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The Superhuman Characters in the Prologues of Seneca's *Hercules Furens, Agamemnon*, and *Thyestes*

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This paper presents a new hypothesis concerning the prologues of Seneca's *Hercules Furens*, *Agamemnon*, and *Thyestes*. It provides an interpretive alternative to the controversies associated with the current reading tradition, which places superhuman and protatic characters speaking in the opening acts of these plays on the same level of fictional reality as other heroes, or subordinates them to figurative construction. According to the proposed hypothesis, the specific nature of these three scenes may be the result of applying the convention known, with little variation, from several other dramas in which the ghosts disturb the sleeping. The argumentation emphasises the paradigmatic nature of these opening scenes, which end with a formula setting them at the close of the night. It also points to the fact that in the light of the new assumptions, these prologues — redundant in their expository and anticipatory function — play an important role in structuring the dramatic action. Moreover, in the context of the events that follow them, their content can be explained in terms of the dream theory known from the rationalising philosophical discourses of antiquity. Finally, proposed reading of these scenes is based on the assumption of continuity between the discursive and poetic activity of the author.

Keywords: prologues of *Hercules Furens*, *Agamemnon*, and *Thyestes*; Seneca's plays.

1. The *status quaestionis*

The prologues of *Hercules Furens*, *Agamemnon*, and *Thyestes*, three Senecan plays distinguished by the presence of a superhuman character on stage, are sometimes discussed together (all three or two of them) in general systematic overviews (cf., e. g., Tarrant [1976] 2004, 157; Calder III 1976, 29–30; Picone 1984, 15; Monteleone 1991, 190–191; Mazzoli 1998, 123–132; Boyle 2017, LXXIX–LXXXI; 100). Heldmann (1974, 1–62) addresses them in some more detail, focusing on the points of difference between these opening scenes and the prologues of Attic tragedies, such as lesser connection with the action, limited self-presentational and expository role (fulfilled only indirectly and occasionally), and the presence of introspection. Other approaches pay more attention to the similarities in the semantic structure of the two of the prologues. Following Poe (1969, 365), Paratore (1982, 226–234) refers to Furia from the prologue of *Thyestes* as a manifestation of the nature of Atreus — who internalised the spirit of Tantalus — and to Atreus and Aegistus, the heroes of *Thyestes* and *Agamemnon*, as characters possessed by family demons. Still, the scholar does not elaborate on this idea and focuses instead on the chronology of the

works. According to Shelton (1975, 257–269; 1978, 17–25), time intervals in the prologues and in the other acts of *Hercules Furens* and *Thyestes* constitute the relation of representation, that is, in spite of being presented linearly, the events take place simultaneously. As a result, the audience observes the action from a dual perspective: superhuman in the prologue and human in the acts that follow. The function of the former is not to indicate that the driving force of the action is an external causal source (Juno or the ghost of Tantalus); rather, it serves to present the internal motivation of human characters (cf. also the remarks in Tarrant 1985, 85–86). However, as Monteleone (1991, 189–192) rightly points out, the argument of temporal simultaneity in *Hercules Furens*, *Thyestes*, and *Agamemnon* is untenable: the prologues and the acts that follow are explicitly set at night and during the day, respectively (cf., in particular, *Her. F.* 123–124 and 939–944; *Ag.* 53–56 and 908–909; *Thy*. 49–50, 120–121 and 776–778, 789–804).

Finally, most often, the prologues are interpreted independently, with the scenes involving ghosts and Juno read literally — as in, e. g., Anliker (1960, 11–19; 23–29; 45–48); Steidle ([1943–1944] 1972, 497–499); Billerbeck (1999, 30–38; 183–185 and 2014, 429–430); Lawall (1983, 6–15); Kugelmeier (2014, 493–494); Friedrich ([1967] 1972, 132–133); Tarrant ([1976] 2004, 157–159); and Bernstein (2017, 18–22; 63–64) — or as partly figurative structures. According to Fitch (1987, 21–33), the prologue scene in *Hercules Furens* — whose content to some extent follows from the adaptation of mythological material — introduces a divine perspective; at the same time, Juno anticipates the *furor* of Hercules, a mental state independent of any external source (similarly, e. g., Pratt 1983, 116–117; Zintzen [1971] 1972, 159–162; 195–196). Pratt (1983, 111–114) argues that in *Agamemnon*, the scene with the ghost of Thyestes thematises the key motif of the play: the error of attribution of the motivation behind human actions to the intervention of external forces, that is, Fortune and Fate. With regard to *Thyestes*, Knoche (1972, 488–489) believes that the prologue with the ghost of Tantalus and Furia speaks of the necessity of fate related to the primordial *nefas*. According to Monteleone (1991, 192–198), the ghost of Tantalus is a stage representation of the ancestral spirit released by anger. Boyle (1983, 210; 2017: LXXXII–LXXXIII; CIII–CV; 99–100) assumes that the ghost of Tantalus represents lust and *furor* — "both as ancestor of the Tantalid house and as emblematic human nefas, as signal mythic prototype of man" — and that the central motifs of the prologue, such as the cyclical evil, lust, and violence, define the nature of the action (a somewhat similar view is taken by Pratt 1983, 103; Mantovanelli 1992, 201–212; Davis 2003, 38–43; cf. also, e. g., Picone 1984, 13–36; Poe 1969, 365–366; and in relation to *Agamemnon*: Shelton 1983, 160–162).

Both lines of interpretation are to varying degrees controversial, each for different reasons. The weakness of literal readings[1] is essentially that they ignore the peculiarity of the above-mentioned characters appearing on the Senecan stage. They are regularly criticised by Seneca the philosopher,[2] and their presence is largely the responsibility of

[1] A similar argument is put forward by Monteleone 1991, 193.

[2] Cf., in particular: "I am not so foolish as to go through at this juncture the arguments which Epicurus harps upon, and say that the terrors of the world below are idle, — that Ixion does not whirl round on his wheel, that Sisyphus does not shoulder his stone uphill, that a man's entrails cannot be restored and devoured every day; no one is so childish as to fear Cerberus, or the shadows, or the spectral garb of those who are held together by naught but their unfleshed bones. Death either annihilates us or strips us bare. If we are then released, there remains the better part, after the burden has been withdrawn; if we are annihilated, nothing remains..." (Sen. *Ep*. 24. 18, trans. by Gummere 1918–1925); "Many thinkers have striven hard to increase its ill repute [of the death — I.S.]; they have portrayed the prison in the world below and the land

