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CAMWS, Seneca, Williamsburg, VA. March 17th.

Tiresias' Role as a Poet within Seneca's Oedipus.

1. Cf. e.g. some passages where Medea speaks of her deeds in the third person, while uttering, "*(Medea) fiam*" (*Med.* 171: "I shall be Medea"), or *Med.* 167 "*Medea superest.*" ("Medea remains"), or "*Medea nunc sum,*" (*Med.* 910: "Now I am Medea"), this last being a line that she pronounces when she eventually accomplishes the murder of her children.
2. "The core of the argument for this case of metatheatricity in Seneca is the multivalency of the Latin word *uates*, which undoubtedly means both 'seer/prophet' and 'poet/bard'. But Seneca does not draw attention to the word." Braund (2002, 219).
3. "As a *vates*, Tiresias is not primarily a poet, but an interpreter who uses several forms of divination to seek a truth that is hidden and ambiguous." Staley (2010, 105).

4. *Oed.* 302

Tir. manifesta sacri signa fatidici refer.

Report the clear signs of this fateful rite.

5. *Hor. Ars* 128 ff.

*Aut famam sequere, aut sibi convenientia finge. [...]
Difficile est proprie communia dicere, tuque
rectius Iliacum carmen deducis in actus,
quam si proferres ignota indictaque primus.
Publica materies privati iuris erit, si
non circa vilem patulumque moraberis orbem;
nec verbum verbo curabis reddere fidus
interpres, nec desilies imitator in artum,
unde pedem proferre pudor vetet aut operis lex.*

Either **follow tradition**, or invent consistently. [...]
It's hard to make the universal specific:
It's better to weave a play from the poem of Troy,
Than be first to offer something unknown, unsung.
You'll win private rights to public themes, if you
Don't keep slowly circling the broad beaten track,
Or, pedantic translator, render them word for word,
Or following an idea, leap like the goat into the well
From which shame, or the work's logic, denies escape.

6. *Sen. Epist.* 79

*Quem quominus Ovidius tractaret, nihil obstitit quod
iam Vergilius impleverat; ne Severum quidem
Cornelium uterque deterruit. Omnibus praeterea
feliciter hic locus se dedit, et qui praecesserant non
praeripuisse mihi videntur quae dici poterant, sed
aperuisse. [...]
Praeterea condicio optima est ultimi: parata verba
invenit, quae aliter instructa novam faciem habent. Nec
illis manus inicit tamquam alienis; sunt enim publica.*

Ovid could not be prevented from using this theme simply
because Vergil had already fully covered it; nor could either
of these writers frighten off Cornelius Severus. [...]
Besides, he who writes last has the best of the bargain; he
finds already at hand words which, when marshalled in a
different way, show a new face. And he is not pilfering
them, as if they belonged to someone else, when he uses
them, for they are common property.
(Richard M. Gummere, LOEB, 1917-25)

7. *Oed.* 288-302

*Creon. In tempore ipso sorte Phoebea excitus
Tiresia tremulo tardus accelerat genu
comesque Manto luce uiduatum trahens.
Oedipus. Sacrate diuis, proximum Phoebos caput,
responsa solue; fare, quem poenae petant.
Tiresia Quod tarda fatu est lingua, quod quaerit moras
haut te quidem, magnanime, mirari addecet:
uisu carenti magna pars ueri patet.*

Cre. Here, most timely, **roused by Phoebus' oracle** Rashes
tardy Tiresias – his knees *tremble*.
With him Manto lungs one widowed of light.
Oe. Priest of the god, **most beloved of Phoebus**,
Solve the oracle. Name the man to be punished.
Ti. That my tongue is slow to speak, that it plays
For time, should not surprise you, noble king.
A great part of truth lies hidden from the blind. Where

*sed quo uocat me patria, quo Phoebus, sequar:
fata eruantur; si foret uiridis mihi
calidusque sanguis, pectore exciperem deum.*

8. Macr. Sat. 5. 18. 1

*‘Sed de his hactenus, quorum plura omnibus, aliqua
non nullis Romanorum nota sunt. ad illa venio quae de
Graecarum litterarum penetralibus eruta nullis
cognita sunt, nisi qui Graecam doctrinam diligenter
hauserunt. fuit enim hic poeta ut scrupulose et anxie,
ita dissimulanter et quasi clanculo doctus, ut multa
transtulerit quae unde translata sint difficile sit
cognitu.*

9. Ov. Am. 3.1.

*Stat vetus et multos incaedua silva per annos;
credibile est illi numen inesse loco.
fons sacer in medio speluncaque pumice pendens,
et latere ex omni dulce queruntur aves.
Hic ego dum spatior tectus nemoralibus umbris —
quod mea, quaerebam, Musa moveret opus —
venit odoratos Elegia nexa capillos, [...]
venit et ingenti violenta Tragoedia passu:*

