human society. But this is one of the essential paradoxes of the Senecan Medea. While seething with emotions that threaten to make her unstable and drive her from her purpose (most dramatically in act 5), and while committing horrific murder, she is also able to maintain a consistent (Stoic?) resolve and mould the action of the play.

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See for example Seneca’s words to Lucilius at *EM* 7.8 (the famous letter on the *spectacula*): *recede in te ipsum, quantum potes* (“withdraw into yourself, as much as you can”).

See Nussbaum’s (1994) and Bartsch’s (2006, 11-12 and 255-81) on the connections between Seneca’s Medea and Stoicism. Nussbaum notes (446-7) that the character of Medea held interest for Stoics such as Chrysippus and Epictetus, and argues that Medea is “excellent raw material for
In her opening words, the nurse advises Medea to lie low for the time being, and keep silent, given Medea’s now precarious status in Corinth. In response, Medea rejects the nurse’s advice, and declares in 157: *libet ire contra* (“I want to attack head-on”). This is similar to Medea’s earlier question to herself in 27, *non ibo in hostes?* (‘Shall I not attack my enemies?’). For these words of Medea, there is an intriguing Virgilian precedent in *Aeneid* 6.95-6, in which the Sibyl, after predicting that Aeneas will have to relive the Trojan War in Italy, advises him to rise to the challenge:

\[
\text{tu ne cede malis, sed *contra* audentior ito}
\]
\[
\text{qua tua te fortuna sinet.}
\]

Do not yield to your sufferings, but attack more boldly where your fortune will permit you.

Medea thus appropriates the Sibyl’s Stoic advice for herself. What is more, Seneca quotes these very lines of Virgil at *Epistulae Morales* 82.18 in advising Lucilius not to fear apparent *mala* such as death, but rather to face them bravely. Interestingly, Seneca’s quote of Virgil reads *quam tua te fortuna sinet*, not *qua*, as in Virgil’s text; thus “attack more boldly than fortune will permit you.” Seneca thus seems to push Virgilian Stoic notions further, both in his prose and poetry.

Bartsch similarly argues (272): “[Medea’s] preoccupation with self-exhortation and self-analysis, and the sense that her identity is coterminous with the full development of a particular way of looking at the world (and the ensuing actions), all seem like an *inverted* version of the progress of the Stoic sage.”

287 Ter Haar Romeny (1887, 75).

288 See Batinski (1983, 68-9) for the different readings of the manuscripts. Most of the Virgilian manuscripts also read *quam* instead of *qua*, but apparently modern editors find this too bold a statement for the Sibyl, despite the fact that *quam* would construe well with the comparative *audentior*. Batinski argues that either Seneca’s text of Virgil had *quam*, or that Seneca altered the Virgilian original to *quam* in order to better fit with his own beliefs on fortune.
In fact, Medea in her dialogue with the nurse continues her Stoic thinking along similar lines at nearly every turn. In her next statement, Medea declares (159) *fortuna fortes metuit, ignavos premit* (“Fortune fears the brave, but crushes cowards”). This is an inversion of the statement in *Aeneid* 10.284 *audentis fortuna iuvat* (“fortune helps the daring/brave”). While the notion in Virgil is proverbial, the fact that Seneca quotes this line of Virgil in *Epistulae Morales* 94.28 suggests that he may have had Virgil’s words in mind when composing this line of Medea’s. While Seneca in *EM* 94 actually quotes Virgil’s maxim with approval, his Medea’s words seem somewhat more in line with Seneca’s repeated Stoic advice in his prose to pay no heed to the vicissitudes of *fortuna*. Rather, as Seneca’s Medea points out, fortune is no match for those who are truly brave. Shortly afterward, when the nurse suggests that Medea’s situation is hopeless, Medea replies (163) *Qui nil potest sperare, desperet nihil* (“He who can hope for nothing should in no way despair”). This Stoic thought, I argue, has a connection to Aeneas’ famous words to his fellow Trojans on the night of Troy’s fall (*Aen*. 2.354): *una salus victis nullam sperare salutem* (“The one safety for the conquered is to hope for no safety”); both statements strike an attitude of defiance *in extremis*, emphasized by the use of antithesis (*una salus/nullam salutem* in Virgil, *sperare/desperet* in Seneca). The crucial difference is that while Aeneas is driven to do something for the greater good of his people, Medea’s intentions are strictly personal –and strictly criminal.

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289 See Otto (1962, 144) for a list of examples of the expression in Latin literature, including Cicero *Tusc*. 2.4.11: *fortis enim non modo fortuna iuvat, ut est in vetere proverbio, sed multo magis ratio* (“For not only does fortune help the brave, as in the old proverb, but even more reason [helps the brave]”).

290 Shelton (1979, 51) also notes this connection between the two passages. *Aen*. 2.354 is actually quoted by Seneca at *Natural Questions* 6.2.2. There is an even stronger and more pointed allusion to this line of Virgil in Sen. *Phoenissae* 89-90, spoken by Oedipus, intent on suicide: *unica Oedipodae est salus, / non esse salvum* (“the one salvation for Oedipus is not to be saved”).
When the nurse objects that nothing remains of Medea’s wealth (*nihilque superest opibus e tantis tibi*, 165) Medea replies (166-7):

Medea superest: hic **mare** et terras **vides**
Ferrumque et **ignes** et deos et **fulmina**.

Medea remains: here you see ocean and lands,
And iron and fire and gods and lightning.

While speaking words in line with the Stoic notion of wealth as an indifferent, Medea notably casts herself as a force of nature, with several manifestations, of a distinctly violent sort. While these lines can stand on their own, it is also, I argue, possible to hear an echo of *Aen.* 4.566-7, when the dream vision of Mercury warns what will happen if Aeneas and the Trojans do not leave Carthage immediately:

Iam **mare** turbari trabibus saevasque **videbis**
conlucere **faces**, iam fervere litora **flammis**,

Soon you will see the sea being stirred up by ships, and menacing fires shining, soon the shores seething with flames,

Note that the 2nd person singular form of *video* comes at the end of the line in both passages.

Nelis (2001, 169) argues that Mercury is actually lying here, as Virgil has given no indication that Dido or the Carthaginians are planning military action. Rather, Mercury’s larger point is about Dido’s rage and how it could further manifest itself; compare Mercury’s earlier words in 563-4. While Mercury’s words to Aeneas achieve their purpose, in that the Trojans set sail from Carthage that very night, Seneca’s Medea, from an intertextual standpoint, will have the opportunity to succeed, in significant contrast to Dido, her Virgilian predecessor. While Aeneas is ultimately able to leave Dido behind, Jason cannot do the same with regard to Medea.

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291 See for example Seneca’s *Epistulae Morales* 18.12-13, quoted below.
292 *illa dolos dirumque nefas in pectore versat /certa mori, variosque irarum concitat aestus* (“she is contemplating in her heart trickery, and an awful crime, has decided to die, and is stirring up conflicting tides of anger”).
The last part of the nurse’s interview with Medea features a vigorous stichomythiac exchange in which Medea employs, among other things, her intertextual identity as a justification for what she is contemplating. When the nurse warns of the threat of Creon, king of Corinth (*rex est timendus*, 168), Medea replies, in the same line, *rex meus fuerat pater* (“my father had been a king”). The implication is that Medea will relive her past, as recounted in other poetic works, but also outdo it by repeating her previous act of deception against a king; in this case, Creon will die, whereas Aeetes does not. 

At the beginning of 171, when the nurse says *Medea*, Medea interrupts with *Fiam*, effectively commandeering the nurse’s syntax (i.e. “I shall become Medea”). There is here and elsewhere in the play a metadramatic sense in such statements of the heroine; as Littlewood (2004, 50) notes, “The metadramatic resonance makes Medea’s role strangely external to Medea herself….we have a strong sense of a role being fashioned for Medea to play rather than of life being lived.” I would add that Medea will become herself by committing the *maius nefas* that will rival those of her poetic predecessors.

Later in the third act, when Medea has an extended discussion with Jason, we witness his relative submissiveness and her unwavering strength of purpose, again of a Stoic cast. While Jason suggests his weakness of spirit in the face of troubles (*Cedo defessus malis*, “I give up, wearied by troubles”, 518) Medea by contrast, once again suggests her Stoic nature (520): *Fortuna semper omnis infra me stetit* (“All fortune has always stood beneath me”). Furthermore, she makes this point to Jason about her lack of need for material goods (540-1):

\[
\textit{Contemnere} \text{ animus regias, ut scis, opes} \\
potest soletque;
\]

My spirit, as you know, is able and accustomed

---

Note also the similarity between this stichomythiac exchange and that in *Agamemnon* 792, quoted in chapter 3, in which Cassandra refers to king Priam, her father: AGAMEMNON: *veneremur aras*. CASSANDRA: *cecidit ante aras pater*. 

195
to disdain royal wealth;

Here Medea plays off of the fact that when she fled with Jason before, she apparently brought no valuables with her. At the same time, these words of Medea constitute, I argue, an allusion to Evander’s famous Stoic words at *Aen.* 8.364-5, when he invites Aeneas into his humble home:

\[
\text{aude, hospes, contemnere opes et te quoque dignum finge deo,}
\]

Dare, guest, to disdain wealth and fashion yourself also as worthy of a god,

These lines of Virgil are in fact quoted by Seneca at *Epistulae Morales* 18.12: Seneca further clarifies for Lucilius, *Nemo alius est deo dignus quam qui opes contempsit* (“No one is worthy of a god other than he who has disdained wealth” 18.13). But the surprise is that, while Medea may not be wealthy at this point, nonetheless she will spare no expense in contriving *nefas*, as seen especially in act 4.

**Medea Monstrum Marinum**

The second and third odes of Seneca’s *Medea* reveal a chorus who now begin to sense what a threat Medea presents to Jason and to all of Corinth. The subject of both odes is the hubris of seafaring, in particular represented by the Argo, the first ship. The association of sailing with the end of the golden age, expressed at 329-39, is found at various places in Latin literature, including *Georgics* 1.136-8; Horace in *Odes* 1.3 further associates navigation with *nefas* (26) and states (23-4) *impiae /non tangenda rates transiliunt vada* (“impious ships dash across seas that ought not to be touched”). Seneca himself in the *Natural Questions* 5.18 sees sailing as a perversion of the divine gift of winds, as most ships, according to Seneca, are dispatched for war, commerce or other questionable ends: *non eadem his et illis est causa*
solvendi, sed iusta nulli ("people have different reasons for setting sail, but none of them are just" 5.18.16). In the odes of the Medea, the chorus does not go so far as to label seafaring a nefas; nonetheless it is seen as an inherently dangerous activity that may provoke divine retribution, and perhaps most importantly, one that actually brought Medea to Greece. In the second ode (301-79), while describing the terrors that the Argonauts faced while at sea, including the Symplegades or clashing rocks, the chorus notes of the Argo (340):

Dedit illa graves improba poenas 
per tam longos ducta timores,

That wicked ship paid a heavy penalty, 
led through such lengthy terrors,

Here there is a clear echo, I argue, of Aen. 4.381-86, in which Dido angrily threatens Aeneas:

i, sequere Italiam ventis, pete regna per undas, 
spero equidem mediis, si quid pia numina possunt, 
supplicia hausurum scopolis et nomine Dido 
saepe vocaturum. sequar atris ignibus absens 
et, cum frigida mors anima subduxerit artus, 
onnibus umbra locis adero. dabis, improbe, poenas.

Go, follow Italy by the winds, seek kingdoms overseas. 
Indeed I hope, if honored spirits have any weight, 
that you get your fill of punishment on the rocks and often call Dido by name. Though absent, I will follow with my black fires and, when cold death has led my limbs from my spirit, I, as a shade, will be everywhere. You will pay the penalty, wicked one.

