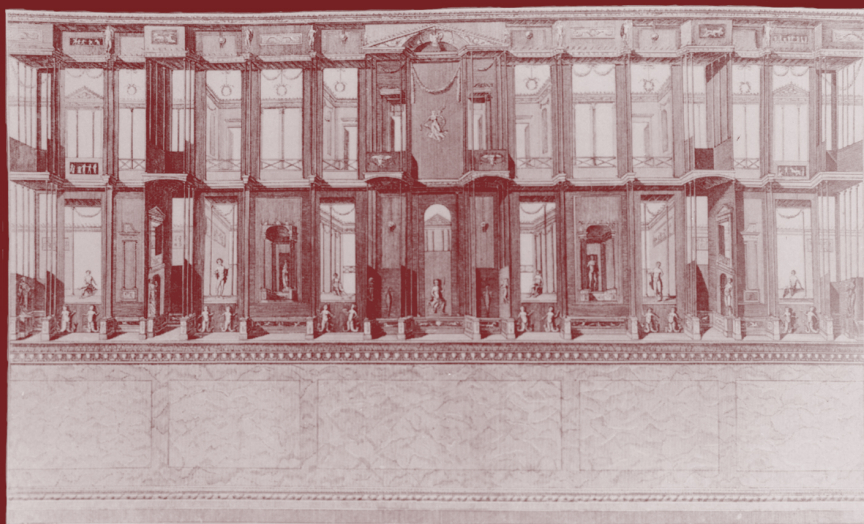


# SENECA

## IN

# PERFORMANCE



edited by

George W.M. Harrison

# SENECA IN PERFORMANCE



# SENECA

## IN PERFORMANCE

edited by

George W.M. Harrison

*Contributors:*

*Frederick Ahl, Elaine Fantham, John G. Fitch,  
Sander M. Goldberg, George W.M. Harrison,  
Brian S. Hook, C.W. Marshall, Gyllian Raby,  
Hanna M. Roisman, Jo-Ann Shelton,  
Eric R. Varner, Katharina Volk*

Duckworth

with

The Classical Press of Wales

First published in 2000 by  
Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd.  
61 Frith Street, London W1V 5TA

Distributor in the United States of America:  
The David Brown Book Co.  
PO Box 511, Oakville, CT 06779  
Tel: (860) 945-9329  
Fax: (860) 945-9468

Originated and prepared for press at  
The Classical Press of Wales  
15 Rosehill Terrace, Swansea SA1 6JN  
Tel: 01792 458397  
Fax: 01792 419056

© 2000

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

ISBN 0 7156 2931 X

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Typeset by Ernest Buckley, Clunton, Shropshire  
Printed and bound in the UK by Antony Rowe Ltd., Chippenham, Wiltshire

## CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction	vii
SENECA ON THE ANCIENT STAGE	
1. Playing Seneca? <i>John G. Fitch</i> (University of Victoria)	1
2. Production of Seneca's <i>Trojan Women</i> , ancient? and modern <i>Elaine Fantham</i> (Princeton University)	13
3. Location! Location! Location! Choral absence and theatrical space in the <i>Troades</i> <i>C.W. Marshall</i> (The Memorial University of Newfoundland)	27
4. Nothing within which passeth show: Character and <i>color</i> in Senecan Tragedy <i>Brian S. Hook</i> (Creighton University)	53
CONTEMPORARY ROMAN SOCIAL INFLUENCES ON SENECA	
5. A new look at Seneca's <i>Phaedra</i> <i>Hanna M. Roisman</i> (Colby College)	73
6. The spectacle of death in Seneca's <i>Troades</i> <i>Jo-Ann Shelton</i> (University of California, Santa Barbara)	87
7. Grotesque vision: Seneca's Tragedies and Neronian art <i>Eric R. Varner</i> (Emory University)	119
8. <i>Semper ego auditor tantum?</i> : Performance and physical setting of Seneca's plays <i>George W.M. Harrison</i> (Xavier University, Cincinnati)	137
MODERN TRANSLATION AND STAGING	
9. Seneca and Chaucer: Translating both poetry and sense <i>Frederick Ahl</i> (Cornell University)	151
10. Seneca's <i>Trojan Women</i> : Identity and survival in the aftermath of war <i>Gyllian Raby</i> (Xavier University, Cincinnati)	173