10. Oed. 328 ff.

*Ma. quid sit, parens, effare. Ti. Quid fari queam
inter tumultus mentis attonitae uagus?
quidnam loquar? sunt dira, sed in alto mala.*

11. Phoebus Apollo = god of poetry.

- a. Hor. Carm. 4.6.29-30
*spiritum Phoebus mihi, Phoebus artem
carminis nomenque dedit poetae*
- b. Prop. 3.1.7ff.
*Callimachi Manes et Coi sacra Philitae,
in vestrum, quaeso, me sinite ire nemus
primus ego ingredior puro de fonte sacerdos
Itala per Graios orgia ferre choros.
dicite, quo pariter carmen tenuastis in antro
quoque pede ingressi? quamve bibistis aquam?
ah valeat, Phoebum quicumque moratur in
armis! exactus tenui pumice versus eat*
- c. Prop. 3.3. 13
*cum me Castalia speculans ex arbore Phoebus
sic ait aurata nixus ad antra lyra:
‘quid tibi cum tali, demens, est flumine? quis te
carminis heroi tangere iussit opus?
non hinc ulla tibi sperandast fama, Properti.*

fatherland, **where Phoebus calls, I’ll follow.**
We must dig fate out. If my blood pulsed strong
And hot, **I’d take the god full in my breast.**

‘But enough about such things, most of which all Romans
know, while others are known to at least some. **I come now to
things fetched from the inner sanctum of Greek literature,**
things no Roman knows, save those who have earnestly drunk
a full draught of Greek learning. For this poet here (i.e. Virgil)
was as evasive and secretive in his learning as he was diligent
and finicky: as a result, the sources of many of his borrowings
are difficult to recognize.
(A. Kaster, LOEB 2011)

There’s an old wood untouched for many years:
you’d believe **a god lives in the place.**
There’s a **sacred** spring at its centre and a **cave**
of overhanging rock, and birds sing sweetly all around.
While I was walking there privately in the wooded shade –
wondering **what project my Muse might be engendering** –
Elegy arrived, her perfumed hair in a knot, [...]
And stormy Tragedy appeared with giant strides:
(A.S. Kline 2001)

Ma. What is it, father? Speak. **Ti.** What can I speak?
My mind is lost in a maze of turmoil.
What words? Dire evil is here –buried deep.

- a. Hor. Carm. 4.6.29-30
Phoebus gave me inspiration, **Phoebus** gave me skill in
singing, and the name of poet. (A.S. Kline 2003)
- b. Prop. 3.1.7ff.
Ghosts of Callimachus and shrines of Coan Philetas, I
pray you let me walk in your grove: I, the first to enter, a
priest of the pure fountain, to celebrate Italian mysteries
to the rhythms of Greece. Tell me in what valley did you
both spin out your song? On what feet did you enter?
Which waters did you drink? Away with the man who
keeps Phoebus stuck in battle! Let verse be finished,
polished with pumice (A.S. Kline 2003)
- c. Prop. 3.3. 13
Then **Phoebus**, spotting me, from his Castalian grove,
leant on his golden lyre, by a cave-door, saying: ‘What’s
your business with that stream, you madman? Who
asked you to meddle with epic song? There’s not a hope
of fame for you from it, Propertius. (A.S. Kline 2003)

d. *Ov. Am.* 3.8. 23
ille ego Musarum purus Phoebique sacerdos
ad rigidas canto carmen inane fores?

See also Callimachus' Hymn to Apollo ll. 108-112 and *Aitia*, frag. 1 and Virg. *Ecl.* 6. 3 ff. among many others.

12. *Hor. Carm.* 3.25

Quo me, Bacche, rapis tui
plenum? quae nemora aut quos agor in
specus velox mente nova?
[...]
nil parvum aut humili modo,
nil mortale loquar. dulce periculum est,
o Lenaeae, sequi deum
cingentem viridi tempora pampino.

13. *Prop.* 3.2.9

Carminis interea nostri redeamus in orbem, [...]
miremur, nobis et Baccho et Apolline dextro,
turba puellarum si mea verba colit?

See also *Hor. Carm.* 2.19 and *Prop.* 3.17

14. *Sen. Med.* 51-55

accingere ira teque in exitium para
furore toto. paria narrentur tua
repudia thalamis: quo uirum linques modo?
hoc quo secuta es. rumpe iam segnes moras:
quae scelere parta est, scelere linquenda est domus.

15. *Virg. Geog.* 3. 8-11 and 42-47

Temptanda uia est, qua me quoque possim
tollere humo uictorque uirum uolitare per ora.
primus ego in patriam mecum, modo uita supersit.
Aonio rediens deducam uertice Musas.