the playwright, in contrast to all references to such characters made by the heroes of the plays, where their subjective views are presented.[3] At the same time, it cannot be assumed that the author is constrained here by a plot schema or a mythological tradition.[4] Firstly, refraining from a more direct indication of the cause-effect relation between the divine intervention and Hercules' madness — in Euripides both events are presented within the same scene, see *Her*. 815–1006) — Seneca did not need to introduce Juno's intervention in a remote and clearly distinct prologue. Hercules' madness is presented unambiguously, especially as a result of the contrast between his words and Amphitryon's comments (*Her*. *F.* 939–1050), and the plot element 'Juno is thought to have brought madness upon Hercules' is first introduced by Hercules' (allusive) utterance (*Her*. *F.* 1036–1037) and then by Amphitryon (*Her*. *F.* 1200–1201; 1297). Secondly, this assumption would also be difficult to confirm in the case of the other two plays discussed here. The only surviving Greek tragedy about the fall of Agamemnon does not contain a prologue involving the ghost

overwhelmed by everlasting night, where 'Within his blood-stained cave Hell's warder huge / Doth sprawl his ugly length on half-crunched bones, / And terrifies the disembodied ghosts / With never-ceasing bark.' Even if you can win your point and prove that these are mere stories [*fabulas esse*] and that nothing is left for the dead to fear…" (*Ep*. 82. 16, transl.: Gummere 1918–1925); cf. also Sen. *Marc*. 12. 4; 19. 4; *Brev*. 16. 5; *V.B*. 26. 6; *Ira* 2. 35, 5; *Ep*. 115. 12.

[3] The distinction between the character and the narrator/poet is one of the themes in the reflection on literary genres in the antiquity; cf. "All poetry is divided into three types: dramatic, where only the characters [*personae*] speak; narrative, where only the poet [*poeta*] speaks; and mixed, where the poet and the character take turns in speaking" (Valerius Probus: Keil, p. 7); cf. also Diom. *Ars*: *GL* 1, p. 482; Arist. *Poet*. 1449b9–12. Educated participants in the literary life of the time may have been sensitive to this distinction; a similar sensitivity can be attributed to Seneca: although elsewhere he skilfully applies narrative and explicitly didactic techniques, in plays, he regularly juxtaposes different perspectives of the characters and the Chorus, avoiding unequivocal summaries. This applies, among others, to the problems discussed here (cf. also in relation to the structure of *Phoenissae* — Sapota, Słomak 2021, 77–89): references to the intervention of gods or ghosts, or to interactions with them, made by Senecan characters appear in recurrent situations or are combined with statements or events that put their credibility in question. The heroes are in the state of madness or act in a mania or out of lust for revenge, like Hercules (*Her*. *F*. 961–1038) and Medea (*Med*. 840–842; 951–971). In *Troades*, Talthybius' report of the appearance of the ghost of Achilles and the oracle announced by Calchas contrast with the sceptical ode of the Chorus and the remarks made by Ulysses, Andromache, and the Messenger (cf. *Tro*. 164–202; 360–408; 529–545; 750–754; 1126–1127). In *Thyestes*, the ode of the Chorus — which includes an attempt to explain the sudden sunset in terms of natural philosophy (cf. *Thy*. 828–878) — acts as a counterbalance to the interpretation of this and similar phenomena by Atreus (*Thy*. 262–266; 891–895), the Messenger (*Thy*. 696–705), and Thyestes (*Thy*. 1020–1021; 1035–1036; 1070), who take it as a symptom of gods' anger, threat, fear, or flight (the analogy between *Troades* and *Thyestes* is also noticed by Volk 2006, 188–189). In *Hercules Furens*, Hercules' account of his overcoming *noctis aeternae chaos* / *... et tristes deos* / *et fata* (*Her*. *F*. 610–612) and Theseus' report of his expedition to the underworld and the abduction of Cerberus from his cave (por. *Her*. *F*. 658–827) contrast with the murder of Megara and Hercules' children, which immediately follows in the sequence of events, and later with a passage of the ode of the Chorus, which — again — makes reference to Cerberus in the cave (*Her*. *F*. 1106–1107); the implausibility of Hercules' account of his conquest of the underworld is also noticed by Fitch 1987, 34–35. In *Oedipus*, Creon's account of the necromancy (cf. *Oed*. 569–658) — which confirms the oracle Oedipus refers to at the beginning of the play (*Oed*. 15–23) — contrasts with Oedipus' closing statement "I call on you, you, god of truth and voice / Of fate. My debt to fate was my father. / I'm a double parricide and guiltier / Than I feared: my crime destroyed my mother. / O lying Phoebus! I've surpassed the sinful fates" (Sen. *Oed*. 1042–1046, transl. Boyle 2011). The fact that we are talking here about a regular phenomenon supports the conclusion that Seneca deliberately emphasises the subjectivity of juxtaposed perspectives. This gives ground to the claim that the ontological status of ghosts and deities appearing in his characters' accounts is fundamentally different from that of ghosts and deities actually introduced on the stage.

[4] Cf. Fitch 1987, 32; cf. also, e. g., Billerbeck's (1999, 32–33) comments.

of Thyestes.[5] There is also no ancient *Atreus* or *Thyestes* surviving to modern times,[6] although the testimonium (Serv. *A*. 8, 130) concerning the genealogy of Atreus may suggest (provided that we assume that this kind of genealogy may be characteristic of the prologue) that the content of Act I of Accius' *Atreus* was different from that in Seneca's play.[7]

As for the shortcomings of the figurative readings, the most general objection concerns the omission of the paradigmatic nature of the discussed prologue scenes. When it comes to details, particularly questionable is the claim that Seneca thematises the idea of evil being inherited from generation to generation, and that he does so with approval. In a detailed commentary on *Thyestes*, Boyle (2017, 156–157; 219–220) lists Senecan maxims 'evil is hereditary' / 'man is born evil', mentioning only in passing that in his prose writings, Seneca expresses different views. It should be emphasised, though, that the examples cited by Boyle refer to subjective opinions of the characters, sometimes presented pejoratively, as in the case of Atreus (*Thy*. 313–314, cf. 250–254) and Laius (*Oed*. 626–630, cf. 644–645), overcome by fury; Phaedra, seeking approval for her lust (*Phaed*. 113–119); emotional Hippolytus (*Phaed*. 687–689, cf. 559–579); and Aegisthus, who justifies his planned revenge (*Ag.* 233). Some such opinions are contested within the same plays, cf., e. g., Oedipus' words and Jocasta's reply (*Oed*. 875–878 and 1019) and the dispute between Oedipus and Antigone on hereditary evil in *Phoenissae*.[8] By contrast, in his discursive writings, Seneca consistently[9] makes it clear that innate characteristics do not determine human capacity to choose between good and evil.[10] It is worth adding that the idea of

[5] Cf. testimonia and fragments of other Greek tragedies about Agamemnon: *TrGF* 1: Snell, Kannicht, p. 96–98; *TrGF* 2: Snell, Kannicht, p. 3. One can only speculate about the possible similarities between Seneca's *Agamemnon* and lost Roman plays with different titles, cf., e. g., Tarrant [1976] 2004, 13–14.