Dido hopes that Aeneas will face disaster at sea after abandoning her. What is threatened by Dido becomes a reality for the Senecan Argo, as the chorus tells it, and also, later in the play, for Jason. Again there is the sense of anachronism, as what was future for Dido (dabis) becomes part of the past (dedit) at Corinth. The chorus, through this (unintended?) allusion, associates the ship that transgresses the foedera mundi (335) with the faithless husband or lover, who violates earlier pledges. Thus the chorus, who had in the first ode celebrated Jason’s marriage with Creusa
without question, indirectly suggests the cloud hanging over Jason, as he tries to forget Medea.

In fact in 361-4, the chorus note that the “reward” of the Argo’s journey to Colchis was not only the golden fleece, but also Medea herself, a passenger on the Argo, who is described (362-3):

\[
\text{maiusque mari Medea malum,}
\]

\[
\text{merces prima digna carina.}
\]

and a greater evil than the sea, Medea, fitting merchandise for the first hull.

Here the intense alliteration of m (as in 674-5, discussed below) reinforces what a *maius malum* the woman from Colchis represents.\(^{294}\)

Aquatic imagery is also found after the second ode in the third act, in which Medea is assimilated to a force of nature and even a sea monster. At the end of the speech that opens the act, the nurse characteristically expresses her concern for what Medea is deliberating (392-5):

\[
\text{ubi se iste fluctus franget? exundat furor.}
\]

\[
\text{non facile secum versat aut medium scelus:}
\]

\[
\text{se vincet: irae novimus veteris notas.}
\]

\[
\text{magnum aliuid instat, efferum immane impium:}
\]

Where will that wave break itself? Her rage is welling up.

She is deliberating with herself no simple or moderate crime:

She will outdo herself: I recognize the signs of her former anger.

Something great is at hand, wild, monstrous, wicked:

In 392, passionate Medea is likened to a wave that will break destructively; again we can note the unfortunate implications for the captain of the Argo. The nurse insists on the magnitude of what Medea is intent on, and employs the reflexive to make the point: *se vincet* (394); ironically, it seems that Medea will become herself by outdoing herself. The nurse speaks from experience: hence *ira novimus veteris notas* (394). This four-word phrase is an allusion, I argue, to Dido’s famous four words at *Aen.* 4.23: *agnosco veteris vestigia flammae* (“I recognize the traces of my

\(^{294}\) See Segal (1982, 241-3) for a discussion of alliteration in this play based on Medea’s name.
former passion”). Both phrases include a 1st-person verb based on nosco, and an accusative plural modified by a two-word genitive phrase, both including veteris. The main difference is that Dido’s flamma, which represents the love or passion that she feels for Aeneas and felt for Sychaeus, is replaced by Medea’s ira, thus suggesting how much further she will go than Dido in her revenge. Note again the implied emphasis on Medea’s present ira as opposed to her, and Dido’s, amor, as in 135-6 discussed above.

In fact, Medea, when she enters, reflects on the relationship between her love and her hatred when she enters, addressing herself (397-8):

Si quaeris odio, misera, quem statuas modum,
imitare amorem.

If, wretched one, you ask what end you should place for your hatred, copy your love.

Once again we find Medea employing repetitive structures to direct her course, but in this case substituting one passion (odium) for another (amor); Medea is a person of extremes. After asking herself whether she could remain unavenged, she answers with an emphatic “No” (401-7):

\[
\text{dum terra caelum media libratum feret}
\text{nitidusque certas mundus evolvet vices}
\text{numerusque harenis derit, et solem dies;}
\text{noctem sequuntur astra, dum siccas polus}
\text{versabit Arctos, flumina in pontum cadent,}
\text{numquam meus cessabit in poenas furor,}
\text{crescetque semper –}
\]

While earth in the middle bears the balanced heaven, and the glittering world revolves in its fixed turns, and the sands are numberless, and day follows sun; while stars follow night, while the pole turns the bears above the ocean, and rivers empty into the sea, never will my fury be idle in its punishments, and will always grow –
Here Medea provides a vivid image of the boundlessness of her furor. This passage constitutes a neat reversal of Aen. 1.607-10, spoken by Aeneas to Dido, in thanks for kindly receiving him and the Trojans:

in freta dum fluvii current, dum montibus umbrae
lustrabunt convexa, polus dum sidera pascet,
semper honos nomenque tuum laudesque manebunt,
quae me cumque vocant terrae.

While rivers run into the seas, while shadows move over mountain slopes, while the pole feeds the stars, always your honor and name and praises will remain, whatever lands summon me.

Steele (1922, 9-10), Costa (109) and Boyle (236) note the overlap but not the reversal implied: Aeneas states the boundlessness of his honor for Dido, Medea the boundlessness of her furor in exacting revenge on Jason. Medea’s allusion to Aeneas also points out the role reversal: the jilted woman appropriates the role of the putative husband. Read in this way, it is even perhaps possible to see Medea as intending to right the wrongs visited on her poetic precursor, Dido.

Furthermore, Medea’s words here suggest her connection to the forces of the universe, as her furor will always be concurrent with these; Aeneas’ intention of always honoring Dido rings hollow by comparison.295 Boyle notes: “One irony of Medea’s assertion of the immutability of nature’s rhythms is that she herself has inverted those rhythms in the past through magic….Another and more blatant irony –indeed paradox –is that Medea uses the immutability of cosmic harmony to guarantee the human chaos to be caused by her fury.” Thus Medea’s assertion also has point from a more cosmic perspective. Furthermore, the phrase cessabit in poenas (406), describing Medea’s incessant capacity for revenge, has, as Costa (110) and Ter

295 See Sen. Oedipus 503-8 for a more orthodox adaptation of this same passage of Virgil, where the chorus declares that they will always honor Bacchus. In discussing the passage from the Medea, Boyle (236) also notes the similarities to Eclogues 5.76-8 and Ovid Ibis 135-40; the Ovidian passage shares the expression of eternal enmity found here in Seneca.
Haar Romeny (65) note, a precedent in the words of the Sibyl at *Aen.* 6.51, who encourages Aeneas to continue his prayers in order to gain entrance to the underworld: *cessas in vota precesque?* (“Are you idle in your vows and prayers?”). Seneca thus takes a Virgilian phrase used in a pious context and relocates it to one of revenge. What is more, the suggestion that Medea’s *furor* will always grow (*crescetque semper*, 407) also brings up the intertextual Medea: as in past poetic works, she will continue to rage, both in this play and on the stages and pages of the future, in a way that implies not simple textual repetition, but rather growth.

In the succeeding lines of her speech, Medea expands on the cosmic, and intertextual, force that she represents (407-10):

```
quae ferarum immanitas,
quae Scylla, quae Charybdis Ausonium mare
Sicilumque sorbens quaeve anhelantem premens
Titana tantis Aetna fervebit minis?
```

What cruelty of beasts,
what Scylla, what Charybdis sucking up the Italian
and Sicilian sea, or what Aetna pressing on the gasping
Titan will blaze with such great threats?

Medea’s comparison of herself to Scylla is significant in that this female monster was one of the terrors to which the Argonauts were subjected, as recounted in the second ode (350-4); Medea will rival her.296 The wording of 408 has two clear poetic precedents: in Catullus 64.154-6,

```
quaenam te genuit sola sub rupe leaena,
quod mare conceptum spumantibus exspuit undis,
quaq Syrtis, quae Scylla rapax, quae vasta Charybdis,
```

what lioness gave you birth under a lonely cliff,

296 On the importance of water and fire imagery in Seneca’s *Medea*, Littlewood (2004, 60) states: “The imagery of fire and flood performs a structural and a moralizing function: the water-fed fire which engulfs the fragile isthmus at the end of the play (885-90 cf. 35-6) is not merely caused by Medea but is her anger, externalized in physical form.”
what pregnant sea cast you out of the foaming waves, 
what Syrtis, what grasping Scylla, what dreadful Charybdis,

Of course, Ariadne means this as an insult, just the opposite of Medea’s positive self-fashioning.

While we have seen the same topos in Aen. 4.365-7, Virgil also adapts Catullus’ lines above,\(^{297}\) as an exasperated Juno complains of her lack of success in stopping the Trojans’ progress over the seas (Aen. 7.302-3):

\[
\textit{quid} \text{ Syrtes aut Scylla } \textit{mihi, quid vasta Charybdis}
\]

\[
\textit{profuit?}
\]

How did the Syrtes or Scylla, how did dreadful Charybdis benefit me?

While Medea shares with Juno her will to destruction, Medea, unlike Juno, expresses supreme confidence. Medea’s words are linguistically closer to Ariadne’s in the anaphora of \textit{quaer}, four times in each passage. This is a good example of what Nelis (2001, 156) calls a two-tier allusion,\(^{298}\) that is, Medea’s words have resonance with both Catullan and Virgilian sources in different ways, sources that themselves are interrelated. While commentators note Virgil’s debt to Catullus here, they have apparently overlooked Seneca’s debt to both.\(^{299}\) After further enraging herself by reflecting on Jason’s cowardly attitude (415-22), Medea ends her fiery speech with another programmatic statement of \textit{nefas} (423-5): \textit{faciet hic faciet dies / quod nullus umquam taceat. invadam deos / et cuncta quatiam (“This day will accomplish, accomplish what

\(^{297}\) Thomson (1998, 413).

\(^{298}\) See also Hinds (1993, 36 n.60) for further bibliography on two-tier allusions.

\(^{299}\) Németi (2003, 207) notes the interesting parallel to Euripides \textit{Medea} 1342-3, in which an outraged Jason insults Medea: \textit{λέαιναν, οὐ γυναῖκα, τής Τισσηνίδου / Σκύλλης ἔχουσαν ἀγριοτέραν φύσιν (“A lioness, not a woman, having a wilder nature than Scylla of the Tuscan sea”), as well as to Aeschylus \textit{Agamemnon} 1232-3, in which Cassandra likens Clytemnestra to \Σκύλλαν τινὰ / οἰκούσαν ἐν πέτραισιν, ναυτίλων βλάβην (“some Scylla inhabiting the rocks, bane of sailors”).
no tomorrow will be silent about. I will attack the gods and shake everything”); again Medea sees her vengeful range as cosmic in nature.  

The threat of Medea is brought out more fully in the third ode (579-669), in which the chorus situates Medea’s hostility to Jason within the context of the fatal penalties that have been visited on the rest of the Argonauts. The chorus first warns of the anger of a wife who has been deprived of her marriage, arguing that she can outdo natural forces of flame and flood. In this context, the chorus notes (591-3):

\[
\text{caecus est ignis stimulatus ira}
\]
\[
\text{nec regi curat patiturve frenos}
\]
\[
\text{aut timet mortem:}
\]

Blind is the fire goaded by anger, it does not care to be ruled, nor does it endure curbs or fear death:

The phrase \textit{caecus ignis}, as descriptive of human passion, is Virgilian, as in \textit{Aen.} 4.2, which describes Dido’s love: \textit{vulnus alit venis et caeco carpitur igni} (“she nourishes the wound with her lifeblood and is seized with a hidden fire”). Both Pease and Williams take Virgil’s \textit{caeco} here to mean “hidden”; Pease notes the instructions of Venus to Cupid in 1.688, \textit{occultum inspires ignem}. However, Seneca seems to transfer the sense of \textit{caecus} to “indiscriminate”; this suggests a nice contrast between Dido’s sense of shame and Medea’s boldness.