11. Putting Andromacha on stage: A performer's perspective	197
<i>Katharina Volk</i> (Princeton University)	
12. Going for Baroque: Seneca and the English	209
<i>Sander M. Goldberg</i> (University of California, Los Angeles)	
Bibliography	233
Index	249

## INTRODUCTION

The debate about whether Seneca intended his plays to be performed on stage, and whether they were so performed within his lifetime either with Seneca or someone else as producer, seems a curiously German and Anglophone concern. Colleagues in other countries appear to take it as an article of faith that the plays are capable of being produced and were performed during the course of the first century AD. The nineteenth-century *Akademie* was not kind to Seneca. Doubts were cast on the authenticity of some of the plays and poems attributed to him, not always without cause, and the value and charm of his work was denigrated. It was at this time and in this climate that the *Rezitations-theorie* received its current form and found a lasting influence.

To test the question of whether the plays were meant for performance or for recitation, the Theater Program at Xavier University, Cincinnati, with the active support of the Department of Classics, put on a production of Seneca's *Trojan Women* under the direction of Gyllian Raby of the Shaw Festival Theatre and produced by Cathy Springfield, adapting from the translation of Fred Ahl. In conjunction with the play, the Department of Classics sponsored a two day conference, 20–21 February 1998, on the plays of Seneca with the active support of the Archaeology Society, Classical Association of the Midwest and South, College of Business Administration, Greater Cincinnati Convention and Visitors Bureau, Senior Classical League, Students Activities Council, Wheeler Grant, Office of the President, and Office of the Dean, Arts and Sciences.

Each speaker was given an entire hour to develop and demonstrate his or her point of view, which touched upon not just the plays themselves but also upon the social *milieu* and the influence of Seneca's plays from antiquity to today. This volume comprises the publication versions of those ten papers, which take into account, as far as each individual has chosen, the comments made and general discussion at the conclusion of their papers and sympotic reflections at more informal settings. To the ten papers delivered at the conference, two have been appended, one by the conference organizer and another by John Fitch; the latter received a preliminary airing at the Crossing the Stages conference at the University of Saskatoon, in October 1997. The editor is particularly grateful that John Fitch accepted an invitation

to publish his paper here and to John Porter and C.W. Marshall, organizers of the Crossing the Stages conference, for their courtesies in allowing Professor Fitch's contribution to grace this collection.

The twelve essays in this volume examine the possibilities and limitations of staging the plays of Seneca and challenge either explicitly or implicitly the view of Seneca the tragedian inherited from prior generations of scholarship; they indicate how far American and Canadian scholarship on Seneca has continued to progress since the 1983 *Ramus* studies on Seneca. Focus is split between imagining how the plays would have looked on an ancient stage and exploring the lighting advantages and other conventions of the modern stage. The papers are not limited to practical issues of stagecraft, but embrace also the impact of contemporary art and popular entertainment on the reception of Senecan drama. The authors have been drawn to Seneca from a variety of backgrounds which is reflected in their essays: in addition to scholars on Euripides who discovered a liking for Seneca's interpretation of the same material, one contributor is an art historian, another a cultural historian of the early Empire, a third came to Seneca *via* Roman comedy, and yet another found Seneca's plays during researches on Lucan's epic; there are also a director, a producer, and an actress-scholar. The breadth of their perspectives and experience broadens the inquiry and enlivened greatly the weekend during which they were all guests of Xavier University, Cincinnati.