[6] Cf. fragments and testimonia of Greek works: *TrGF* 4: Radt, p. 162–163, 239–246; *TrGF* 5: Kannicht, p. 437–442, *TrGF* 1: Snell, Kannicht, p. 162, 209, 212, 219, 246–247, 254–255; cf. also Luzón Martín 2016, 127–148. On the lost Latin texts on this topic, see Lana 1958–1959, 293–385; La Penna [1972] 1979, 127–141; Leigh 1996, 171–197.

[7] This seems to be a reasonable assumption but — contrary to views presented, e. g., by Ribbeck 1875, 448, Lana 1958–1959, 294–299, Dangel 1995, 276, Boyle 2017, LXXIV–LXXV — is not obvious. This genealogy could have been presented in another part of the tragedy; in Seneca, its elements appear also in the ode of the Chorus (*Thy*. 136–175) and later in the Messenger's report (*Thy*. 659–664). According to the testimonium, the genealogy mentions Mercury (absent in Seneca), which may suggest that the lost fragment of the tragedy referred to his role in the discord between the Pelopides, but the claim that the prologue was actually delivered by Mercury (see Monteleone 1991, 187) must be treated as speculation. Also, the conclusion (La Penna [1972] 1979, 136, n. 1) that the prologues to Accius' *Atreus* and Seneca's *Thyestes* were similar — based on two short quotations of unknown origin, which mention Tantalus' punishment in the underworld (see Cic. *Tusc*. 1, 10; 4, 35) — is not verifiable; the fragments may come from a play or plays on any theme; e. g., in Seneca, brief references to the punishment of Tantalus also appear in: *Her*. *F*. 752–755; *Med*. 745; *Phaed*. 1232.

[8] For more detail, see Sapota, Słomak 2021, 82.

[9] The example cited by Boyle (Sen. *V*. *B*. 15, 7), allegedly proving the opposite, is inapplicable. Seneca refers here only to circumstances beyond our control (cf. also *V*. *B*. 15, 1–16, 3) and the need to cope with them.

[10] See: "Consider what the fact of my birth is in itself — a small matter of uncertain character, with a like potentiality of good and evil, without doubt the first step to everything else, but not greater than everything else simply because it comes first" (Sen. *Ben*. 3, 30, 2, transl. Basore 1928–1935); cf. Sen. *Ep*. 22, 15; *Ep*. 94, 55–56; cf. also Seneca's distinction between spontaneous and controlled reactions (here on anger): "'But,' you ask, 'what is the purpose of such an inquiry?' I answer, in order that we may know what anger is; for if it arises against our will, it will never succumb to reason. For all sensations that do not result from our own volition are uncontrolled and unavoidable, as, for example, shivering when we are dashed with cold water and recoilment from certain contacts; bad news makes the hair stand on end, vile language causes a blush to spread, and when one looks down from a precipice, dizziness follows. Because none of these things lies within our control, no reasoning can keep them from happening. But anger may be routed at our behest; for it is a weakness of the mind that is subject to the will, not one of those things that result

introducing a 'divine perspective' may seem promising in the light of the motif of the view from the heights of heaven, unlimited by time or space, which appears in Seneca the philosopher (cf. *Marc*. 26, 1–5). However, in this case, Seneca refers to the soul of a sage, omniscient after being elevated to the stars. It does not seem to be his intention to cast in a similar role a character whose knowledge is limited (cf. below), and who contrasts so sharply with the image of a sage as insane Juno or Furia.

2. The opening scenes as dream visions

So far, no attempt has been made to read these troublesome prologue parts in terms of a dream vision. This approach offers the following advantages. (2.1) It takes into account the paradigmatic nature of these opening acts, that is, the recurrent pattern with a similar function: a superhuman character appears before dawn and declares oneself to be the direct or indirect cause of the imminent catastrophe; sunrise marks the division between the scene involving the character and the other scenes of the play. (2.2) It overcomes the model of interpretation which results in major contradictions between the views of Seneca the playwright and Seneca the philosopher.[11] (2.3) It offers a rational explanation of other specific features that occur in these prologues, namely, their redundancy as an introduction to the plot or a synopsis, their echoes in the utterances of selected characters, the limited knowledge of the protatic persons, and the warped logic.

2.1. The paradigmatic nature of these scenes

Searching for distant models for the discussed prologues among the surviving Greek tragedies and monuments of Roman literature of the Republican and Augustan age,[12] one tends to overlook the regularity: each of them ends with a formula indicating sunrise (*Her. F.* 123–124; *Ag.* 53–56; *Thy*. 120–121), separating the prologue from scenes involving human characters, and this solution has no exact parallel in surviving texts by the Attic tragedians. In Aeschylus, the ghost of Clytemnestra haunts Erinyes at a time of human activity, and the ghost makes no mention of sunrise (cf. Aesch. *Eu*. 1–139). The ghost of Darius appears in similar circumstances (Aesch. *Pers*. 681–842). Eur. *Hec*. 1–76 suggests that Polydorus appears early in the morning,[13] but his turn is not separated from that of Heca-

from some condition of the general lot of man and therefore befall even the wisest, among which must be placed foremost that mental shock which affects us after we have formed the impression of a wrong committed. ... Such impulses cannot be overcome by reason, although perchance practice and constant watchfulness will weaken them. Different is that prompting which is born of the judgement, is banished by the judgement" (Sen. *Ira* 2, 2, 1–2; 2, 4, 2, transl. Basore 1928–1935).

[11] On the relationship between Seneca's philosophy and his tragedies see also especially the discussion by Staley 2010, 3–136.

[12] The prologue of *Hercules Furens* is juxtaposed with, among others, the dialogue between Iris and Lyssa (Eur. *Her*. 822–874) and the scenes with Juno and sea deities (Ov. *Met*. 2, 508–530), Juno and Tisiphone (Ov. *Met*. 4, 416–480), and Juno and Allecto (Verg. *A*. 7, 330–560) (Anliker 1960, 47; Fitch 1987, 116–117; Billerbeck 1999, 16; cf. also Bernstein 2017, 42–61); the dialogue between Furia and the ghost of Tantalus in *Thyestes* is compared to, among others, the dialogues between Iris and Lyssa (Eur. *Her*. 822–874), Kratos and Hephaestus (Aesch. *P.V*. 1–87), Inopia and Luxuria (Plaut. *Trin*. 1–22), and the scenes with the ghost of Polydorus (Eur. *Hec*. 1–58) and Juno and Allecto (Verg. *A*. 7, 330–560) (cf. e. g., Anliker 1960, 24; Monteleone 1991, 318–322; Boyle 2017, 99); and the monologue of the ghost of Thyestes in *Agamemnon* is juxtaposed with the monologues of the ghost of Polydorus (Eur. *Hec*. 1–58) and Hermes (Eur. *Ion* 1–81) (Anliker 1960, 11–12, 19; Tarrant [1976] 2004, 157).