[...]
interea Dryadum siluas saltusque sequamur
intactos, tua, Maecenas, haud mollia iussa:
te sine nil altum mens incohat. En age segnis
rumpe moras; uocat ingenti clamore Cithaeron
Taygetique canes domitrixque Epidaurus equorum, et
uox adsensu nemorum ingeminata remugit.

**Temptanda uia est* is later echoed by Seneca's Tiresias, immediately after the end of the extispicy and before the beginning of the necromancy l. 392)

16. *Ov. Am.* 3.1.11-16

Venit et ingenti violenta Tragoedia passu:
fronte comae torva, palla iacebat humi;
laeva manus sceptrum late regale movebat,

d. *Ov. Am.* 3.8. 23
Am I, the pure **priest** of **Apollo** and the Muses, to sing
idle songs at unyielding doors? (A.S. Kline 2001)

Where are you taking me, Bacchus,
now I'm full of you? To what caves or groves,
driven, swiftly, by new inspiration? [...]
I'll sing nothing trivial, no
humble measure, nothing that dies.
O, Lenaeus, the danger of following a god
is sweet, wreathing my brow with green leaves of
the vine. (A. S. Kline 2003)

Prop. 3.2.9

Let me return, meanwhile, to the world of my poetry:
no wonder if, **befriended by Bacchus and Phoebus**, a crowd
of girls should cherish my words? A.S. Kline 2002.

Gird thyself with wrath, and prepare thee for deadly deeds
with the full force of madness. Let the story of thy rejection
match the story of thy marriage. How wilt thou leave thy
husband? Even as thou didst follow him. **Break off now dull**
delay: the home which by crime was gained, by crime must
be abandoned.

I must try a path, by which I too can rise from the earth and
fly, victorious, from men's lips.
If life lasts, I'll be the first to return to my country,
bringing the Muses with me from the Aonian peak:
[...]
Meanwhile let's off to the Dryads' woods, the untouched
glades, no easy demand of yours, Maecenas. Without you my
mind attempts no high themes: come then, **end my lingering**
delay: Mount Cithaeron calls with loud cries, the hounds of
Taygetus, Epidaurus, tamer of horses: and the sound doubled
by echoes rings from the woods. (A.S. Kline 2001)

And stormy Tragedy appeared with giant strides:
forehead wild with hair, robe trailing the ground:
her left hand waving a royal sceptre about,

*Lydius alta pedum vincla cothurnus erat.
Et prior 'ecquis erit,' dixit, 'tibi finis amandi,
O argumenti **lente** poeta tui?*

17. Hor. Ars. 295-299.

*Ingenium misera quia fortunatius arte
credit et excludit sanos Helicone poetas
Democritus, **bona pars non unguis ponere curat,**
non barbam; secreta petit loca, **balnea vitat.**
Nanciscetur enim pretium nomenque poetae,
si tribus Anticyris caput insanabile nunquam
tonsori Licino commiserit.*

18. Tiresias' description

a. Oed. 548-549

*Huc ut **sacerdos** intulit senior gradum,
haut est moratus*

b. Oed. 551-555

*ipse funesto integit
uates amictu corpus et frondem quatit;
squalente cultu maestus ingreditur senex,
lugubris imos palla perfundit pedes,
mortifera canam taxus adstringit comam.*

c. Oed. 559-572

*Vocat inde manes teque qui manes regis
et obsidentem claustra Lethaei lacus
carmenque magicum uoluit et rabido minax
decantat ore quidquid aut placat leues
aut cogit umbras; sanguinem libat focus
solidasque pecudes urit et multo specum
saturat cruore; libat et niueum insuper
lactis liquorem, fundit et Bacchum manu
laeua **canitque** rursus ac terram intuens
grauiore manes **uoce** et **attonita** citat.
latrauit Hecates turba; ter ualles cauae
sonuere maestum, tota succusso solo
pulsata tellus. 'audior' **uates** ait,
'rata uerba fudi:*

d. Oed. 621-622

*instat et Stygias preces
geminat **sacerdos**,*

e. Oed. 530- 533

***Cr.** Est procul ab urbe lucus ilicibus niger
Dircaea circa uallis inriguae loca.
cupressus altis exerens siluis caput
uirente semper alligat trunco nemus.*

high-soled Lydian boots fastened to her feet.
And she spoke first, saying: 'O **sluggish poet**,
will you ever stop taking love as your subject? (A.S. Kline
2001)

Because Democritus believed talent a greater
Blessing than poor old technique, and barred sane poets
From Helicon, a good few don't care to trim their nails,
Or beards, haunting secluded spots, shunning the baths.
Surely a man will win the honour and name of poet
If only he doesn't entrust Licinus the barber,
With a noddle that three Anticyras couldn't affect!