Although there may never be total agreement on whether the plays were written for full production, there was unanimous agreement among presenters and attendees that there is no alternative to performance, since the experience of reading the text in a class can never duplicate what the play looks like on stage. During the two days of the conference and the continuing discussion which has taken place since then, it has become clear that the differences between the two views regarding performance are narrowing considerably, not the least because of Fitch's work which does not see recitation and staging as mutually exclusive but considers that they co-existed side-by-side. The terms of the debate about performance vs. recitation has been altered irrevocably by his identification of passages which he argues convincingly could be taken out or left in according to the type of production. Fitch's thesis is complimented by Harrison's, which seeks to understand what counted as '*performance*' among Romans of the early Empire and thus also to consider the impact of physical performance spaces of different kinds on an argument for production stripped of an anachronistic view of formal staging.

Almost every paper makes reference to at least one other contribution in the volume and several of the contributors read drafts of each other's papers since the positions taken by nearly every author support those of at least one other participant. Thus Roisman's view that Seneca's *Phaedra* is highly original and at places seems a calculated refutation of Greek myth (including Ovid) is compatible with Hook's reading of Seneca's characterizations, Ahl's sense of word play and puns in Seneca, and Fantham's intuition, as well as Marshall's, that the stage conventions of Roman tragedy owe more to Roman comedy than to Greek tragedy. The articles on the influence of contemporary Roman setting are all in accord, Shelton from a cultural standpoint, Varner from an artistic one, and Harrison from an architectural perspective.

One of the special features of the conference was that the director and translator consented to be on the program the day after the play was viewed by contributors, conference registrants, and the general public. This added dimension of having the principals of production as speakers at the conference made viewing the play much more than a pleasant adjunct to the colloquium: it became the focus of the discussion on the following day. It was our hope and expectation that a Senecan specialist might help the director read the text with a greater appreciation of the ancient perspective while the professional director might show how the subtleties and conventions of the modern stage can contribute to a finely-nuanced presentation of Seneca's tragic ideas.

How to put ancient plays on a modern stage is hardly a new problem. Solutions abound from renditions as faithful as possible to the producer's vision of ancient staging to ones rooted in the *avant garde*. Volk, Raby, and Ahl have sharp but informative differences which have as much to do with the professional vantage point from which they attack the plays as with any theoretical or scholarly divisions; that is, as performer on stage, or director at the footlights, or translator with text and foolscap in the shadow of the first rows. Faithful rendition is represented by the practical experience of Katharina Volk who played Andromache in the Munich staging of Seneca's *Trojan Women*. The '*experimental philology*' of director Wilfried Stroh brought out the complexity of Andromache and most particularly her sinister side, a self-aware victim whom the audience knew would be the founder of a half-Trojan Thessalian dynasty through Neoptolemus, son of Achilles. Fred Ahl's translation had already been used successfully in a production of Seneca's *Trojan Women* at Columbia University on which he consulted; more significantly he directed a production of Seneca's *Trojan Women* in Athens, Greece, and supervised a recitation at Ohio University at Athens, Ohio. His

instincts, however, remain those of someone mesmerized by the unshacklable power of the words and thus his staging is pre-eminently oral, not physical. Gyllian Raby's background in Edwardian, but also experimental, theater places her intuitively at the other end of the spectrum. Her use of video to distinguish passages which she thought took place in the speaker's mind and stilts to indicate varying power relationships are two examples which remain memorable.

Her paper is, I think, essential to this collection since it is a welcome reminder that contemporary directors are subject to considerable influences not felt by ancient playwrights or modern scholars. The need to bring the performance in at seventy minutes and thus without an intermission had more to do with certain cuts than a view of the importance of certain scenes to the message of the play. So, too, the historical perspective of modern directors is multiple, automatically reading the ancient through several successive (but selective) layers of history and collapsing them together, and then coloring the resulting *mélange* with the political tastes and causes of this day. The arguments spawned by the production and Raby's explanation of the intellectual and practical considerations for various directorial decisions are fascinating, not the least because many of the objections are precisely the same ones laid against Seneca by purists of fifth-century Attic tragedy, a drama performed outdoors exclusively and only in association with religious festivals. Raby's almost dismissive self-assurance in the cuts she made is a chilling tonic but a useful juxtaposition through which to judge the scrupulous and thoughtful attention Volk lavishes on the play. Hook, through his detailed acquaintance with Mamet, and Marshall, through Ubersfeld, counterbalance Raby's post-modernist approach to all drama.