After asking the gods in two lines to spare Jason, tamer of the seas (595-6), the chorus spends the rest of the ode grimly cataloguing the previous deaths of the other Argonauts. Such a

\[\text{Boyle ad loc. notes that the phrase in 423-4, dies / quod nullus umquam taceat “echoes, even as it inverts the grounds for,” Aen. 9.447, in which Virgil assures immortality to Nisus and Euryalus: nulla dies umquam memori vos eximet aevò (“No day will ever remove you from memory”). See below on Medea 917-19 for further echoes of the Nisus and Euryalus episode.}\]

\[\text{Biondi (1984, 147) and Boyle ad loc.}\]

\[\text{See also Aen. 4.209, where Iarbas asks if the ignes or thunderbolts of Jupiter are caeci, in the sense of “aimless, indiscriminate.”}\]
catalogue is necessarily ominous for Jason, though in fact Jason does not die in the play. The chorus notes that Neptune is angry at this new violation of his realm by the Argo and its sailors (597-8), thus suggesting that divine retribution is in play; at the same time, as in the second ode, seafaring is cast as inherently dangerous and hubristic. Of particular interest is the chorus’ summary statement of the fates of the Argonauts (607-15):

Quisquis audacis tetigit carinae
nobiles remos nemorisque sacri
Pelion densa spoliavit umbra,
quisquis intravit scopulos vagantes
et tot emensus pelagi labores
barbara funem religavit ora
raptor externi rediturus auri,
exitu diro temerata ponti
iura piavit.

Whoever has touched the famous oars of the bold ship, and robbed Pelion of the dense shade of its sacred grove, whoever entered the wandering rocks, and, having survived so many trials of the sea, fastened the rope on barbarian shores, about to return as a plunderer of foreign gold, has atoned for the violated laws of the sea with a horrific death.

Note that Seneca’s lines here suggest the inherent criminality of the Argonauts’ actions: in creating their ship, which is audax, they plundered the Pelian grove for timber (spoliavit, 609), and they later emerge as raptores (613) or thieves of the golden fleece. This is in keeping with the focus in Senecan tragedy on nefas, but while the Argonauts will be victims of their own nefas, Medea will be the champion of hers. What is more, I believe that in 607 we can hear an echo of Dido’s regret in Aen. 4.657-8:

felix, heu nimium felix, si litora tantum
numquam Dardaniae tetigissent nostra carinae.

Fortunate, oh too fortunate [would I have been], if only
Dardanian ships had never touched our shores.

In Virgil the action of *tango* is attributed to the ships that touched the shores, whereas in Seneca it is transferred to the men who touched the oars. Dido’s statement, in turn, includes clear allusions to earlier poetry, including Ariadne’s lament in Catullus 64.171-2 (*utinam ne tempore primo / Gnosia Cecropiae tetigissent litora puppes*, “would that in earliest times Athenian ships had not touched Cretan shores”), which itself has connections to the beginning lines of Ennius’ *Medea Exul,* which in turn imitate the opening lines of Euripides’ *Medea,* spoken by the nurse:

Would that the ship of Argos had not traversed through the dark Symplegades on its way to the land of the Colchians, or that in the glens of Pelion the cut fir had never fallen, or furnished oars for the hands of noble men, those who pursued the golden fleece for Pelias.

The contents of the beginning of the Euripidean nurse’s prologue are very close to that of the Senecan chorus’ lines: note that besides the grove of Pelion, both mention the Symplegades and emphasize the act of rowing. In fact, the Senecan hypallage of *nobiles remos* in 608, noted by Costa *ad loc.* (i.e. describing the oars, as opposed to the men, as famous), appears, in retrospect, 303

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303 Ennius *Medea Exul* 1-7: *utinam ne in nemore Pelio securibus / caesa accidisset abieagna ad terram trabes, / neve inde navis inchoandi exordium / cepisset, quae nunc nominatur nomine / Argo, quia Argivi in ea delecti viri / vecti petebant pellem inauratam arietis / Colchis, imperio regis Peliae, per dolum* (“Would that in the Pelian grove the fir tree had not, cut by axes, fallen to the ground, and that from there it had not made a prelude of the first ship, which now is named Argo, because chosen Argive men, carried in it, were seeking the golden fleece of the ram of Colchis, at the order of king Pelias, by deceit”). Note that the beginning *utinam ne* is echoed in Catullus’ lines.
to be partially derived from Euripides’ ἐρετμῶσαι χέρας / ἀνδρῶν ἀρίστων. 304 Like the nurse’s opening words in Euripides, those of Seneca’s chorus provide a summary of the journey of the Argo, and suggest the unfortunate results of such a journey. But here there is also a larger reversal: in Euripides, Ennius, Catullus, and Virgil, the sailing of ships results in the suffering of heroines (Medea, Ariadne, and Dido) who come into contact with the sailors involved, and thus express their regret, whereas in Seneca, the sailing results in the actual deaths of the sailors themselves. While it can be convincingly argued that Euripides’ lines have the most resonance with those of Seneca at this point, the closest linguistic echo to Seneca’s verses here is found in Virgil (i.e. tetigit carinae vs. tetigissent...carinae). In Virgil, Dido is ultimately a victim of the Trojans’ journey on the seas; in Seneca, the Argonauts, in the form of Jason, suffer, and the heroine involved, Medea, emerges victorious. 305

The Senecan chorus’ affirmation that all the Argonauts have died at this point is of course an overstatement, as the chorus later notes that Peleus (656-7), for one, is not dead yet, nor is Jason himself. Further, the deaths of some of the Argonauts, including Orpheus (625-33) and Hercules (634-42), are not usually associated with their presence on the Argo. Nonetheless, it is true that such heroes are often said to suffer greatly after their time on the ship. Rather, the chorus, through the exhaustiveness of its catalogue of Argonautic deaths (616-67), creates a sustained image of human wickedness and consequent suffering. 306 While Medea is never named

304 Conte (2007, 58-122) makes a compelling argument that hypallage (or enallage, as he terms it) is essential to the sublime style of Virgil in the Aeneid; thus we might see Virgilian influence in Seneca’s use of hypallage here.
305 Note that Catullus’ Ariadne will later, like Medea, be triumphant, as she accomplishes her revenge on Theseus and becomes immortal, thanks to Dionysus; Dido’s victory in Virgil is much more ambivalent, as discussed above.
306 As Henderson (1983, 99) argues on this ode: “The vignettes of death, fire, flood, females and families are strung into a cumulatively reverberating vortex of disaster and at the same time an
in the ode, the threat that she represents can be felt throughout, as the chorus juxtaposes the wrath of a rejected wife (*coniunx viduata taedis*, “a wife deprived of her marriage” 581) with the fates of the Argonauts (595-660); thus in 595-6, at the end of the ode, the chorus asks the gods somewhat feebly that Jason be spared (669): *parcite iusso* (“spare one under orders”).

**Medea Maga**

The fourth act contains an extended description of Medea’s magic rites in order to concoct the poison that will kill Creusa and Creon; the nurse first narrates Medea’s making of the poison (670-739); then Medea enters and completes the ritual, including an extended invocation of Hecate, in various meters (740-848). Medea is the only person involved in the entire scene, as the nurse, while a close witness, plays no part. The actual preparation of the poison in the scene seems secondary to Medea’s need to perform this impressive act of *nefas*. By comparison, in Euripides’ play, the rites by which Medea concocts the poison are only very briefly mentioned, as at 384-5 and 789. Why is this so important in Seneca’s play? Fitch (1987, 275-6) makes an essential point: “The conjuration scene illuminates the identity of ‘Colchian witch’ to which Medea reverts when her identity as ‘wife of Jason’ is denied her.” Indeed, in the second and third acts, Medea received confirmation from Creon and Jason that her marriage with Jason is over and that she will be separated from her children; the subsequent activation of her role as witch appears to represent her will to erase her marriage and motherhood and renew her past self. The idea of reversion is important here: both Medea and the nurse make frequent reference to elegantly eloquent tapestry patterned by the dominant metaphor-forces of the play. Flame and flood come into their own here at the ‘hinge’ of the drama.”

Boyle *ad loc.* notes that this may recall Aeneas’ *apologia* to Dido in the underworld on why he had to leave Carthage (*Aen*. 6.461-3): *sed me iussa deum…imperiis egere suis* (“But the orders of the gods drove me with their commands”); but in this case Aeneas was ordered by the gods, whereas Jason was ordered by Pelias.
Medea’s past in explaining the rites; at the same time, such a reversion is also represented as, in this case, something *maius*, as Medea outdoes her own reputation for witchery. As argued in earlier chapters, reversion to the past has, in Seneca, a necessarily intertextual aspect: Medea and the nurse look back to past accounts of magic and of Medea herself, and also draw a contrast, by suggesting Medea’s current efforts to outdo any past (poetic) precedents.

At the same time, witchery and magic have a programmatic sense in poetry in and of themselves: witches create, like poets. Commenting on the association of sorcery with poetry, Littlewood (2004, 158) argues: “Poetry leads an audience to assent to its falsehoods by exerting its force beneath the threshold of rationality. It wins listeners over against their will and in its power to charm is like magic….Poetry does not simply charm, but fashions its material and creates a world. Magic is thus a fine image for grand poetic projects and sublime art.” In support of these notions, we can note that the word *carmen* can be used to signify “a magical chant, spell, or incantation” as in Sen. Medea 688 and Aeneid 4.487, as well as, more generally, poem or song. Thus the prominence given to Medea’s sorcery in the play suggests Medea’s ability to create not only poison but, by extension, poetry; she in fact speaks her dreadful incantations throughout the rhesis (690-704 and 740-842).

The passage in *Aen.* 4.478-521, in which Dido announces to Anna her intentions to practice magic, and then performs the magic rite with the Massylian priestess’s help, as a pyre,

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308 *OLD s.v. carmen* 1b, as in Virgil *Eclogues* 8.68-70, in which Alphesiboeus employs *carmina* in order to cast a love spell on Daphnis.
309 *carmine audito stupet* (“at the sound of the spell [the snake] is stunned”).
310 *haec se carminibus promittit solvere mentes* (“she professes to loosen minds by spells”).
311 Schiesaro (1997, 96 n.11) notes that in Horace’s *Epistulae* 2.1.208-10 the tragic poet is equated to a magician (*poeta…ut magus*); later (103), Schiesaro quotes Plutarch’s *How the Young Man Should Study Poetry* in the *Moralia* (16d), in which the young poet is advised always to keep in mind the sorcery of poetry, in its ability to make the false true (*τῆς ποιητικῆς τὴν περὶ τὸ ψευδός γοητείαν* (“the sorcery of the poetic art regarding falsehood”)).
topped with an effigy of Aeneas, is built, is the only significant instance of magic in Virgil’s epic; the contrasts with the use of magic in Seneca’s Medea are notable.\textsuperscript{312} Dido appears to have little experience with magic, and in fact delegates most (but not all) of the magic rites to the Massylian priestess; Medea acts completely alone. Dido further states to Anna her unwillingness to delve into magic (4.492-3): \textit{testor...magicas invitam accingier artis} (“I swear…that I unwillingly arm myself with magic arts”), while the Senecan Medea’s acts of magic seem essential to her process of truly becoming herself. Furthermore, Henry and Henry (1985, 34) make the point that Dido initially uses magic, as she says, to charm Aeneas into loving her or to free herself from \textit{amor: viam...quae mihi reddat eum vel eo me solvat amantem} (“a way that might return him to me or free me from loving him” 478-9), whereas Medea only uses magic, strictly speaking, to commit murder.\textsuperscript{313}

The nurse’s words at the opening of the act provide further perspective on Medea’s efforts to create a \textit{maius nefas} (671-75):

\begin{quote}
immane quantum augescit et semet dolor
accendit ipse vimque praeteritam integrat.
vidi furentem saepe et aggressam deos,
caelum trahentem: \textit{maius} his, \textit{maius} parat Medea monstrum.
\end{quote}

It is frightful how much her resentment grows and inflames itself and renews its own past strength.
I have often seen her raging and, having attacked the gods, dragging down the heavens: greater than these, Medea is preparing a greater portent.

