

Dramatizing Generic Constraints: Seneca and his Tragic Surrogates.

In the past decades a growing number of scholarly contributions has convincingly demonstrated the inclusion of a level of metadramatic communication into Seneca's plays. Major studies include the works of Anthony Boyle (2011, 2014, 2017), Cedric Littlewood (2004), Alessandro Schiesaro (2003), and Christopher Trinacty (2014).

With the present paper, I intend to provide my contribution to the exploration of the metadramatic aspects of Seneca's plays by focusing my attention on a selection of tragic characters that can be read as surrogates of the tragedian, these including Oedipus, Jocasta, Clytemnestra, Tiresias, and Cassandra. The aim of this investigation is to show that, through the portrayal of characters as followers and producers of enthusiastic poetry, Seneca points to the constraints and limits imposed by the convention of the tragic genre on the creativity of the tragic poets, while also exploring and illuminating the ways in which originality can nonetheless be achieved. In arguing my points, I shall highlight the ways in which Seneca's plays encourage a meta-poetic interpretation of these characters, by examining intertexts and intratexts that evoke a connection between these characters and well-known real and mythical poets, and by analyzing the ambiguous language with which the authorial characters under examination are described and that the authorial characters themselves utilize to convey content that can be interpreted meta-poetically.

I shall argue that images such as that of pathways, of stormy seas and calm shallow waters, and metaphors of a military and religious nature that Augustan poets such as Horace, Ovid, and Propertius often used to convey their ideas about poetry (cf. Horace, *Odes* 3.25, Propertius 3.1 and 3.3, Ovid, *Amores* 1.1) recur in Seneca's plays and encourage the audience to

explore their meta-poetic potential. It will be my contention, in fact, that scenes such as those in which characters consider what pathway (*via*) they should undertake while engaging in a poetic competition with their past (cf. e.g. Sen. *Oed.* 949 ff. and 1031 ff., and Ag. 109 ff.), in which they are represented in direct and indirect ways as followers of Bacchus (cf. e.g. Sen. *Oed.* 915 ff. and Ag. 867 ff.), and in which Bacchus is portrayed in metatheatrical terms (cf. e.g. Boyle 2011 on Sen. *Oed.* 403 ff.), all combine to encourage the exploration of their meta-dramatic possibilities.

By means of this study, I hope to illuminate the ways in which Seneca construes the metadramatic identity of his authorial characters, the artistic complexity of his tragic poetry, as well as the ways in which his own poetry can speak and shed light on Seneca's own tragic poetry.

Bibliography:

Boyle, A. J. (2011), *Seneca: Oedipus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

_____. (2014), *Seneca: Medea*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

_____. (2017), *Seneca: Thyestes*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Littlewood C. A. J. (2004), *Self-Representation and Illusion in Senecan Tragedy*, Oxford Classical Monographs, Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

Schiesaro, A. (2003), *The Passions in Play: Thyestes and the Dynamics of Senecan Drama*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Trinacty, C. (2014), *Senecan Tragedy and the Reception of Augustan Poetry*, New York: Oxford University Press.