[13] Cf. Gregory 1999, 39, 52–53.

be by the above-mentioned delimitation formula. No such formula closes the dialogue between Athena and Odysseus in Soph. *Ai*. 1–133, a conversation that takes place before dawn (Soph. *Ai*. 141–143), or Aphrodite's monologue in Eur. *Hipp*. 1–57, a play that also contains a dialogue scene with Artemis (cf. Eur. *Hipp*. 1283–1439). It is absent from the monologue of Dionysus (por. Eur. *Ba*. 1–63), a character that also speaks later in *Bacchae*; the same is true of the scenes with Apollo and Death (Eur. *Alc*. 1–76), Poseidon and Athena (Eur. *Tro*. 1–97), and Hermes (Eur. *Ion* 1–81). A formula that indicates sunrise closes the prologue scene in *Iphigenia in Aulis*, but the play involves no superhuman characters (Eur. *IA* 156–160). The prologues of *Hercules Furens*, *Agamemnon*, and *Thyestes* can also be contrasted with the Roman *Octavia*, where the scene involving the ghost of Agrippina appears in the middle of the play (*Oct*. 593–645) and does not contain the delimitation formula. However, it is worth noting that Poppea seems to refer to this scene later: both on the stage and in Poppea's words, Agrippina appears with a torch (cf. *Oct*. 594–595 and 721–723) and in connection with the wedding (cf. *Oct*. 595–597 and 690–717); she is also surrounded by an ominous aura (cf. *Oct*. 597–631 and 724–739). Importantly, in this case, Nero's wife talks about her dream vision.

The fact that the discussed prologue scenes in Seneca always take place before dawn[14] and are paradigmatically separated from the dialogue parts involving human characters may be significant. Although there are no exactly parallel examples in ancient tragedies, there are several scenes with ghosts later referred to as dreams (e. g., in *Octavia*, in Euripides' *Hecuba*, and in Pacuvius' *Iliona*, where the ghost of Polydorus speaks to the sleeping mother, who later confirms that he appeared in a dream; see Eur. *Hec*. 1–58; 68–76; Pacuvius: *Iliona*, fr. 205–206: Remington 2, p. 238; por. Cic. *Tusc*. 1, 106). In view of that, a cautious hypothesis can be proposed that we are dealing here with a formula of a dream vision, a hypothesis that also accounts for other features of Seneca's plays (cf. 2.3).

2.2. Seneca's stance on dream visions

There are occasional references to illusory dreams in Seneca's philosophical writings, but they are of a general nature, cf. "Others I have surrounded with unreal goods, and have mocked their empty minds, as it were, with a long, deceptive dream [*longo fallacique somnio*]" (Sen. *Prov*. 6, 3, transl. Basore 1928–1935); "This passes over everthing of that

[14] In his comment to the prologue to *Agamemnon,* Tarrant [1976] 2004, 180, concedes that this is the result of the application of a rule according to which ghosts are released for a short time (cf. e. g., Aesch. *Pers*. 691–692) and have to return before dawn, as in, e. g., Verg. *A*. 5, 738–739; Prop. 4, 7, 89–91. NB in the cited work by Propertius, the ghost of Cynthia arrives in a dream (cf. 4, 7, 3–5; 87–88); a similar situation occurs in the example from *Iliona* to which Tarrant refers (see below). However, it is difficult to accept the view that in *Her*. *F*., this limitation applies also to Juno, who is allegedly closer to a demon than to a goddess (*Iuno inferna*). Fitch (1987, 117) reaches a similar conclusion as Tarrant and assumes that by asking *tantaene animis caelestibus irae?* (Verg. *A*. 1, 11), the Virgilian narrator questions Juno's divinity. Given the similarity between the images of jealous Juno in Virgil and in Seneca, one might assume that her godlike nature is also called into question by the Roman playwright. However, it should be emphasised that jealous Juno, who in the *Aeneid* approaches Alecto (7, 323–340), loses nothing of her identity as *dea caelestis*: jealousy and anger are recognisable features of her mythological and literary nature, as are the reasons for these emotions, namely Jove's lack of erotic discipline (cf. e. g., Verg. *A*. 1, 26–49; Ov. *Met*. 2, 508–530; 3, 251–284; 4, 416–480; this regularity is also noticed by Fitch 1987: 116). In *Hercules Furens*, Seneca refers to this specific conventional image of Juno; the very fact that this similarity exists cannot lead to the conclusion that Juno is ascribed the status of a spirit from Hades.

sort as of no more consequence than the delusive shapes of dreams and the apparitions of the night [*vanas species somniorum visusque nocturnos*], which have nothing in them that is substantial and real" (Sen. *Const*. 11, 1, transl. Basore 1928–1935); "Just as a man is annoying when he rouses a dreamer of pleasant dreams [*iucundum somnium*] (for he is spoiling a pleasure which may be unreal but nevertheless has the appearance of reality [*etiam si falsam, effectum tamen verae habentem*]), even so your letter…" (Sen. *Ep*. 102, 1, trans. by Gummere 1918–1925). However, the author presents his stance on dream visions more clearly in a passage of *Quaestiones naturales*:

> *Hoc inter nos et Tuscos, quibus summa est fulgurum persequendorum scientia, interest: nos putamus quia nubes conlisae sunt fulmina emitti; illi existimant nubes conlidi ut fulmina emittantur. nam cum omnia ad deum referant, in ea opinione sunt tamquam non quia facta sunt significent, sed quia significatura sunt fiant. eadem tamen ratione fiunt, sive illis significare propositum sive consequens est. 'quomodo ergo significant, nisi ideo mittuntur?' quomodo aves, non in hoc motae ut nobis occurrerent, dextrum auspicium sinistrumque fecerunt. 'et illas' inquit 'deus mouit'. nimis illum otiosum et pusillae rei ministrum facis, si aliis somnia, aliis exta disponit.* (2. 32. 2–3)
>
> This is the difference between us and Etruscans, who have reached an advanced knowledge of lightning: we believe that lightning results from clouds colliding together; they believe that clouds collide in order for lightning to occur. For since they relate everything to god, they are also convinced that events take place in order to signify, not that signs are evidence of events. However, the mechanism of the origin [of lightning — I. S.] is the same, no matter whether it is meant to signify or whether it is a sign of events. "How do they signify then if they are not sent with this purpose in mind?" Just like birds that bring good and bad omens: they have not been sent to appear before us. "They are also led by god", someone will say. You imagine that he is so bored or concerned with trifles since to some he reveals divination in dreams and to others in viscera.