\textsuperscript{312} However, as noted by Boyle \textit{ad loc.}, the messenger in Hosidius Geta’s Medea, in describing her magic rites (321-73) does quote Virgil’s words on magic from Aeneid 4.
\textsuperscript{313} In this way, Seneca’s Medea is also unlike Ovid’s Medea of the Metamorphoses, as there Medea’s magic rites (extensively recounted at Met. 7.179-294) are performed in order to rejuvenate Aeson, not to kill. While Ovid’s Medea does deceptively use magic to convince the daughters of Pelias to dismember their father (7.309-21), she does not actually use magic to kill Pelias, as she delegates the killing to the daughters.
Lines 671-2 emphasize how Medea’s dolor grows, but also feeds on itself and its own past, like an invasive cancer; as always, it is unclear how something that is nourished on its own self can ever become something maius. Nonetheless, the nurse declares that this will be something that rivals Medea’s past witchery; the emphatic alliteration of m in 674-5 suggests both the maius theme as well as Medea’s similarity to a monstrum maius herself.\(^{314}\)

The nurse goes on to explain how Medea proceeded to her penetrale funestum (deathly inner sanctum, 676)\(^{315}\) and poured out all of her resources (totas opes effudit, 677) in order to assemble a turba malorum (“crowd of evils,” 679).\(^{316}\) This turba is primarily made up of two elements, which are listed at length: snakes (680-704) and noxious plants (705-30). It is notable that Medea summons the snakes by her incantations (vocat, 681; magicis cantibus, 684; carmine audito, 688, cantus meos, 699; cantibus meis, 704); the power of her voice, like that of a poet, is thus prominent. In fact the nurse quotes Medea in lines 690-704, within the rhesis. Here Medea declares that terrestrial snakes are insufficient evils (parva mala, 690) for what she is preparing, and proceeds to summon snakes from heaven, now in the form of constellations, noting (692-3):

\begin{quote}
iam iam tempus est aliud movere fraude vulgari altius
\end{quote}

(“Now, now it is time to undertake something grander than common crime”)\(^{317}\). While it is common for witches to draw down the

\(^{314}\) Note the similarity to the chorus’ words in 362 (maius...Medea malum) discussed above; also Sen. Phaedra 688: o maius ausa matre monstrifera malum. As Segal (1983, 238) notes, “[Medea] both conquers monstra and is herself a monstrum.”

\(^{315}\) Boyle \textit{ad loc.} notes that the magic rites committed by Dido and the priestess similarly take place in Dido’s inner court: penetrali in sede (Aen. 4.504); Seneca by comparison emphasizes the horrid nature of the penetrale by applying to it the adjective funestum.

\(^{316}\) To the exhaustiveness of these efforts we can compare the Euripidean Medea’s injunction to herself at 401-2: φείδου µηδὲν ὅν ἐπίστασαι, / Μήδεια, βουλεύουσα κὶ τεχνοµένη (“spare nothing of the things you know, Medea, in planning and contriving”).

\(^{317}\) Compare the words of Seneca at \textit{De Tranquillitate Animi} 17.11, relating to poetic creation: 
\begin{quote}
Cum vulgaria et solita contempsit instinctuque sacro surrexit excelsior, tunc denum aliquid cecinit grandius ore mortali
\end{quote}
(“When [the mind] has scorned common and customary things, and
moon (as in Virgil Eclogues 8.69, *deducere lunam*), Medea by comparison will bring down horrific constellations by her words. Bringing constellations back also implies a reversal of time, which witches are also capable of, as Medea later states of her past in 759, *temporum flexi vices* ("I have bent the courses of the seasons"); compare also Aeneid 4.487-9, in which the Masyllian witch professes to turn the stars backwards, *promittit...vertere sidera retro*. In this case it seems that evil serpents that had been effectively neutralized by their catasterism are now to live again.

Note how the Hydra’s descent is described by Medea (701-2):

> et Hydra et omnis redeat Herculea manu succisa serpens caede se reparans sua.

And let the Hydra, with every snake cut by Hercules’ hand, return, renewing itself by its own laceration.

Note the serpentine alliteration of *s* in 702. The tendency of the Hydra to renew itself through its own laceration is similar to Medea’s activation of her past criminal self; she also later sheds her own blood (807-11) in her (repeated) rites for Hecate’s sake. Medea even summons the snake from Colchis who guarded the golden fleece (703-4), thus specifically referencing one of her own past encounters with snakes.

While the snakes are summoned by her incantations, Medea appears to gather the noxious plants by her own hand. The extensiveness of the list of plants —some 19 different items, from locales far and wide—is part of the point; furthermore, as Fyfe (1983, 83) notes, the plants are often referenced according to their lands’ generative powers: *generat* (707), *fert* (708), *creat* (714), *viret* (717), *gignit* (719), and *aluit* (723); but, as Fyfe states, this fecundity is productive of death, especially in Medea’s hands. Medea’s access to so many botanic evils recalls the words of Euripides’ Medea, in which she says that she has many ways of death

has risen higher by divine inspiration, then at last it has sung something grander than of mortal voice”); see also *Medea* 906 quoted below.
(πολλὰς...θανασίμοις...όδοις, 376) for Creon, Creusa and Jason. One thinks also of the mille nocendi artes or thousand baneful arts, ascribed by Juno to Allecto in Aen. 7.337-8.\(^{318}\) In a similar vein, the nurse calls Medea a scelerum artifex (contriver of crimes) in 734.\(^{319}\)

At the end of the preparation of the brew, Medea then makes a dramatic entrance\(^{320}\) in order to begin an elaborate incantation and to complete the rite. She begins by invoking the spirits of the underworld, here in trochaic tetrameters (740-2):

Comprecor vulgus silentum vosque ferales deos
et Chaos caecum atque opacam Ditis umbrosi domum,
Tartari ripis ligatos squalidae Mortis specus.

I pray to the crowd of the dead, and you savage gods
and blind chaos and the dark home of shady Dis,
the caves of frightful Death bound to the banks of Tartarus.

As before in the prologue (9-12), Medea summons the powers of the underworld, now for her magical rites. While, in the context of magic, the closest analogue in the Aeneid is the prayers of the sacerdos enlisted by Dido, who invokes 300 gods, and Erebus, Chaos, and Hecate (Aen. 4.510-11), the closest linguistic parallel is Aen. 6.264-6, in particular as Virgil here, like Medea, speaks in the first person:

Di, quibus imperium est animarum, umbraeque silentes
et Chaos et Phlegethon, loca nocte tacentia late,
sit mihi fas audita loqui,

Gods, who hold supremacy over souls, and shades of the dead, and Chaos and Phlegethon, places widely silent with night,

\(^{318}\) Note also the mille aliis rebus that Ovid’s Medea adds to her brew at Met. 7.275.

\(^{319}\) The same phrase also appears in Seneca’s Troades 750, describing Ulysses (see chapter 4), and Phaedra 559, in Hippolytus’ description of the female; in the Medea, Creon earlier addresses Medea as malorum machinatrix facinorum (266) and Jason later calls her sceleris auctorem (979).

\(^{320}\) As Hine (175) notes, normally a rhesis in Senecan tragedy is spoken only by the narrator, in this case the nurse; thus Medea’s entry, after which she effectively usurps the nurse’s role, is unexpected at this point. Once again, Medea commandeers the action. See also Boyle (2014, cxi).
may it be proper for me to speak what has been heard,

Medea’s invocation, in comparison to Virgil’s, is laced with words which more fully bring out the horrific and detestable nature of the underworld: *vulgus, ferales, caecum, opacam,* and *squalidae.* More broadly, while Virgil adopts a tone of reverence, and hopes to express, in narrating Aeneas’ journey to the underworld, what is *fas,* Medea has more nefarious purposes. In 752-70, Medea rehearses her past abilities and efforts in magic, which she accomplished for Hecate. Hine and Boyle *ad loc.* note that this is akin to prayers that recount past gifts that have been offered to a deity, in effect asking *da quia dedi* (“Give because I have given”), but, in this case, Medea does not list her gifts, but her past acts of magic. Thus once again we find Medea using her past as a guide to the present/future.

After even more elaborate invocation of Hecate (771-816), during which Medea makes an offering of her own blood (806-11), Medea then calls on Hecate to tincture the gifts for Creusa with the prepared poison, now in anapestic meter (817-21):

\[
\text{Tu nunc vestes tinge Creusae}
\]
\[
\text{quas cum primum sumpserit, imas}
\]
\[
\text{urat serpens flamma medullas.}
\]
\[
\text{Ignis fulvo clusus in auro}
\]
\[
\text{latet obscurus,}
\]

Now tincture the clothes for Creusa, so that, when she first puts them on, a creeping flame may burn her deepest marrow. The fire encased within the tawny gold hides, shrouded,

Medea’s malevolent intentions for Creusa have an intriguing overlap, I argue, with *Aeneid 4.66-69,* in which Virgil describes Dido’s passion for Aeneas:

\[321\] Note that Ovid’s Medea at *Met. 7.199-214* also lists her past magic feats in preparation for rejuvenating Aeson. At points, Ovid’s Medea uses the present tense (i.e. “this is what I do” not “did”), whereas Seneca’s Medea uses only the past tense in 752-70.
Meanwhile a flame devours
her delicate marrow, and a silent wound lives in her breast.
Unhappy Dido burns and wanders, raving, through the whole
of the city,

Here the metaphoric “flame of love” for Dido becomes, in Seneca, an actual flame that will kill
Creusa; note the appearance at line end of the phrase flamma medullas in both passages.322

Seneca thus reifies a vivid Virgilian metaphor, placing it in the shocking scenario of murderous
revenge. As in the phrase caeco igni in Aen.4.2 discussed above, Dido’s fire is hidden within
due to her sense of pudor, whereas the flame in Creusa’s gifts is deceptively hidden for purposes
of revenge. The intertext is also rendered complex by the fact that Dido too had fatally received
gifts from Aeneas and the Trojans in Aen. 1.647-55 and 709-11, which were delivered by Cupid
in the guise of Ascanius. Venus in her treachery specifically made use of Aeneas’ well-
intentioned gifts in order to fire Dido with love, as Virgil states (1.659-60):

donisque furentem
incendat reginam atque ossibus implicet ignem.323

322 Boyle ad loc. notes the allusion, and terms it a parody of erotic language. Virgil’s wording
here, as before, seems much indebted to Catullus, as noted by Pease and Austin ad loc.,
including the description of Ariadne’s passion for Theseus at 64.92-3: cuncto concepit corpore
flammam / funditus atque imis exarsit tota medullis (“in her whole body, she conceived the flame
and burned entirely in her deepest marrow”); there are also close overlaps at Catullus 35.14-15,
45.15-16, 66.23, and 100.7. Virgil also uses similar language at Aen. 8.389-90 when Vulcan is
aroused by Venus (accepit solitam flammam notusque medullas / intravit calor, “he received the
customary flame and the usual heat entered his marrow”) and at Georgics 3.271, on the power
of amor over animals (avidis ubi subdita flamma medullis, “when the flame is applied to their
greedy marrow”). On the Senecan side, at Sen. Agamemnon 132, Clytemnestra describes her
conflicting emotions, including dolor, timor, and cupidio, thus: flammae medullas et cor exurunt
meum (“the flames burn my marrow and my heart”).
323 See also Aen. 7.354-6, describing the effect of the snake that Allecto hurled at Amata: prima
lues…/…ossibus implicat ignem / necdum animus toto percepit pectore flammam (“At first the
and that by the gifts [Cupid] 
might set the raging queen aflame, and weave fire into her bones.