Divergent details of staging expose much larger differences of vision and approach. A few particularly revealing ones can stand for the whole: Volk argues passionately, for example, that Andromache's fixation on the cloak of Hector is symptomatic of her character and of all of the relationships between her and other characters; in contrast, Raby cut the scene from the production. Fitch makes a point of killing Medea on stage, a view to which Shelton would subscribe, while Goldberg would keep all violence off-stage. Volk is almost certainly correct that the title of the play was *'Troas'*, not *'Troades'*, of which Marshall's staging seems astutely aware. The centering of the play on the grief of the city and all of its warriors and inhabitants, and not just on the surviving women, has immense ramifications for staging and interpretation, to which she alludes; her observations, further, are not without importance to Fitch's

surmise of stage and studio versions of Seneca's plays. Uncertainty over the positioning of the chorus is perhaps the most intriguing problem in the play: for Fantham the double chorus and abrupt scene changes tell against performance while Marshall sees Seneca's resolution of the difficulty as proof of his genius.

If we have read Seneca according to the prejudices of the nineteenth-century German *Akademie für Altertumswissenschaft*, we value him for his perceived influence on Elizabethan drama. This volume as a whole argues for a reassessment of Leo and others, while Goldberg's paper starts out by making a compelling case that Seneca was more influential for Shakespeare's dark plays, such as *Titus Andronicus*, or for Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, than for Elizabethan drama in general. Perhaps the greatest and most lasting single contribution from all of the papers, though, is Goldberg's careful argument that Seneca's greatest influence on any of his successors was on the Jacobean drama, a point also made by Raby, but not developed. His unstated but implicit and inescapable conclusion is that the sudden proliferation of productions of Seneca's tragedies in the last decade of the twentieth century is an indication of the closeness of our tastes and sensitivities to those of Dryden and his generation.

The title of this collection of essays is by way of compliment to Niall Slater, author of *Petronius in Performance*, and dear friend.

George W.M. Harrison  
Cincinnati, Ohio  
27 February 1999



## PLAYING SENECA?

*John G. Fitch*

The occasion of two conferences on the staging of drama in antiquity<sup>1</sup> has provided an opportunity to re-assess the question whether Seneca envisaged performance when writing his tragedies. My purpose has not been to provide a compendium of all the arguments used on each side, but rather to report on the *status quaestionis*, and to see whether any new conclusions can be reached.

The notion that Seneca's tragedies were not composed for performance was first put forward in the nineteenth century, and is evidently grounded in Romantic aesthetics. It appears to originate with August Wilhelm von Schlegel (1809), the high priest of German Romanticism.<sup>2</sup> Schlegel predictably found Seneca's dramas bombastic, unnatural, shocking, and alien to the Greek genius, and he threw out the personal opinion (no more) that 'they were never intended to emerge from the rhetorical schools on to the stage.'<sup>3</sup> That suggestion was later worked up into a hypothesis by Gaston Boissier (1861), who objected to the horrific nature of certain scenes, and to the preponderance of speech (especially monologues) over action. The anti-performance view was then canonized by acceptance in the magisterial edition of Friedrich Leo (1878–9), and thereafter was served up in countless handbooks and literary histories 'as established fact' (Fortey and Glucker 1975, 699). It was finally elaborated in detail, over a century after Boissier's essay, in the dissertation of a young scholar who was to become the best modern editor of the tragedies, Otto Zwierlein (1966).