The commonly accepted view is that the manuscript reading is corrupted at the key point here: according to Gronovius (1658, 300), the word *omina* was wrongly replaced by *somnia*. Nonetheless, the rejected version can be justified. The sentence *si aliis somnia, aliis exta disponit* may have carried the following shade of meaning: 'since [in addition] to some he reveals divination in dreams and to others in viscera'. NB Gronovius argues in favour of *omina* by referring to the next passage of the text, which speaks of divination from the flight of birds and from viscera (Sen. *N. Q.* 2. 32. 4), and suggesting that *omina* is here synonymous with *auguria*. Still, it is worth noting that in his thorough discussion of the problem, Cicero uses the term *omina* to refer to various events/behaviours, but not to the flight of birds/the way they eat, see *Div*. 1. 102–106; 2. 26; 83–84; 149. Still, even if Gronovius' conjecture is accurate — and Seneca refers here to other divination signs than dreams — this and other passages confirm that the philosopher generally agrees with the sceptical position expressed by Cicero in Book II *De divinatione* on, among others, divination from the flight of birds (cf. Sen. *N. Q.* 2. 32. 3–5 and Cic. *Div*. 2. 70–83), viscera (Sen. *N. Q.* 2. 32. 3; 34. 1–2 and Cic. *Div*. 2. 28–42), lightning (Sen. *N. Q.* 2. 32. 1–51, 2, and Cic. *Div*. 2. 42–49), and on propitiatory sacrifices (cf. e. g., Sen. *N. Q.* 2. 35. 1–2 and Cic. *Div*. 2. 20–22). It is noteworthy that in the same treatise, Cicero also criticises the interpretation of dreams as admonishing and warning messages (por. Cic. *Div*. 2. 119–147) sent by deities. Following Aristotle (cf. *Parv*. *Nat*. 458b1–464b20 and Pease 1923, 555; see also,

e. g., Lucr. 4, 962–1036, and Bailey 1947, 1296; Accius *Brutus*, 663–665: Dangel 1995, 238; Petronius fr. 30), he defines them as follows:

> *Sin vera visa divina sunt, falsa autem et inania humana, quae est ista designandi licentia ut hoc deus, hoc natura fecerit potius quam aut omnia deus, quod negatis, aut omnia natura? Quod quoniam illud negatis, hoc necessario confitendum est. Naturam autem eam dico qua numquam animus insistens agitatione et motu esse vacuus potest. Is cum languore corporis nec membris uti nec sensibus potest, incidit in visa varia et incerta ex reliquiis, ut ait Aristoteles, inhaerentibus earum rerum quas vigilans gesserit aut cogitaverit; quarum perturbatione mirabiles interdum existunt species somniorum*. (*Div*. 2. 127–128; cf. *Rep*. 6. 10)
>
> But if true visions are divine while the false and meaningless ones are from nature, what sort of caprice decided that god made the one and nature made the other, rather than that god made them all, which your school denies, or that nature made them all? Since you deny that god made them all you must admit that nature made them all. By 'nature,' in this connexion, I mean that force because of which the soul can never be stationary and free from motion and activity. And when, because of the weariness of the body, the soul can use neither the limbs nor the senses, it lapses into varied and untrustworthy visions, which emanate from what Aristotle terms 'the clinging remnants of the soul's waking acts and thoughts.' These 'remnants,' when aroused, sometimes produce strange types of dreams. (Transl. Falconer 1923.)

Cf. also:

> *Dormientium et vinulentorum et furiosorum visa imbecilliora esse dicebas quam vigilantium siccorum sanorum* (Cic. *Luc*. 88).
>
> Your assertion was that presentations seen by people asleep and tipsy and mad are feebler than those of persons awake and sober and sane. (Transl. Rackham 1933.)

Generally, Seneca may have shared his views in this respect, too. A polemical reference in *Troades* (cf. Sen. *Tro*. 438–460 and Verg. *A*. 2, 268–297) supports this inference. The author adapts here a narrative schema[15] that the audience should first associate with *Aeneid*: the hero/heroine is visited by the ghost of Hector, who brings a warning of imminent danger. In Virgil, the ghost has the knowledge that turns him into a representative of gods/the oracle: he is the first to reveal to Aeneas his mission, which he promptly carries out, and to warn him of the danger that Trojans did not expect (Verg. *A*. 2, 248–249). In Seneca, Hector is a harbinger of danger that cannot have been new to the captive, while his warning not only proves futile but also prompts Andromache to undertake an action that compounds her humiliation.

The perspective of dream vision — understood as an effect of imagination, free and uncontrolled in sleep, working through the matters that preoccupy the characters when they are awake — also proves useful in defining the nature of the prologue scenes in *Hercules Furens*, *Agamemnon,* and *Thyestes*.

2.3. The redundancy of these scenes; their role in structuring the action; the limited nowledge of the protatic characters; the warped logic

In the case of the three prologues, what draws attention is their redundancy with regard to the presentation of the situational context. The knowledge they present reflects

[15] Cf. also Keulen 2001, 304; Fantham 1982, 279.

the general knowledge of the characters in the world of the play, especially of the hero to whom the dream vision can be attributed and whose words contain paraphrases of ideas that appear in the prologue, presented in the form of reminiscences rather than direct references. The prologues have a different function — they provide information about the events covered by the dramatic action — but they fulfil it to a limited extent. The prologue characters anticipate the course of events only insofar as it concerns the 'sleeping' heroes; they do not seem to have knowledge of events that result from the activity of other characters and cause the action to turn. It is also worth noting that the lines spoken by the prologue characters in *Hercules Furens* and *Thyestes* include some peculiar elements, which additionally emphasise their emotional state/madness, a condition manifested by the 'sleeping' heroes, too.

2.3.1. Hercules Furens

In *Hercules Furens*, the redundancy of the prologue in its expository role is rather obvious. The enumeration of Juno's rivals and Jove's illegitimate children — with explicit mention of the fact that they were deified — and the reference to Alcmene, the cause of Juno's hatred and persecution of Hercules (*Her. F.* 5–29; 35–36), are present in Amphitryon's words,[16] who merely limits the number of examples (cf. *Her. F.* 262–266; 439–462); Juno's hatred is also mentioned by Hercules in his first stage monologue (*Her. F.* 604–606). Hercules' prior victories (*Her. F.* 30–46; 70–74) are presented in detail by Amphitryon (*Her. F.* 213–248; 481–487), Megara and Lycus (283–288; 431–434), and, later, the Chorus (*Her. F.* 526–546) and Hercules himself (944–946). The completion of another task — the capture of Cerberus — and the fact that Juno's devious repertoire is finally exhausted (*Her. F.* 46–63) are mentioned by Hercules (*Her. F.* 606–615; 955–957), in more detail by Theseus (*Her. F.* 662–829), and later by the Chorus (*Her. F.* 830–837; 882–892). As for summarising the action, particular elements of the content and imagery present in Juno's lines appear in Hercules' 'mad' monologues, but freely reformulated. Hercules attacks heaven, acts against Jove (cf. *Her. F.* 64–74 and 958–986), and sees Erinyes (cf. *Her. F.* 86–88; 100–106 and 982–986), but Titans/Giants are his allies at one time, and at other times, his enemies (cf. *Her. F.* 79–83 and 965–981). Moreover, Juno's prophetic vision is incomplete in that, satisfied with Hercules' expected madness and crime (*Her. F.* 85–124), she does not foresee[17] a suddenly optimistic turn of the plot, resulting from the intervention of Amphitryon (*Her. F.* 1302–1313) and, first and foremost, Theseus (*Her. F.* 1341–1344). In addition to this, Juno expresses concern that Hercules might wish to seize heaven by force and rejoices that the crime committed in madness will prevent his deification; in fact, his intention to conquer heaven appears precisely as a manifestation of madness[18] (cf. *Her. F.* 64–65, 100–122 and 960–986).