As before, Virgil’s text can be read as allusive of the gifts found in Euripides; the idea of the young son (Cupid/Ascanius) bearing the gifts seems in particular an allusion to Euripides’ Medea, in which the sons of Medea bear the gifts to Glauce (969-73 and 1136-55). But Seneca specifically reinvents the Virgilian precedent through the close verbal echo – and by making Dido’s fire real.324 On a deeper level, Seneca’s Medea redeploy the elements that were the undoing of Dido, her literary comrade in abandoned love, in order to craft her victory. While Dido is a casualty of future Rome, and of the constraints put upon Aeneas, Seneca’s Medea, as will be seen further, upends the course of history itself through her magic, and her will.

Toward the end of her invocation, Medea includes more lurid imagery of a similar nature (832-39):

Adde venenis stimulos, Hecate, 
donisque meis semina flammae condita serva:

835 fallant visus tactusque ferant, 
meet in pectus venasque calor, 
stillent artus ossaque fument 
vincatque suas flagrante coma nova nupta faces.

Add spurs to the poisons, 
Hecate, and for my gifts 
keep the seeds of flame hidden. 
May they deceive sight, and endure being touched, 
may their heat pass into her chest and veins, 
may her limbs drip and her bones smoulder, 
and may the new bride outdo her wedding torches 
by her burning hair.

infection…weaves fire into her bones, and not yet has her spirit felt the flame throughout her breast”).

324 Note also that the gifts that Seneca’s Medea sends to Creusa include a palla and a monile (570-3), as do Aeneas’ gifts to Dido (Aen. 1.648-55).
The phrase *semina flammae* in 834 is Virgilian\(^{325}\), used at *Aen.* 6.6-7 to indicate the sparks derived from flint that the newly arrived Trojans seek out in Cumae (*quaerit pars *semina* *flammae* / *abstrusa in venis silicis*), and imitated by Ovid at *Met.* 15.347. Once again we find Seneca adopting Virgilian phrasing for more nefarious ends. Lines 836-7 contain more imagery that seems to suggest the *calor* of love, as in *Aen.* 8.390, noted above, but is actually horrific. Lastly, the notion of Creusa outdoing her own wedding torches in terms of fire has a close referent in Ovid *Heroides* 12.180\(^{326}\) in which Medea wishes similarly for Creusa: *flebit et ardores vincet adusta meos!* (“she will weep and, set on fire, will outdo my love!”). Seneca and Ovid thus share the wicked double entendre of the fire of love and actual fire; but the Senecan Medea applies the idea to a more strictly marital setting through the reference to faces or wedding torches.\(^{327}\) In fact, the mention of wedding torches (faces) and hair (coma) on fire in 838-9 also suggests the portent of Lavinia’s hair catching fire at *Aeneid* 7.71-77:

\[
praeterea, castis adolet dum altaria *taedis*,  
et iuixa genitorem astat Lavinia virgo,  
visa (nefas) *longis* comprendere *crinibus* ignem  
atque omnem ornatum flamma crepitante cremari,  
regalisque accensa *comas*, accensa coronam  
insignem gemmis; tum fumida lumine fulvo  
involvi ac totis Volcanum spargere tectis.
\]

Furthermore, while the maiden Lavinia stands near her father and he kindles the altars with hallowed torches,\(^{328}\) she seemed—horror—to catch fire in her long hair, and to burn in all her headgear with crackling flame, her royal hair ablaze, ablaze her crown studded with gems; then, smoking, to be enveloped in

\(^{325}\) Costa and Hine *ad loc.*  
\(^{326}\) Németi (2003, 260-1).  
\(^{327}\) Furthermore, Davis (1993, 193) notes that Medea’s language in 838-9 (*vincat* etc.) is an ironic reformulation of the chorus’ earlier prayer that Creusa might outdo other wives in her beauty (*vincat *femina coniuges*, 91).  
\(^{328}\) Either Latinus or Lavinia can be taken as the subject of *adolet*; here I follow Horsfall *ad loc.* in making Latinus subject.
yellow flame and to scatter fire in the whole palace.

As the portent is interpreted, Lavinia is to be married to Aeneas, the *externus gener* (7.98), but such a marriage will also involve war (80). What is here a vision in Virgil becomes a frightful reality for Seneca’s Creusa;\(^{329}\) further note that the idea of the fire from Lavinia spreading to the whole palace in 7.77, a metaphor for the coming war, is actually what happens after Creusa catches fire in Seneca’s *Medea*, as briefly reported by the messenger at the beginning of act 5;\(^{330}\) this is in contrast to Euripides’ *Medea*, where the fire does not spread beyond Glaucce and Creon.\(^{331}\)

**Medea Virgo**

In act 5, Medea dominates as well; she finally completes her unspeakable revenge, in the process delivering “the longest and most complex monologue in Senecan tragedy” (895-977).\(^{332}\)

A messenger has just very briefly reported the deaths of Creon and Creusa and the ensuing conflagration (879-90), thanks to Medea’s deceptive gifts. When the nurse advises Medea to flee into exile as quickly as possible, given the recent developments, Medea replies (893-99):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Egone ut recedam? si profugissem prius,} \\
\text{ad hoc redirem. nuptias specto novas.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

895 quid, anime, cessas? sequere felicem impetum. 

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{pars ultionis ista, qua gaudes, quota est?} \\
\text{amas adhuc, furiose, si satis est tibi} \\
\text{caelebs Iason. quaere poenarum genus}
\end{align*}
\]

\(^{329}\) Hosidius Geta in his cento *Medea* actually has Medea quote *Aen*. 7.75 and 77 at 422-3 when she describes the horrific death of Creusa. 

\(^{330}\) Lines 885-7, *avidus per omnem regiae partem furit / ut iussus ignis; iam domus tota occidit, / urbi timetur* (“the greedy fire, as if ordered, rages through every part of the palace; already the whole structure has collapsed, and there is fear for the city”), and 890: *magis ardet ignis; ipsa praesidia occupat* (“the fire burns greater; it attacks the very fortifications”).

\(^{331}\) Note also that there appears to be a significant fire in the wake of Dido’s death, as reported in *Aen*. 5.3-7.

\(^{332}\) Boyle 2014, c.
haud usitatum

I retreat? If I had fled previously,
I would return for this. I am watching a strange marriage.
Why, mind, do you hesitate? Follow your successful attack.
How small is this part of your revenge that you are enjoying?
You are still in love, raging one, if a widowed Jason
is enough for you. Seek a type of revenge that is
not customary

Here Medea appears to cast the deaths of Creusa and Creon as a strange marriage (894) which
she enjoys watching. What does this mean? I argue, as suggested previously, that their deaths
constitute an annulment, in Medea’s mind, of her own marriage to Jason. Remember that in lines
37-40 of the prologue Medea had imagined herself as a fury-like pronuba to Jason’s new
marriage, and in doing so, she was assuming the role that the Furies had assumed in her own
earlier marriage to the Argonaut, as stated in 13-17. In this her role again is similar to Juno’s
infernal spoiling (or delaying) of Aeneas’ and Lavinia’s marriage, as Juno herself expressed it to
Lavinia (Aen. 7.317-22). Furthermore, the idea of caelebs Jason in 898 suggests that Jason no
longer has a wife – neither Creusa nor Medea. At the same time, Medea activates maius nefas
language (pars ultionis…quota est, 896; satis, 897; haud usitatum, 899) as she steels herself to
commit a crime that is even greater than her recent one. This instance is particularly dramatic, in
that those who know the story of Medea can foresee where she is headed, namely infanticide.
Note that in Euripides’ play Medea decides to kill her children, and openly states so to the
chorus, well before Glaucce and Creon are dead (790-806); whereas Seneca and his Medea
structure the revenge as a series of crimes, the latest attempting to outdo the last. This allows for
the passionate soliloquizing found in Medea’s final monologue. Medea continues with more
horrific self-exhortation (902-14):

incumbe in iras teque languentem excita
penitusque veteres pectore ex imo impetus
violentus hauri. quidquid admissum est adhuc,
pietas vocetur. hoc age! en faxo sciant
quam levia fuerint quamque vulgaris notae
quae commodavi scelera. prolusit dolor
per ista noster: quid manus poterant rudes
audere magnum, quid puellaris furor?

Medea nunc sum: crevit ingenium malis:
iuvat, iuvat rapuisse fraternum caput,
artus iuvat secuisse et arcano patrem
spoliasse sacro, iuvat in exitium senis
armasse natas.

Bear down on your anger, and rouse up your weary self,
and violently draw on the old impulses within, from your deepest
heart. Whatever has been committed thus far,
let it be called piety. Do this! Behold, I will make them understand
how trifling and how common were the crimes that I did to oblige
others. Through those, my resentment practiced;
what great thing could inexperienced hands dare,
what could a girl’s rage?
Now I am Medea: my capacity has grown by evils:
it is a delight, a delight to have torn off my brother’s head,
a delight to have cut off his limbs, and to have robbed my father of
his secret relic, a delight to have armed the daughters for the death
of their father.

The language of comparative crime becomes so insistent at this point that one wonders if there
can ever be an act of revenge that is unquestionably *maius* and thus satisfying; the same question
is posed by Atreus in Seneca’s *Thyestes* (1053-68). Again we see Medea’s drive to renew her
past criminal self (*veteres impetus*, 903) as well as to outdo that self. Her famous declaration in
910, *Medea nunc sum*, again suggests the metapoetic aspect of the striving for *maius nefas*. As
Gill (1987, 32) well notes of this line: “Medea’s statement, while first-personal in form, takes on
a quasi-third-personal force: she is not simply saying ‘now I am myself,’ but ‘now I am
MEDEA’ (that is, ‘now I am living up to the *persona* implied by that name’).” Her apparent
knowledge of herself across the poetic tradition allows her to strive to live up to her other (past)
incarnations and also outdo them. Thus again we see her obsessive return to her own past in 911-14, as she again recounts her past crimes, but this time with a sense of delight at the past. Her present criminality confirms that of her past, and vice versa. The drive to create a maius nefas seems based on a need to create difference or distinction in a world that is mostly static over time.

Shortly after these lines, Medea comes to the realization of what she must do, namely kill her sons, which she labels the ultimum scelus (923). In the process, she states (917-19):

\[
\text{nescioquid ferox}
\text{decrevit animus intus et nondum sibi}
\text{audet fateri.}
\]

My savage mind has decided on something within and does not yet dare to acknowledge it to itself.

While these lines can be meaningfully compared to those of Atreus at Sen. Thyestes 267-9, quoted above, there are for both passages Ovidian and Virgilian precedents. In Ovid’s Heroides 12.212, at the end of her letter, Medea announces: nescioquid certe mens mea maius agit! (“My mind is up to something greater, surely!”). The thing that is maius will be her revenge against Jason, just as in Seneca’s play. As Barchiesi (2001, 113) and Hinds (2011,15) suggest, the thing maius that Ovid’s Medea first contemplates in the Heroides will be enacted in

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333 At the same time, Fitch (2002, 423 n.43) notes that the name Medea means “the thinking/inventive woman,” as derived from μηδος or μητς; hence when Medea says crevit ingenium malis she may be seen to be playing across languages, through the connection between ingenium and μηδος/μητς. See also Fitch and McElduff (2008, 164-5).
334 Nescioquid animo maius et solito amplius / supraque fines moris humani tumet / instatque pigris manibus; see also Sen. Hercules Furens 1148, spoken by Hercules: nescioquid animus grande praesagii malum (“My mind has a presentiment of some great evil”) and Oedipus 925: secum ipse saevus grande nescioquid parat (“He himself cruelly prepares something great”).
a loftier, *maius* genre, namely tragedy, in Ovid’s own lost *Medea*,\(^{335}\) whereas for the Senecan Medea, as has been argued, that which is *maius* is accomplished not by shifting genres, but rather by rivaling past crimes as narrated in earlier poetry of multiple genres. Consider also the emphasis on Medea’s mind in fashioning these horrors, as in lines 45-7 of the prologue: *effera ignota horrida...mala / mens intus agitat.* (“My mind is contemplating wild, unheard-of, horrific evils”). In light of this, it is also important to recognize one essential Virgilian precedent, pointed out by Tarrant (1985, 129) in the context of the *Thyestes* quote above: *Aen.* 9.186-7, in which Nisus explains to Euryalus his thoughts:

\[
\text{aut pugnam aut *aliquid* iamdudum invadere *magnum mens agitat* mihi, nec placida contenta quiete est.}
\]

For a long time my mind has been planning to undertake a battle or something great, and is not content with peaceful quiet.

