

The Division of *Fas* and *Libido* in Seneca's *Thyestes*

Senecan dramas cannot be completely severed from Senecan philosophy. While it is true the Senecan dramas are more than stoic treatises (Motto & Clark 1982), some scholars have overlooked how Seneca embeds his stoic philosophy into the internal debates his characters have within his plays (Staley 2005). Historical contexts and other facets do affect the content of his plays, and while Seneca entails further assertions of his own philosophy into his actual treatises, when we consider stoicism within Senecan contexts (Graver 2007), and then we assess how Senecan stoicism deals with the *affectus*, it gives substantial context to Seneca's aspirations in all his works. In this paper, I argue that Seneca's *Thyestes* corroborates theories of stoic psychological corruption, where *affectus* functions to corrupt the mind, leading to a dichotomy of rational and irrational thoughts and actions. Inwood specifically notes how Seneca's notions of rationality perform a different role than Socratic dualism of the mind and body (Inwood 1993; Reydams-Schils 2023), but the splintering of these corrupted and uncorrupted recesses of the mind are still apparent as a form of Senecan monism. *Thyestes* validates this distinction of the mind by the juxtaposition of *fas* and *libido* within Thyestes and Atreus. Unlike the complete division of body and soul, the psyche is transformed, causing a split that diverges into distinct forms of the tainted and untainted versions by the *affectus*, which battle each other in direct discourse.

Fas and *libido* permeate the psyches of these characters, and create the tragic events, Atreus killing and cooking Thyestes' sons, and then feeding Thyestes' own sons to him. Seneca characterizes the *libido*, which provokes the dissatisfaction of the two brothers to drive the plot forwards into a conclusion where tyranny overcomes all else, Atreus wins (Rose 1986). Atreus is

still unsatisfied by the accomplishment of his planned retribution since he does not force Thyestes to eat the meal, aware that the feast is his own sons. Seneca shows Atreus battling with his desire for complete satisfaction as he does with Thyestes. It is Thyestes' initial transgressions, caused by his *libido*, of committing adultery with Atreus' wife and of attempting to subjugate the kingdom for himself that spurs Atreus' revenge plot. This act of wrath can only be perpetuated by Thyestes agreeing to return from exile under the false impression of obtaining power, once again tempted for his *libido*. For Atreus, no retaliation is able to fully assuage his anger, leading to more steps of wickedness and deception. Atreus' conception of *fas*, tells him *bene est, abunde est*, it is good, it is more than enough, but his *libido*, his ultimate desire to completely dominate, even enslave Thyestes, compels him towards still wanting more (Meltzer 1988). Because they disregard their *fas*, the representation of the rationalization in their brain, their *libido*, accomplishes this descent towards tragedy. The physical divisions of Thyestes' sons operate to remove their identity, and give total control to Atreus (LaPerle 2012), but, evaluating these ideas further, it is the internal corruption that prompts the external laceration. By analyzing Senecan plays in the perspective of stoic theories, we therefore can prove Senecan stoic framework and reflect on Senecan objectives in his creation. Rather than diverging Seneca's compositions, we must now use these concepts to appreciate Seneca in his entirety, to fully grasp his masterpieces. This acknowledgment of philosophy encapsulated within the characters themselves provides a novel and necessary perspective on Senecan drama.

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