The suggestion that Seneca did not write for performance, then, arose in the nineteenth century from an intense distaste for the qualities of his dramas. Correspondingly the very gradual critical rehabilitation of Seneca's tragedies in the twentieth century, as Romantic criteria became less dominant, was accompanied by a renewed appreciation of their dramatic qualities (however different these might be from Greek tragedy), and the tide of opinion among critics who wrote in detail on this question turned increasingly in favour of performance of

some kind. A pioneer champion of performance was Léon Herrmann, who devoted chapter 2 of *Le Théâtre de Sénèque* (1924) to the question. A successor in the pro-performance camp in France was Pierre Grimal (1983). German-speaking proponents of performance include Braun (1982) and Dihle (1983), whose work I shall return to later. In the United States the most prominent discussions have been the article of Calder (1975) and the monograph of Sutton (1986). Sutton argues for full-scale performance in theatres, whereas Calder believes in smaller-scale performances in the mansions of the elite and of the emperor, as does Ahl (1986, 18, 27).

A tenet common among pro-performance critics is that the text of a drama has a similar status to a musical score, as something whose power can only be fully realized in performance. Several Senecan critics have shown a commitment to this tenet by involving themselves with stage productions, which have in turn informed their criticism. Fortey and Glucker directed a production of *Phaedra* in Exeter, and published their conclusions about implicit stage-directions (1975). Fred Ahl's translations were shaped by his experience of staging three of the plays, and advising on production of a fourth, at Cornell (1986, 26); a production of *Troades* adapted from his translation also accompanied the Xavier conference.<sup>4</sup> A production of Boyle's translation of *Troades* in Melbourne in 1988 is reflected in the consistent concern with staging in his commentary on that play (1994). And a production of *Troades* in the original Latin in Munich was followed by an article by the director, Wilfried Stroh, and one of the actors, Barbara Breitenberger (1994); it also led to a paper in this volume by Katharina Volk, describing how her understanding of the play was deepened by the experience of playing the role of Andromacha in that production.

Another tendency evident in current Senecan criticism is to reduce the extreme dichotomy between the two options of *recitatio* and theatrical performance.<sup>5</sup> Proponents of *recitatio* used to feel obliged to argue that Seneca's dramas had nothing theatrical about them, that they were in Zwierlein's word *bühnenfremde*, 'foreign to the stage'. But such absolute positions are less often taken these days. For example Richard Tarrant in his editions of *Agamemnon* and *Thyestes* adopts the view that Seneca wrote for *recitatio* rather than performance; yet Tarrant himself in a ground-breaking article (1978) has shown that the dramatic technique of Seneca's plays is that of theatrical writing as it had evolved in the Hellenistic and Augustan ages: that techniques such as the entrance-monologue or the lengthy aside, which Zwierlein and others had characterized as untheatrical, were actually recognized elements

of theatrical technique in Seneca's day. Tarrant also acknowledges 'the undeniable theatrical power of many Senecan scenes' (1985, 14). Finally Tarrant does not deny the possibility that Seneca's plays were performed in his lifetime, even though in his view their author was not writing for performance. So clearly in Tarrant's criticism there is not an all-or-nothing dichotomy between the case for *recitatio* and the case for performance. I am going to try to blur the dividing-lines in another way, by arguing that Seneca's plays are not uniform in this respect: that some scenes are written with the theatre in mind, but one scene is written for verbal effect in such a way as to exclude theatrical performance.

A good example of a scene which has theatrical power is that contained in act 5 of *Thyestes*. Atreus prowls in front of his own palace, gloating over the ghastly banquet which his unsuspecting brother is devouring within. Then he orders the palace doors to be opened, so that he can enjoy the spectacle of Thyestes' feasting. He is playing the role, then, of director or *régisseur* of the drama, providing a spectacle to be watched by himself and by the implied spectators.<sup>6</sup> He is also planning the moment of *anagnorisis*, when Thyestes will recognize the heads of his murdered children (903–7). This pattern of one of the *dramatis personae* directing his own play is reminiscent of plays which are unquestionably for the stage: one thinks of Clytaemnestra controlling the tableaux of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, of cunning slaves such as Pseudolus and Palaestrio who direct stage situations, of Prospero in the *Tempest*.