The strong intention of Nisus to achieve something great in warfare is realized that night when he and Euryalus kill the sleeping enemy and then die themselves. At the end of the Nisus and Euryalus episode, Virgil famously addresses the heroes and associates their eternal fame with the legacy of his poem,\(^{336}\) thus implying that they did in fact achieve *aliquid magnum*. In turn, it seems likely that Ovid’s and Seneca’s Medeas remember the words of Nisus, and thus attempt to fashion their own literary fame, in imitation of the Virgilian heroes, in their own ways. But while Ovid’s Medea makes a clever intertextual point about a shift in genre, Seneca’s Medea takes the Virgilian pattern to a more specifically frightful and nefarious setting, as the thing she

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\(^{335}\) Williams (2012) argues that the *nescioquid maius* mentioned at *Heroides* 12.212 is also enacted by Medea in book 7 of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*.

\(^{336}\) *Aen.* 9.446-9: *fortunati ambo! si quid mea carmina possunt, / nulla dies umquam memori vos eximet aeo* etc. (“Both fortunate! If my poetry can do anything, no day will ever remove you from the memory of time” etc.) Seneca actually quotes these lines to Lucilius at *Epistulae Morales* 21.5, promising that, like Nisus and Euryalus, both Seneca and Lucilius will have long-lasting literary fame through his letters, similar to Cicero and Atticus, and Epicurus and Idomeneus (friend of Epicurus), as Seneca himself explains at *EM* 21.3-8.
is contemplating is nothing less than killing her own innocent children. Thus the Virgilian epic
language is frightfully adapted by Seneca’s Medea in order to characterize her *maius nefas*.

However, Medea complicates the nature of her *ultimum scelus* in the following part of
her speech. After the moment that Medea fully grasps her plan for killing the children (922-25),
she suddenly and surprisingly has a moment of hesitation,\(^{337}\) saying that her motherly feelings
return (926-30). In this context, she contemplates *scelus* past and present (931-6):

\[
\text{incognitum istud facinus ac dirum nefas} \\
\text{a me quoque absit. quod scelus miseri luent?} \\
\text{scelus est Iason genitor et \textit{maius scelus}} \\
\text{Medea mater – occidant, non sunt mei;} \\
\text{percant, mei sunt. crimine et culpa carent,} \\
\text{sunt innocentes, fateor: et frater fuit.}
\]

Let this unparalleled atrocity and horrid crime
be absent from even me. Wretched ones, what crime will they atone for?
The crime of having Jason as father, and, a greater crime,
Medea as mother. Let them die, they are not mine;\(^{338}\)
let them perish, they are mine. They are free of blame and guilt,
they are innocent, I admit; and so was my brother.

Despite Medea’s wavering, there is a cold resolution about these lines, as Medea acknowledges
her fundamentally criminal nature. Note that the phrase *dirum nefas* in 931 is not attested before
Virgil, as spoken by the dream vision of Mercury, urgently warning Aeneas of the threat posed
by Dido in *Aen. 4.563* (*illa dolos \textit{dirumque nefas} in pectore versat*, “she is contemplating in her

\(^{337}\) Medea actually hesitated before, while planning her revenge, at 137-42, wherein she
questions whether Jason is truly to blame; but in that case, she does not give up on her plans, but
temporarily intends to focus her revenge on Creon, whom she briefly blames for everything
(143-49). Medea’s hesitation in act 5 is more striking because she has throughout the play
indicated that this is where she is headed. However, note that Euripides’ Medea famously
hesitated before committing infanticide (1040-58).

\(^{338}\) Medea had just reasoned to herself (921-4) that she can kill the children because they in effect
are no longer hers, given Jason’s marriage to Creusa.
heart trickery, and a horrid crime”). While Medea’s and Dido’s situations are parallel in the extremity of their emotions, note that Dido’s dirum nefas is either not achieved or ambivalent, in that, as stated above, Virgil does not indicate whether Dido ever achieved this; but the same will not be true for Medea. The phrase maius scelus / Medea mater in 933-4 again associates Medea with greater crime, again with strong alliteration of m. The comparison of the innocent sons to her brother Apsyrtus in 936 again brings Medea’s past to bear on the present: her criminal history can only repeat itself.

Medea’s wavering further intensifies in the following lines (937-44):

quid, anime, titubas? ora quid lacrimae rigant
variamque nunc huc ira, nunc illuc amor
diducit? anceps aestus incertam rapit;
940 ut saeva rapidi bella cum venti gerunt,
utrimque fluctus maria discordes agunt
dubiumque fervet pelagus, haud alter meum
cor fluctuat: ira pietatem fugat
iramque pietas –cede pietati, dolor.

Why do you hesitate, my soul? Why do tears dampen my face and why does anger now lead me, uncertain, this way, now love leads me that way? A double tide shifts me back and forth; as when swift winds wage fearsome battle, on both sides the conflicting waves drive the oceans and the unstable sea boils, not otherwise is my heart in confusion: anger puts love of family to flight, and love of family anger –yield to love of family, my pain.

Medea here presents a complicated image of her inner turmoil, including amor and pietas (both relating to the children) on one side, and ira and dolor (relating to Jason) on the other. The

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339 The phrase dirum nefas later appears twice in the Hercules Oetaeus (1232 and 1350) and its use in the Aeneid is imitated by Valerius Flaccus, Argonautica 2.657-8, and Silius Italicus, Punica 8.177.
extended sea-storm simile that Medea employs in 940-3 seems epic in its grandeur, and in fact there is a precedent at *Aen.* 4.531-2, describing Dido’s torment:

-ingeminant curae rursusque resurgens
*saevit amor* magnoque *irarum fluctuat aestu.*

Her concerns double, and again resurging love rages and tosses on the great tide of anger.

There is a clear overlap in language here; but Seneca develops the language of one Virgilian line into a complex simile of more than 4 lines. Note that Dido’s *amor* is for Aeneas, while Medea’s is for her children; Dido’s erotic torment is transferred to Medea’s inner debate over whether to commit infanticide.

Shortly thereafter, as her anguish over her children’s fate continues, Medea has a vision of the Furies, including Megaera, and her dead brother Apsyrtus approaching her (958-64). As Costa notes *ad loc.*, this development, which suggests madness on Medea’s part, has a counterpart in the simile within Dido’s dream at *Aen.* 4.469, where she is likened to Pentheus (*Eumenidum veluti demens videt agmina Pentheus*, “as when mad Pentheus sees the band of Furies”). When Medea recognizes her brother, she says (964-6):

*frater est, poenas petit.*
*dabimus, sed omnes.* *fige luminibus faces,*
*lania, perure,* *pectus en Furii patet.*

It is my brother, he seeks revenge.

---

340 Compare Clytemnestra’s use of the sea-storm simile for herself at Sen. *Agamemnon* 138-43, including the added image of Clytemnestra as a storm-tossed ship, whereas Medea, tellingly, only likens herself to the forces of water and wind. See Tietze-Larson (1994, 29 and 62) on epic similes in Senecan tragedy. For similar language in this play, see the nurse’s words in 392, quoted above, discussing Medea’s furor: *ubi se iste fluctus franget? exundat furor.*

341 As noted by Fantham (1975, 8-10) and Boyle *ad loc.* Besides these lines, there are also in the *Aeneid,* as noted by Pease *ad loc.*, 4.564 (*variosque irarum concitat aestus,* “she stirs up conflicting tides of anger,” Mercury’s description of Dido), and 12.486 (*vario nequiquam fluctuat aestu,* “in vain he wavers on a conflicting tide,” describing Aeneas).
We will pay it—but all of it.\textsuperscript{342} Fasten your torches in my eyes, mangle me, burn me—see, my breast lies open to the Furies.

Medea’s language in 965-6 has a precedent in Aen. 7.456-7,\textsuperscript{343} in which the Fury Allecto hurls her torch at Turnus:

\begin{verbatim}
facem iuveni conicet et atro
lumine fumantis fixit sub pectore taedas.
\end{verbatim}

She hurled a torch at the young man
and fixed in his breast the brand smoking with black light.

Here we find Medea wishing for herself what happened to the unwilling Turnus; note that Virgil uses \textit{lumen} to describe the light of the torch (\textit{atro lumine}) whereas Medea frightfully makes her \textit{lumina} (eyes) a potential target for the Fury’s torches. Nonetheless, Medea then immediately asks her brother to order the Furies to retreat, assuring him that she will use her own hand to achieve the revenge that they apparently seek (967-70); she then kills the first son, specifically as atonement for her brother Apsyrtus (\textit{victima manes tuos / placamus ista}, “by this victim I appease your shade” 970-1). Medea’s vision of Apsyrtus at this point in the drama may seem strangely timed, as she might more likely be haunted by her very recent victims, Creusa and Creon, than by her brother; but, as throughout the play, Medea has shown obsession with her earlier criminal past, in particular with her brother’s death, so the death of the first son is a kind of perverse repetition of and atonement for the death of Apsyrtus, as she understands it. But more broadly, Medea’s wavering of purpose in her last extended speech, from line 926 onwards—and later again at 988-90—lends a somewhat deflating or anticlimactic sense to the \textit{maius nefas} of killing her children. This is in notable contrast to the \textit{Thyestes}, as in that play Atreus

\textsuperscript{342} The \textit{omnes} can be taken as either accusative, as I have translated, or nominative, as in “We will pay it—but all of us,” i.e. Medea and the sons.

\textsuperscript{343} Ter Haar Romeny, 1887, 51.
never wavers in his purpose, but only wishes he could have been more sadistic in his revenge.\textsuperscript{344} We might even accuse Medea of attempting to justify her act by ascribing the agency to the Furies and Apsyrtus – a justification which seems weak, as she emerges as killer of both her brother and her child.\textsuperscript{345} But in the process, Seneca lends further complexity to his heroine, as she herself is led to question, for a moment, the basis for her actions.

After the first son is killed, Medea hears her enemies, including Jason, approaching, and decides to climb to the roof, accompanied by the one surviving son. Note that in Euripides there is not a similar development, as Medea in Euripides’ play only appears on the roof in her serpent chariot at the end, without any mention of her climbing to that place. In fact, Medea’s wording that describes her action of climbing to the roof (\textit{excelsa nostrae tecta conscendam domus}, “I shall climb to the high roof of our house,” 973) overlaps, I argue, with Dido’s final act of climbing, at the end of \textit{Aeneid} 4, onto her funeral pyre (\textit{altos / conscendit furibunda rogos} “full of rage, she climbs onto the elevated pyre” 4.645-6).\textsuperscript{346} In both cases, the act of elevating oneself creates a sense of the importance of what is to follow. But Dido climbs the pyre to kill herself, whereas Medea climbs the roof to kill her other son, to provide a means of flight, and, perhaps most importantly, to create a spectacle of herself and of her triumphant scelera.