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[16] Castiglioni 1926, 180, treats his lines as the proper prologue, a counterpart of the prologue to Euripides' tragedy.

[17] In light of the lines *scelere perfecto licet / admittat illas genitor in caelum manus* (*Her. F.* 121–122), one may posit that perhaps Juno foresees the future deification of Hercules; however, as Fitch 1987, 156–157, observes, in this context, *licet* conveys ironic acquiescence (as in *nunc tibi me posito visam velamine narres, / si poteris narrare, licet* — Ov. *Met.* 3, 192–193) rather than introduces a regular concessive clause. Cf. also earlier: *escendat licet / meumque victrix teneat Alcmene locum, / pariterque natus astra promissa occupet* ... (*Her. F.* 21–23). In any case, Juno does not predict the solution proposed by Theseus.

[18] Cf. also, e. g., Anliker 1960, 47.

The prologue scene is redundant as an introduction to the situational context, provides an imperfect synopsis, and underscores in various ways the speaker's madness; the character is agitated (*Her. F.* 27–29, 75–77), wants to go mad (*Her. F.* 107–109), and pays no attention to the logical development of the argument: Juno takes the labour she herself set for Hercules as evidence of his growing ambition (cf. *Her. F.* 46–48 and 60–63[19]). However, this scene plays an important role in setting the action in motion once we identify it as a dream vision of mad Hercules, whose insanity, as Fitch (1987, 24–32) convincingly argues, seems to result from a long-standing and growing obsession rather than an unexpected bout triggered by a sudden intervention of a superhuman character. Note that in her monologue, Juno focuses on her hostility towards Hercules (*Her. F.* 23–35; 75–123) and his heroic achievements (*Her. F.* 40–46; 70–74), conquest of Hades (*Her. F.* 46–63), divine origin, and aspirations to divinity (cf. *Her.F.* 23–26; 36–40; 64–68; 74; 89–90; 117–118; 121–122), that is, themes which — based on the words of other characters (Amphitryon, *Her. F.* 213–248; 275–277; 440–487; Megara, *Her. F.* 283–288; 425; 437; and Theseus, *Her. F.* 650–829), the Chorus (*Her. F.* 527–549; 830–894), and Hercules himself (*Her. F.* 604–615; 898; 907–908; 936–939) — can be considered pivotal for defining the hero's identity[20] and which evidently preoccupied him before the outburst of the crisis of madness. The hypothesis that Juno is a character from Hercules' dream also explains why the goddess has no knowledge of the sudden turn of the action and the denouement: the work of Amphitryon and Theseus.

This is likely to be the effect of the reinterpretation of the myth along rational lines and reworking of the story in accordance with the author's views on deities, identified by Seneca with supreme *ratio*, nature, creator, and fate, and possibly identifiable under traditional names (cf., e. g., *Ben*. 4, 7, 1–8, 3; *Helv*. 8, 3), but incapable of inflicting harm (cf. *Ben*. 6, 27, 5–6; *Ira* 2, 27, 1–2; *Ep*. 95, 49) or experiencing lust (cf. *Ben*. 4, 9, 1; *Ep*. 95, 48). NB: Seneca criticises the literary image of Jove seized by lust for Alcmene and other mortal women (*Brev*. 16, 5; *V. B.* 26, 6, cf. also above). In this perspective, Hercules' madness does not result from actions of the jealous goddess but marks the crisis stage of the hero's obsession with heroism, divine origin, deification, and the threat of Juno, while the dream vision in the prologue is a symptom of imminent crisis and determines its form, that is, the involvement of Juno, Titans/Giants, and Furies.

2.3.2. Agamemnon

The redundancy of the opening scene in the expository role is also well visible in *Agamemnon*. The crime in the *domus Pelopia* (*Ag.* 7–11; 21; 25–27) is mentioned in Act II of the play (*Ag.* 165; 295–297), together with the circumstances of Aegisthus' birth (*Ag.* 28–36 and 233; 293–294). With regard to summarising the action, the prologue mentions the arrival of the victorious hero and his death during a feast at the hands of Clytemnestra, who will be helped by Aegisthus (cf. *Ag.* 39–52 and 400–401; 875–907). However, it should be noted that the murder is presented as a family revenge, in line with the oracle's prophesy (*Ag.* 37–49), and hence without considering Clytemnestra's motivation (*Ag.* 158–191) or the perspective of Cassandra (*Ag.* 741–774; 791–798; 867–880; cf. also 698–709) — much

[19] Cf. also Fitch 1987, 21.

[20] Some of these observations are also made by Fitch 1987, 24–28, who concludes: "Hercules' *virtus*, then, is tainted by aggression, ambition, and megalomania."

emphasised throughout the play[21] — who takes the death of Agamemnon as a revenge for the death of the loved ones and the fall of Troy. Equally importantly, the ghost of Thyestes, satisfied with vendetta, does not take into account the turn of the plot that takes place as a result of Electra's resistance, the arrival of Strophius, and the saving of Orestes; he also knows nothing of Cassandra's prophecy (*Ag.* 910–1012). Thus, the prologue of *Agamemnon* presents the point of view that can only be identified with that of Aegisthus; in his first words on the stage, Aegisthus emphasises the fact that he carries out the duty imposed on him from the very beginning (cf. *Ag.* 48–49 and 226–233), and in doing so, he paraphrases the argument invoked by the ghost of Thyestes (cf. "Look to your mother: it befits you" — *Ag.* 52; "for one of such birth, death is no hardship" — *Ag.* 233, transl. Fitch 2004).

Again, the assumption that we are dealing here with Aegisthus' dream vision allows to show that this part of the play has an important function. It is worth noting that in contrast to Aeschylus (*Ag.* 1–39; cf. 264–316),[22] Seneca does not include the scene in which Clytemnestra's trusted servant receives the news that Troy has fallen.[23] Instead, it is clearly implied that the emotional dialogues in Act II follow closely (though, it seems, not immediately) the moment when the news reaches the palace that Troy has fallen (*Ag.* 204–206), Cassandra is Agamemnon's captive (*Ag.* 188–191; 194; 254–258), and Menelaus and Helen have become reconciled (*Ag.* 273–274).[24] Moreover, Clytemnestra's monologue and her conversation with the Nurse indicate that in connection with the news, the queen did consider returning to the role of a faithful wife earlier (cf. *Ag.* 108–109; 136–138); she comes back to this idea in her dialogue with Aegisthus (*Ag.* 239–243). Aegisthus, in turn, definitely abandons his earlier dilemmas in his first monologue on stage, and urges Clytemnestra to do the same (*Ag.* 226–309). Considering these circumstances, the prologue scene — if interpreted as Aegisthus' dream vision — plays its role in the construction of the drama, even though it is redundant for other reasons and cannot be treated as a variation of Aeschylus' prologue.[25] In contrast to Clytemnestra, who is still undecided, Aegisthus has just received the impetus to act (in Act I) and now (in Act II) successfully persuades the queen to follow him, thus setting the dramatic action in motion.