It was here that the old priest came,
No delay.

The seer shrouds
His body in dead robes and shakes a leaf-spray;
This dismal costume flows down to his feet.
The old man steps forwards, squalid and gloomy;
His white hair is wreathed by deathly yew.

Next, he summons the dead and thee, lord
Of the Dead, and the lethal lake's keeper
And recites **magic verses**, and he **chants**
With **rabid menace** what calms or compels
The weightless ghosts. He offers blood on the fires,
And burns the animals whole, and drenches the pit with great
gore. He makes a libation
Of snowy milk; his left hand pours Bacchus.
He **chants** again and staring at the earth
Incites the dead in **deeper, frenzied tones**.
Hecate's pack howled; thrice the hollow valley
Echoed the doleful sound. The whole earth jolted, the ground
shook. 'They hear me,' cried the **seer**,
My words have power.'

The **priest** presses on and doubles
His Stygian prayers.

There is far aside the city a dark
Ilex grove by Dirce's watery vale.
Cypresses tower over soaring trees;
Their evergreen trunks envelope the wood.

19. Trees, forests, and shadows as metaphors for books, literary tradition, and literary influence

liber “bark,” or “book,” “tree”

silvae “forest,” “source material”

umbra “shadow,” or “influence” respectively.

See Henkel 2009, Hinds 1998, Hunter 2006, Schiesaro 2006, Fenton 2008, Scanlon 2014.

20. *Oed.* 534-541

*curuosque tendit quercus et putres situ
annosa ramos: huius abruptis latus
edax uetustas; illa, iam fessa cadens
radice, fulva pendet aliena trabe. * * *
amara bacas laurus et tiliae leues
et Paphia myrtus et per immensum mare
motura remos alnus et Phoebus obuia
enode Zephyris pinus opponens latus.*

Ancient **oaks** stretch their bending branches
Rotten with decay. One has partly **crumbled**,
gnawed by time; a second now hangs titling
from withered roots, propped on another trunk.
There are sour-berried laurels, slender lindens,
Paphian myrtles, **alders** destined to drive
Oars through boundless sea and – facing Phoebus –
Pines, baring their smooth boles to the zephyrs.

21. *Oed.* 542 ff.

*medio stat ingens arbor atque umbra graui
siluas minores urguet et magno ambitu
diffusa ramos una defendit nemus.
tristis sub illa, lucis et Phoebi inscius,
restagnat umor frigore aeterno rigens;
limosa pigrum circumit fontem palus.*

in the midst, stands a huge tree. Its heavy shade crushes
smaller trees. With a vast span of spreading boughs it guards
the grove alone. Beneath it – grim and lacking Phoebus’ light
– lies a pool, icy and ever motionless. A muddy marsh circles
the sluggish spring.

22. *Ov. Met.* 15.871

*Iamque opus exegi, quod nec Iovis ira nec ignis
nec poterit ferrum nec edax abolere vetustas.*

And now the work is done, that Jupiter’s anger, fire or sword
cannot erase, nor the **gnawing tooth of time**.

A.S. Kline 2000

23. *Hor. Sat.* 1.4.11

*nam fuit hoc vitiosus: in hora saepe ducentos,
ut magnum, versus dictabat stans pede in uno;
cum flueret lutulentus, erat quod tollere velles;
garrulus atque piger scribendi ferre laborem,
scribendi recte: nam ut multum, nil moror.*

That’s where the fault lay: often, epically, he’d dictate
Two hundred lines, do it standing on one foot even!
A lot should have been dredged **from his murky stream**.
He was garrulous, hated (lit. **lazy** in) the labour involved in
writing, Writing well, I mean: I don’t care for mere quantity.
A.S. Kline 2005

24. *Oed.* 598 ff.

*ilico, ut nebulae leues,
uolitant et auras libero caelo trahunt.
non tot caducas educat frondes Eryx
nec uere flores Hybla tot medio creat,
cum examen arto nectitur densum globo,
fluctusque non tot frangit Ionium mare,
nec tanta gelidi Strymonis fugiens minas
permutat hiemes ales et caelum secans
tepente Nilo pensat Arctos niues,
quot ille populos uatis eduxit sonus.*

At once, like misty clouds,
they **flit about** and breathe the open sky.
More than all **the falling leaves** on Mount Eryx,
All the **flowers** budding in Hybla’s mid-spring
When the **dense swarms** cluster in soaring balls,
More than all the **breakers of Ionia’s sea**,
All the **birds** fleeing icy Strymon’s threats,
Quitting winter and slicing through heaven
To swarp Arctic snows for the balmy Nile,
Was the number raised by the seer’s voice.

*Translations of Seneca’s Oedipus are from Boyle (2011).

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