Whereas the killing of the first son was mostly a deeply personal act on the part of Medea, the killing of the second son looks toward Medea’s wider reputation, as she herself states in 976-7:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Thy}. 1054-68, Atreus says that he wishes he had poured the hot blood from the dying sons straight from their wounds into their father’s mouth.
\textsuperscript{344} Gill (1987, 35) and Boyle (366) both understand Medea’s killing of the children as, in part, a form of self-punishment; that is, Medea also knowingly pays the penalty for killing her brother and perhaps for other crimes. I find it hard to accept this reasoning, as it would further compromise her revenge on Jason, especially considering the way that Medea expresses her accomplishment of this revenge at the very end of the play; see below.
\textsuperscript{345} This happens to be the only use of \textit{conscendo} in Senecan tragedy –thus perhaps the Virgilian influence (six times in the \textit{Aeneid}).
\end{quote}
non in occulto tibi est / perdenda virtus; approba populo manum (“Your excellence is not to be squandered in secret; prove to the people the power of your hand”).

Once Jason enters, calling on the Corinthians to help him in capturing Medea, whom he calls ipsam sceleris auctorem horridi (“the very doer of this horrid crime” 979), Medea, now apparently on the roof, speaks her most triumphant lines in the play (982-6):

Iam iam recepi sceptrum, germanum patrem,  
spoliumque Colchi pecus aureae tenent;  
rediere regna, rapta virginitas redit.

Now, now I have regained my scepter, my brother, my father,  
and the Colchians possess the fleece of the golden ram;  
my kingdom has returned, my stolen virginity has returned.  
O divine powers at last propitious, o festive day,  
o wedding day!

Medea asserts nothing less than a reversal of time and a return to her past that was taken away from her by Jason. The mention of the wedding day in 986 suggests that her own marriage to Jason has, paradoxically, been reversed, through the “strange wedding” (nuptias novas, 894) of Jason and Creusa, which was effectively consummated by Medea’s vengeful fire. Now Medea has regained her virginity, and all of her status before meeting the Argonauts, to the point that she imagines that the golden fleece has been returned to Colchis. Medea’s triumph can perhaps be taken further as a representation of a victory over “civilizing” Greek influence, as she claims to have erased the victory of the Greeks in retrieving the golden fleece, and to have upended any attempt by Jason to civilize her. Her virginity, more specifically, has been restored by killing her

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347 Seneca divides the murders of the sons into two short episodes, unlike in Euripides. See also the sequential killings of Thyestes’ sons by Atreus (Sen. Thy. 713-43) and the sacrifice of Astyanax followed by that of Polyxena, at the end of Seneca’s Troades (1068-1164). Such sequencing also suggests notions of maius nefas, as one crime seems to build upon, and perhaps outdo, the previous.
child. As Schiesaro (2003, 211) argues regarding the play as a whole, “Medea is, at a certain level of abstraction, a wish fulfilled, a compulsion satisfied against the requirements of logic and reality.” Medea’s ecstatic triumph here has an analogue in that of Cassandra at the end of Seneca’s *Agamemnon*, who also imagines that time is reversed, and Troy is restored, as discussed in chapters 3 and 4.\(^{348}\) The sense of repeating the criminal past is important for both characters, but whereas Cassandra is an observer, Medea herself wills and performs this repetition.

On line 984 (*rediere regna, rapta virginitas redit*), Wills (1996, 291) and Boyle *ad loc.* make the essential point that it is an allusion to Virgil *Eclogues* 4.6:

\[
\text{i am redit et Virgo, redeunt Saturnia regna,}
\]

Now also the Virgin returns, the reign of Saturn returns,

Both lines contain 3\(^{rd}\) person singular and plural forms of *redeo*, the form *regna*, and either *Virgo* or *virginitas*. While Virgil’s line goes from singular to plural forms, Seneca’s reverses that process, while also adopting a chiastic rather than alternating structure (i.e. verb-noun-noun-verb, instead of verb-noun-verb-noun); both poets use alliteration of *r*. While Virgil’s line signals the return of the peaceful golden age, complete with the *Virgo*, i.e. Justice or Δίκη,\(^{349}\) a golden age associated with the birth of a male child (*nascenti puero*, 8), Seneca’s line announces the return of Medea’s (criminal and savage) past, accomplished through her murder of her son and

\(^{348}\) Compare especially Cassandra’s words, quoted in chapter 3, at *Ag*. 730 (*Idaea cerno nemora*?), 758 (*fata se vertunt retro*), and 870 (*bene est, resurgis, Troia*). Note also that at *Ag*. 750-1 and 1011 Cassandra repeatedly uses *iuvat* to express unexpected delight, like Medea at *Med*. 911-13 quoted above. Boyle *ad loc.* also notes the important parallel in Sen. *Thyestes* 1096-9, where Atreus, in his moment of vengeful triumph, similarly imagines that sexual chastity has been restored, despite his wife’s past infidelity with his brother Thyestes: *liberos nasci mihi / nunc credo, castis nunc fidelem reddi tortis* (“Now I believe that the children were born mine, that now fidelity has been restored to the marriage bed,” 1098-9).

\(^{349}\) Clausen, 1994, 120.
others. The allusion could not be more pointed. Furthermore, while the irony of Medea’s thanks to the gods in line 985 (o placida tandem numina) is self-evident, given her acts of nefas, we can also draw on another Virgilian passage to reinforce the point. At Aen. 4.576-9, after the dream of Mercury encourages Aeneas to leave Carthage immediately, given the dangers of Dido, Aeneas expresses his allegiance to the god, and asks for future assistance as well (4.578-9):

advis, o placidusque iuves et sidera caelo / dextra feras (“may you be present and help propitiously, and may you bring favorable stars to the sky”). As it happens, these are the only two attested cases of the sequence o placid- in classical Latin. Again, there is complete reversal: the divine apparatus of Virgil’s epic apparently saves Aeneas from the dangerous woman, while Medea co-opts that divine apparatus for herself in her nefarious triumph over the faithless man.

After more hesitation on her part (988-90), Medea encourages herself to kill the second son in sight of Jason (spectator iste, 993). When Jason desperately pleads with her to kill him, not the son, she replies (1006-8):

Hac qua recusas, qua doles, ferrum exigam.  
I nunc, superbe, virginum thalamos pete,  
relinque matres.

Here where you forbid, where it pains you, I will drive the sword.  
Go now, proud one, seek out virgins’ bedrooms,

350 While this line of Virgil is not part of the Aeneid, the 4th eclogue has important connections to Virgil’s epic, particularly in a maius context, as it claims the status of maiora, or greater things, in line 1 (paulo maior canamus, “let us sing of things somewhat greater”), like the maius opus of the Aeneid (7.45); and in line 5 Virgil announces magnus ab integro saeclorum nascitur ordo (“a great order of the ages rises anew”), which again sounds like Virgil’s description of his epic at Aen. 7.44, quoted in chapter 2, maior rerum mihi nascitur ordo. Note that the 4th Eclogue also later contains language that strongly suggests temporal repetition, including mention of the Argo (34-6): alter erit tum Tiphs, et altera quae vehat Argo / delectos heroas; erunt etiam altera bella / atque iterum ad Troiam magnus mittetur Achilles (“then there will be another Tiphys, and another Argo which will carry chosen heroes; also there will be repeated wars, and again a great Achilles will be sent to Troy”).

351 Costa ad loc. notes the overlap between Seneca and Virgil here in terms of the use of placidus applied to a divinity.
abandon mothers.

To the sarcastic commands of Medea in 1007-08, inviting Jason to do again what he did to Medea, we can compare those of Dido spoken to Aeneas at *Aen*. 4.381:

\[
i, \text{ sequere Italiam ventis, pete regna per undas.}
\]

Go, aim for Italy by the winds, seek your kingdom over the waves.

Both passages contain three sarcastic imperatives in a row, including *i* and *pete*.\(^{352}\) Dido ridicules Aeneas’ epic future, whereas Medea makes incisive reference to Jason’s past. And while Aeneas will make it to Italy, Jason’s life is effectively over.\(^{353}\)

Medea continues her verbal taunting of Jason in the last lines of the play. When Jason says that killing one son is enough, she replies that even two is too small a number (1008-11); she even says that if she is by chance now pregnant with Jason’s child, she will abort the fetus with her own sword (1012-13). When, in frustration, he asks her to get the murder over with, she says she will take her time, as this is her moment (*meus dies est*, 1017). Once she has killed the second son, Medea addresses her *dolor* (1019-20): *plura non habui, dolor, quae tibi litarem* (“I had no more, my pain, which I could offer in sacrifice to you”). Her revenge on Jason has thus been exhaustive, but the question of whether she is truly satisfied is left somewhat hanging. In fact, at one point in her final speech to Jason, Medea reverts to simply repetitive language in describing her triumph to Jason (1021-22): *coniugem agnoscis tuam?*\(^{354}\) / *sic fugere soleo* (“Do you recognize your wife? In this way I am accustomed to flee.”) While Medea here makes a

\(^{352}\) Compare also Juno’s sarcastic words to an absent Hercules in Sen. *Hercules Furens* 89-90: *i nunc superbe, caelitum sedes pete / humana temne!* (“Go now, proud one, seek the abodes of the gods, disdain human affairs!”).

\(^{353}\) See also Medea’s sarcastic words to Jason in Ovid *Heroides* 12.204: *i nunc, Sisyphias, inprobe, confer opes* (“go now, shameless one, compare the wealth of Sisyphus [i.e. with all that I gave you as dowry]”).

\(^{354}\) See Fitch and McElduff (2008, 169) for different ways of understanding Medea’s question in this line.
clever point, in a nod to her metapoetic self, about her tendency to successfully flee at times when she has recently committed violent acts, as before in Colchis and Iolchus, this notion suggests that Medea is who she always is— is this something maius, or simple repetition? As suggested before, this is always an open question.

At the end of the play, Medea flees triumphantly into the sky aboard her winged chariot, but Jason, addressing her, famously gets the last word regarding this act of Medea’s (1026-7):

*Per alta vade spatia sublime aetheris, / testare nullos esse, qua veheris, deos* (“go through the lofty spaces of the sky on high, bear witness that, wherever you go, there are no gods”). While Medea’s miraculous upward movement suggests an apotheosis, Jason by contrast makes the point that her own capacity for nefas makes wherever she goes an essentially godless place.

Thus the fifth act is somewhat anticlimactic in that, first, Medea repeatedly expresses self-doubt, and second, her extended cruelty towards Jason within the final 30 lines is capped by Jason’s rather damning words that end the play. At the same time, there is no reason to question whether or not Medea actually triumphs, as she clearly does, most notably as expressed in her climactic speech in 982-94. While act 5 finally depicts Medea’s ultimate act of maius nefas, i.e. the killing of her own children, the rhetoric of maius nefas is strongly operative throughout the play, especially as spoken by Medea herself. In fact, the hint at the ambiguity within Medea’s

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355 Note that she still refers to herself as Jason’s coniunx.
356 As Littlewood (2004, 192) argues, “Medea leaves the stage to become not an Athenian [as in Euripides’ Medea] but a god.” Medea’s achievement of quasi-divine status at the end of the play is paralleled by that of Atreus toward the end of the Thyestes, who, after killing Thyestes’ sons and serving them to the father, in line 911 calls himself caelitum excelsissimum (“the most exalted of gods”).
357 Boyle (lxxxv) argues that in fact Jason is mistaken in his words, i.e. that Medea has shown a steady allegiance with gods such as Hecate and Titan throughout the play, as first expressed in the prologue. However, Medea’s earlier declaration that she will attack the gods (invadam deos, 424) could be seen as justification for Jason’s words. Hine (31-3) tentatively offers several ways of understanding Jason’s last words, one being an implication that “the powers that control a world in which a Medea can succeed so abundantly have no moral right to be called gods.”
ultimate revenge on Jason suggests, once again, the ultimate difficulty of understanding Medea’s acts as *maiora*, as opposed to seeing them as essentially repetitive. Seneca resists an easy conclusion on this topic, as the words of his Medea herself suggest, from her prologue to her final triumphant exit from the stage at the end of act 5.