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[21] Cf., e. g., Kugelmeier 2014, 495–500; Schiesaro 2014, 179; Calder III 1976, 32; Tarrant [1976] 2004, 3; Lefèvre [1966] 1972, 468–473.

[22] NB: the motif of a dream also appears in Aeschylus (*Ag.* 274–275), in the form of an allegation (here false) that Clytemnestra's news of Greek victory is born from a dream vision.

[23] In this way, the playwright avoids the implication — troublesome from the point of view of temporal probability — that Agamemnon takes Troy at night, fights a sea storm on his way back on the same night, and reaches Argos during the day (cf. Aesch. *Ag.* 278–279; 320; 650–670; 783–829). Critics point out, among others, that the rule of single-day plot does not apply here, or assume that criticism regarding the violation of this rule results from pedantry that was alien to Aeschylus' contemporaries; for a review of approaches, see Fraenkel [1950] 1962, 254–256; Taplin 1977, 290–294. Nevertheless, in surviving Attic tragedies, this rule is only occasionally violated (see Aesch. *Eu.* 74–243), while in the collection of surviving serious Roman plays, an obvious instance of its violation can only be found in non-Senecan *Octavia*, fabula praetexta; cf. Herington 1961, 21–25; Ferri 2003, 61, 119; Boyle [2008] 2013: LXIII; see also Słomak 2022, 90–96.

[24] This order of events is not reflected in other surviving texts based on this story; cf. Aesch. *Ag.* and Hom. *Od.* 3. 130–158; 255–275; 301–305; 4. 512–537; 11. 405–434; 24. 20–22, and shorter references, e. g., Pind. *Pyth.* 11. 31–34; Aesch. *Cho.* 491–494; 973–1000; *Eu.* 631–635; Soph. *El.* 95–99; Eur. *El.* 4–13; *Or.* 25–26; Paus. 2. 16. 6; Ps.-Apollod. *Ep.* 6. 23; Procl. *Chrest.* 17–18: Bernabé, p. 95; for more references, see Gantz 1993, 664–676. Still, Hyginus (*Fab.* 117) and Dictys (6, 2) report that Clytemnestra planned the murder at the instigation of Palamedes' brother Oeax, who brought her (false) news of Agamemnon's new love interest.

[25] The ghost of Thyestes makes no mention of Cassandra or Helen; this information must have reached the palace from elsewhere, and its source is unlikely to have been a light signal.

2.3.3. Thyestes

Regularities like those discussed above can also be found in *Thyestes*. As regards the expository function, its prologue offers only a number of allusions. The most direct ones refer to the events presented in more detail in Ode I and mentioned in Act II, that is, to the crime and punishment of Tantalus (cf. *Thy*. 1–6; 62–71; 97–99; 105–106 and 144–175; 242). In addition, there is a clear but very general reference to the crimes of the descendants of Tantalus (*Thy*. 18–20; 25–32), an allusion to the *stuprum* of Thyestes (*Thy*. 46–47), vague references to a fight between 'brothers' (probably Atreus and Thyestes) for the throne (*Thy*. 32–36), and very unclear remarks about various events (*Thy*. 37–48), placed within a evidently topical passage (especially *Thy*. 40–46), whose only function may be to produce an affective hyperbole.[26] The prologue does little to inform the audience of the cause of Atreus' anger and its roots in the family tradition; this kind of information is supplied in the ode of the Chorus, which makes reference to the crime of Pelops (*Thy*. 139–143; cf. also Atreus' remark, *Thy*. 242 and the words of the Messenger, *Thy*. 659–662), and in the tirade by Atreus, who speaks about his brother's crimes (*Thy*. 178–180; 221–241). The opening scene is also redundant as a synopsis of the plot: as early as in Act II, Atreus mentions the 'Thracian' inspiration for the design of the crime and presents its details (cf. *Thy*. 54–62 and 272–333). In addition, there is a discrepancy here that seems intentional and may serve to bring out the illusory nature of the scene: Furia closes the prologue and the Chorus begins the ode with references to a different landscape of the Argos area[27] (cf. *Thy*. 116–119 and 125–131). Also noteworthy is the warped logic of events: the ghost mentions the crimes of the descendants (*Thy*. 18–23) before he discovers the purpose of his return to earth, thus implicitly undermining the sense of Furia's plan;[28] this logic nonetheless fits well with the idea of dream vision.

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[26] According to Tarrant [1985] 1998, 92, and Boyle 2017, 119, lines 37–39 (*ob scelera pulsi, dum dabit patriam deus* / *in scelera redeant, sintque tam invisi omnibus* / *quam sibi*) refer to Aegisthus' revenge or Thyestes' exile and his return, followed by further crimes. The reference to Aegisthus is moderately plausible, as long as it is assumed that Furia does not continue her earlier thought (the preceding passage contains a reference to brothers, cf. *Thy*. 32–33) and that *pluralis* refers figuratively to a single character. The other option seems doubtful, especially with regard to the words spoken by Furia (who, unlike Thyestes' naïve son, is well aware of what is going on; cf. *Thy*. 471) *dum dabit patriam deus*, understood as a reference to Atreus' plot to lure Thyestes back to his homeland. Interpreters may be misled by the use of coniunctivus, which in this case, however, does not have to refer to future events but may refer to the past; cf. a similar construction (Oedipus' tirade against the murderer of Laius): *hic et parentem dextera perimat sua,* / *faciatque (num quid gravius optari potest?)* / *quidquid ego fugi* (Sen. *Oed*. 261–263). It seems more likely that these lines refer to, e. g., the story of Atreus, who, in collusion with Thyestes, murdered their half-brother Chrysippus; as a result, Atreus and Thyestes were exiled by Pelops, but after the death of their father or their relative Eurystheus, Atreus took the throne (according to some sources, as a result of an oracle) and continued to compete for power with Thyestes; cf. various versions of this story, e. g., Hellanicus, fr. 157: FGrHist 4, p. 144; Thuc. 1, 9, 2; Hyg. *Fab*. 85; Diod. 4, 58, 1–5; Ps.-Apollod. *Ep*. 2, 10–12. Σ Eur. *Or*. 5; 12; 998. With regard to lines *Thy*. 40–46, this passage is highly topicalised and modelled after the conventional description of the Iron Age/the age of fall; cf. in particular Ov. *Met*. 1, 144–148, and Sen. *Ira* 2, 9, 1–2; *Ben*. 5, 15, 3; *Phaed*. 530–542; 551–556; cf. also, e. g., Hes. *Op*. 182–196; Hor. *Carm*. 3, 6, 17–48; Tib. 1, 3, 35–50; Ov. *Am*. 3, 8, 35–64; *Met*. 15, 86–142. One should also be cautious about possible allusions to concrete past and future events here (which Tarrant [1985] 1998, 93–94, and Boyle 2017, 119–122, attempt to identify, although both also notice the topical nature of this passage).