5.3 Conclusion.

Seneca’s *Medea* provides an impressively sustained exploration of the Senecan tragic theme of *maius nefas*. Much of what makes Medea’s crimes *greater* is through comparison with the earlier poetic tradition, notably Virgil’s *Aeneid*. While scholars have noted the Senecan Medea’s debt to Virgil’s Dido, they have not explored this subject in depth, nor have they done so from a thematic perspective, such as has been offered here.

Medea is in many ways the arch villain –and heroine –of Senecan tragedy. Her domination of the entire play, including her clever inversion or reinvention of Stoic ideals, her upending of the progress of Greek civilization as represented by the Argo, and her tour-de-force performance of magic and murder in acts 4 and 5 respectively make her a force of poetry not to be ignored. Medea’s victories in the play completely overshadow the delays of Juno and the curses of Dido in Virgil’s epic. As Medea wickedly and masterfully reconfigures her poetic predecessors’ language and struggles, so does Seneca reinvent Virgil.
Conclusion.

This study has investigated some of the profound overlaps in language, themes, and subject matter between Senecan tragedy and Virgil’s *Aeneid*. A consideration of these overlaps, as has been argued, helps us understand Senecan tragedy and, indirectly, Virgil’s epic. Most earlier scholarship has been content to list the overlaps between Seneca’s tragedies and Virgil’s *Aeneid* without much comment, thus obscuring the significance of the language transfer, or just taking that transfer for granted; this study thus helps shed further light on the sophisticated relationship between Seneca’s and Virgil’s texts. The study of Putnam (1995c) is, to date, the only extended discussion of the interaction between Senecan tragedy and Virgil’s *Aeneid*. In comparison to Putnam and others, this dissertation adopts a new approach, both in its thematic focus and in its sustained consideration of specific overlaps in language. On both counts, this study allows for new readings of Senecan tragedy, in particular the *Troades*, *Agamemnon*, and *Medea*, including possible allusions to Virgil that have not been fully considered or mostly overlooked.

In terms of the three themes that have been explored in this dissertation, repetition of the past, victor and vanquished, and *maius nefas*, Seneca has been seen to rework Virgilian thematic precedents and greatly expand upon them, in effect giving center stage to themes that were mostly understated in the *Aeneid*. While the theme of temporal repetition in Senecan tragedy has been explored by scholars such as Schiesaro (2003), it has not to date been explored in close and sustained comparison with Virgil, and with Virgil’s own treatment of the same theme, as has been done here. As noted in chapter 4, the theme of victor and vanquished in both Seneca and Virgil has been overlooked by scholars; my focus on this issue offers a new way of reading significant parts of Seneca’s *Troades* and *Agamemnon*. The same can be said for the theme of
maius nefas, and my focus on the Medea in chapter 5; besides Seidensticker (1985), this theme, essential to Senecan tragedy, has not been discussed at length by scholars, and on the Medea, as noted, most scholarship has preferred to compare Seneca’s Medea to her incarnations in Ovid, in the process overlooking her undeniable Virgilian poetic precedents, most notably Dido and Juno.

These three themes have been seen to overlap considerably across plays: all three are strongly operative in the Troades and Agamemnon, and two (repetition of the past and maius nefas) are prominent in the Medea. This overlap can be understood through the further thematic framework of revenge: these three plays, as has been discussed, are very much about revenge. Revenge, as has been seen, can lead one to wish to repeat a past criminal action, as well as outdo it, by creating a maius nefas; revenge can also lead to a shifting of identities between victor and vanquished, as victims transform themselves into victors, and vice versa. The theme of revenge is also prominent in the Aeneid, as has been argued; indeed, Seneca’s characters and choruses often specifically frame acts of revenge through subtle yet pointed allusion to precedents found in Virgilian epic.

The three Senecan plays that I have investigated in this study all engage repeatedly with the issue of seafaring; the sailing of the Greek fleet after Troy’s destruction is prominent in both the Agamemnon and Troades, as is the sailing of the Trojan fleet after Troy’s destruction in the Aeneid, and the expedition of the Argo looms ominously throughout the Medea. Seafaring in Roman culture, as has been seen, is problematic, as it is often understood as fundamentally criminal or subversive; hence it is very telling that the fleet of Aeneas ultimately transforms itself into nymphs (Aen. 9.77-122), as seafaring seems to be represented as one of the distractions Aeneas had to leave behind in order to achieve his Italian victory. By contrast, Seneca does not
leave the issue of seafaring behind, as it is presented as evidence for the fundamentally criminal and transgressive nature of human behavior.

I have offered an essentially intertextual approach to understanding these three themes. Repetition of the past involves a repetition and reactivation of earlier texts; repeating Troy comes to mean repeating earlier poetry, so that the literary tradition, in Seneca’s hands, can seem to form a closed world that one cannot escape, but only embrace. The theme of victor and vanquished displays intertextual blending of an often disconcerting sort, as different past poetic models, both Greek and Latin, are assimilated within and across texts. The theme of *maius nefas* is the most programmatic of the three themes, because *maius nefas* has an aspect of human intention, namely the intention to commit a greater crime, while human intention is less prominent in the other two. Medea, in her Senecan play, by realizing her *maius nefas*, realizes the play; and in so doing she and Seneca attempt to rival the poetic past.

Specific allusions to Virgilian epic in Senecan tragedy have been seen to be significant for a number of reasons. On one level, the allusions display Seneca’s strong familiarity with the *Aeneid*, and provide further evidence of the highly allusive nature of the tragedies, and of Roman poetry in general. Beyond that, a variety of specific effects are achieved through the poetic echoes. On a circumscribed lexical level, Seneca sometimes uses specific words or phrases borrowed from Virgil, but in the process activates different meanings for those words. At the level of a specific subject or *topos*, Senecan tragic language often expands on an earlier Virgilian treatment, including more details or examples; on the other hand, it at times condenses the Virgilian language to make a clever point. More broadly speaking, Seneca frequently creates a sense of reversal by placing Virgilian language in a new context, one that erases or transforms the signification of the language as it previously existed in the epic. Within this realm of
reversal, Senecan characters at times appropriate the language of their political enemies as represented in the *Aeneid*. Equally importantly, Senecan tragedy often resituates Virgilian language in a more horrific and more criminal setting, and this contrast highlights the horrific and criminal preoccupations of Seneca *tragicus*.

Senecan characters often appear aware of the *Aeneid*; they employ the language of Virgil’s epic in order to explain their predicaments and to defend their thoughts and actions. Thus Seneca’s Medea and Cassandra rewrite or reframe their own stories based on their knowledge of Dido’s tragedy (*Aeneid* 1 and 4) and the fall of Troy (*Aeneid* 2) respectively. By contrast, figures such as Hecuba and Andromache in the *Troades* find little consolation in Aeneas’ story of survival and triumph, and so their echoes of Virgilian language become all the more stark and horrific. The characters Medea, Cassandra, and Hecuba have been argued to have the most commanding, quasi-authorial aspect in these plays; by contrast, it would be difficult to identify characters in the *Aeneid* whose perspectives dominate in the same way, except perhaps for gods such as Jupiter and Juno. In further contrast, the gods do not appear as characters in these three tragedies; the divine providence that guides Aeneas and the Trojans is absent from these plays of Seneca. What divine forces there are in Seneca’s plays are consistently hostile and destructive, and characters such as Medea and Ajax seem openly defiant of the gods.

In terms of genre, this study has argued for a vigorous intergeneric dialogue between Senecan tragedy and Virgilian epic. Seneca’s admiration for and extensive knowledge of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, as attested in his prose works, necessarily led to his use of Virgilian epic language in the tragedies he composed. Typically epic elements found in Senecan tragedy, including extended ecphrases, extended similes, and lengthy catalogues, are evidence for the
influence of Virgil’s epic. At the same time, specific allusions to the *Aeneid* often point out, in striking fashion, the overall distance between Senecan tragedy and Virgilian epic, particularly as the *Aeneid* often emphasizes survival and political triumph sanctioned by the gods, whereas Senecan tragedy emphasizes death and dissolution within a profoundly criminal world. Furthermore, Senecan tragedy shows a strong debt to poetry of various poets working in diverse genres, most notably the Augustans Virgil, Ovid, and Horace, but also Euripides. By drawing on diverse sources for his plays, Seneca was following Virgil’s lead, especially as the *Aeneid* engages with various forms of earlier poetry, including tragedy.

Implicit in Seneca’s reworking of Virgilian epic material is the political reality of Seneca’s time versus that of Virgil. Repetition of the past denies the political transformation that the principate represented. As seen in Seneca’s plays, this repetition involves a constantly recurring cycle of violence, motivated by dangerous passions, such as *furor*. Bloodstained *furor* was supposed to be contained by Augustus’ victory, according to Jupiter’s prediction at *Aen.* 1.294-6; therefore its resurgence in Senecan tragedy (and also later in the *Aeneid*) is troubling. Such a cycle may also allow for further instances of emulative acts of *nefas*, which is also problematic for the same reason. Similarly, the theme of victor and vanquished, as explored in Senecan tragedy, both confirms some of the tensions found in the *Aeneid* and pushes these tensions to the point that political victory may seem ambivalent or even inherently criminal.

Philosophy, in the form of Stoicism, has also been interpreted as part of Senecan tragedy’s dialogue with Virgilian epic. Seneca’s use of Virgilian Stoic language reflects his admiration for certain passages from the *Aeneid*, as is also seen in his prose works. In the case of the *Medea*, this appropriation is paradoxical, in that Medea’s Stoic tendencies are at odds with her submission to passions such as *dolor* that at times threaten to overwhelm her, and as her
activation of Stoic reasoning is ultimately antisocial, in contrast to that of Aeneas and his allies. As for the *Troades* and the *Agamemnon*, the brave resolve of Astyanax, Polyxena, Cassandra, and even Ajax in the face of death was seen to reflect Seneca’s own type of Stoicism that placed a great emphasis on surmounting the challenge of death; this emphasis is mostly absent from Virgil’s *Aeneid*.

This study has been limited in nature; in fact, any intertextual study must be so, as there are a potentially infinite number of intertexts to investigate, especially in the context of large bodies of work, such as Virgil’s *Aeneid* and Seneca’s tragedies. I have studied three plays of Seneca and how they intersect with the *Aeneid* according to three specific themes; therefore, much remains to be investigated on this subject. For example, a close study of Seneca’s *Hercules Furens* could further enlighten Seneca’s indebtedness to and reworking of Virgil, as that play has a clearly Virgilian backdrop, in particular through Juno’s hostile prologue, similar to her role in *Aeneid* books 1 and 7, and through the description of Hercules’ *katabasis* in act 3, which has sophisticated links with book 6 of the *Aeneid*. Furthermore, more study could be given to the reception of Virgil’s *Aeneid* in Seneca’s prose works as compared to that in his tragedies. Besides the themes that I have discussed, other possible focal points between the two poets to explore include issues of gender and both poets’ use of ecphrasis.

While there of course exists a great deal of scholarship on Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Senecan tragedy has to date been less fully studied than it deserves. Fortunately, scholarly attitudes toward Seneca *tragicus* have notably shifted in the last fifty years, in part thanks to Herington (1966); as a result, the plays are usually no longer seen as poorly constructed, overly bombastic, or essentially derivative of and inferior to Augustan poetry and Attic tragedy. Indeed, as this
study has shown, Senecan tragedy, like Virgil’s  *Aeneid*, is profoundly and complexly allusive, and this allusivity merits careful study in order to understand how Senecan tragedy works.
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