[27] This discrepancy is also noted by, among others, Davis 2003, 62, and Boyle 2017, 152–153, who suggest that it is the Chorus that shows ignorance in this case; this, however, is an arbitrary inference.

[28] This incoherence is also pointed out by, e. g., Paratore 1982, 228; cf. also Anliker 1960, 28.

Once again, the prologue — superfluous as an introduction to the plot and in its anticipatory role — turns out to be purposeful from the point of view of setting up the dramatic action, provided it is interpreted as a dream vision of one of the characters. Considering the remark on the extended period of time that has elapsed since Thyestes' exile (cf. *Thy*. 305; 425–426) and the suggestion that he has made no attempt to return or regain power (*Thy*. 425–427; 449–469), Atreus' extreme agitation and displeasure at his own passivity so far (cf. *Thy*. 176–204; 249–254; 259–262; 267–270) must appear strange. His state can be explained in terms of the intervention of Furia/Tantalus, an intervention only Atreus seems to be half aware of, but not the Chorus or any other character. However, it is clear from the description of the palace in Act IV that Atreus has long commemorated episodes of the family history that are rooted in the 'barbarian' tradition and marked by *impietas* (cf. *Thy*. 659–664). In the light of this description, it is implausible that *impietas* and the scheme devised by the tyrant appear ad hoc, as a result of a night intervention by the ghost; rather, they seem to be an effect of his long-term fixation on particular models, fixation that can also motivate the dream that spurs the tyrant to act. Interpreting Furia's intervention in terms of Atreus' dream vision explains his bout of anger, irritation (cf. in particular *Thy*. 57–58 and 280–281), and references to Furia (*Thy*. 250–254); it also helps to understand the direction his plans take (references to Tantalus and Procne: *Thy*. 62–63 and 242–243; 56–57; 272–276).

Also interesting in this context is the suggestion arising from an obvious reference to Virgil's description of the house of Latinus (cf. *A*. 7, 170–186 and *Thy*. 650–664) and Faunus' oracle in Seneca's description of *domus Pelopia*;[29] cf. in particular:

> *hinc Italae gentes … in dubiis responsa petunt; huc dona sacerdos / cum tulit et caesarum ovium sub nocte silenti / pellibus incubuit stratis somnosque petivit, / multa modis simulacra videt volitantia miris / et varias audit voces fruiturque deorum / conloquio atque imis Acheronta adfatur Avernis* (Verg. *A*. 7. 85–91)
>
> Here the peoples of Italy … sought answers in their uncertainties; here when the priest brought his offerings and lay down on the skins of slaughtered sheep in the darkness of night, and sought sleep, he sees many phantasms fluttering in strange ways, hears varied voices, enjoys converse with the gods and speaks to Acheron in the depths of Avernus. (Transl. Horsfall 2000.)
>
> *hinc … Tantalidae solent … petere lassis rebus ac dubiis opem. … hinc orantibus / responsa dantur certa, cum ingenti sono / laxantur adyto fata et immugit specus / vocem deo solvente* (*Thy*. 657–682).
>
> Tantalid kings … seek help here in disasters and dilemmas. … Here those seeking oracles are granted infallible answers; words of destiny are loosed from the sanctuary amidst thunderous noise, and the hollow space booms as a god unleashes his voice. (Transl. Fitch 2004.)

If in Virgil, the reference to the oracle is directly related to the development of events, in Seneca, it does not seem to be motivated by the current demands of the plot — unlike the other elements of the description — and contributes little to the *locus horridus*. Perhaps it could be reinterpreted in the context of other details that set up the action. Scil. Atreus, who in his first words on stage states that he earlier passively lamented Thyestes'

[29] Cf., e. g., Carandini, Bruno 2008, 240–242; Torre 2014, 509, and the bibliography there.

impunity (cf. … *questibus vanis agis* … — *Thy*. 179), could — in line with the tradition of the Tantalids — seek *lassis rebus ac dubiis opem* from the palace oracle and provoke a dream vision, just like the priest/priestess in the *Aeneid*.

3. Conclusions

The main advantage of the proposed interpretation is that it overcomes the limitations of both the current tradition of literal reading of the scenes with ghosts/deities — unsatisfactory when juxtaposed with the views of Seneca the philosopher and difficult to justify on the basis of pre-existing plot material — and figurative readings, applicable to only one of the plays or flawed for different reasons. It is based on the assumption of continuity between the discursive and poetic activity of the author and is in line with the beliefs about dream visions disseminated in the rationalised philosophical discourses of the time, which in all likelihood were shared by Seneca. It also takes into account examples of ancient plots — so far ignored in critical discussion — where the characters manifest concern about their dream vision, introduced earlier as an independent scene. Although this solution has no exact counterpart in Seneca, the dramatic situation in each of his three plays implies that the heroes are influenced by this kind of vision; moreover, each of these plays includes a delimited 'night scene', which can be identified with a scene from a dream. Given the paradigmatic nature of Seneca's prologues discussed here, one can also propose a cautious hypothesis that the author applied a solution that was already conventionalised at that time or that was not highly ambiguous or confusing for his target audience.

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Сверхчеловеческие персонажи в прологах Сенеки "Неистовый Геракл", "Агамемнон" и " Фиест"

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В данной статье представлена новая гипотеза, касающаяся прологов пьес Сенеки «Геркулес в безумии», «Агамемнон» и «Фиест». Она представляет собой альтернативную интерпретацию противоречий, связанных с существующей традицией прочтения, которая ставит сверхчеловеческих и протатических персонажей, выступающих в начальных актах этих пьес, на один уровень вымышленной реальности с другими героями или подчиняет их образной конструкции. Согласно выдвинутой гипотезе, специфика этих трех сцен может быть результатом применения конвенции, известной, с небольшими вариациями, из ряда других драм, в которых призраки тревожат спящих. В аргументации подчеркивается парадигматический характер этих начальных сцен, которые завершаются формулой, указывающей на исход ночи. В статье отмечается также и то, что в свете новых предпосылок эти прологи, избыточные в своей экспозиционной и предвосхищающей функции, играют важную роль в структурировании драматического действия. Более того, в контексте последующих за ними событий их содержание может быть объяснено в терминах теории сновидений, известной по рационализирующим философским дискурсам античности. Наконец, предлагаемое прочтение этих сцен основано на предположении о преемственности между дискурсивной и поэтической деятельностью автора.

Ключевые слова: прологи к трагедиям «Геркулес в безумии», «Агамемнон» и «Фиест»; пьесы Сенеки.

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