As the palace doors open, the indoor scene of Thyestes' banquet becomes visible. Clearly this is in keeping with the theatrical technique whereby a tableau of an indoor situation is wheeled out through palace doors on an *exostra* or *eccyclema* so it can be seen by the audience, though it remains 'indoors' by theatrical convention. The theatricality of the scene is increased by the contrast between darkness outside and light and colour indoors. *Aperta multa tecta conlucent face. | Resupinus ipse purpurae atque auro incubat.* 'The open palace is gleaming with many torches. Thyestes himself is reclining sprawled on purple and gold' (908–9). This is a strongly visual effect, which would work powerfully in the theatre. Then, as Thyestes receives the horrific goblet from his brother, he perceives that the lights of the dining-hall are failing (*vix lucet ignis*, 990): the outer darkness of evil is invading what he took to be safety of the house. And the climax of the scene is reached as Atreus uncovers to his brother, no doubt with a dramatic flourish, the faces and severed heads of his murdered children.

Yet the impression of ‘theatrical power’ is not in itself probative. It is conceivable that the scene was written out of a theatrical imagination – and appeals to a similar imagination on the part of listeners or readers – without any expectation of performance. Indeed, the very recognition of the scene as theatrically powerful is based on a certain experience and interpretation of the theatre: Zwierlein, coming from a different experience, called it ‘scarcely actable’ (‘nur schwer darstellbar’, 1966, 28 n.6).

Is it not possible to find something more probative in the text of the dramas? Ludwig Braun has done so in his discussion of the very scene we have been considering (1982, 45–6). He points out that the scene’s critical moment of recognition, the moment towards which the whole play moves, depends for its effect on a physical action – Atreus’ revealing of the heads of the children. And this action is not verbalized: Atreus does *not* say ‘Look, father, at the severed heads of your sons.’ On the contrary, he speaks until the very last moment as if they were alive: *Expedi amplexus, pater; | venere*. ‘Spread out your arms to embrace them, father; they have come’(1004f.). So the shock value depends entirely on what he *does* next, not what he says. Consequently Braun concluded that this scene must be intended for performance, in the sense that the words of the text must be accompanied and explained by a decisive revelatory action.

Braun argued further that the text alone, in a purely verbal *recitatio*, would actually be confusing for the audience. Thyestes’ words are, *Agnosco fratrem. sustines tantum nefas | gestare, Tellus?* ‘I recognize my brother. O Earth, can you endure to bear so great an evil?’ These words register that Thyestes now knows that Atreus has killed his children, but they do not register *how* he knows it. They depend on the action which has occurred, but without specifying what it was. So an audience relying on the text alone would not only miss the emotional impact of the revelation, but would also be confused about how the revelation has taken place.

There are similar examples in other scenes in Seneca’s tragedies – examples where the words of the text are not complete in themselves, but allude to some action and can only be fully understood if the action is enacted and seen by the audience. Ludwig Braun (1982, 46–7) pointed particularly to the scene in *Medea* where Medea murders her children onstage. The murders take place as the climax of a long soliloquy during which Medea debates with herself whether or not to kill her children. If an audience were listening to a *recitatio* of this soliloquy, with no action to guide their understanding, there are several

places where these listeners might conclude, from the words of the text, ‘Medea is killing her children right now.’ For example at 924–5 she says, ‘Children once mine, bear the punishment (*poenas date*) for your father’s crimes.’ ‘Bear the punishment’ sounds as if it could be the cue for the murders. But then the self-debate goes on, so the audience would realize she has *not* killed them. Ten lines later: *occidant, non sunt mei; | pereant, mei sunt*. ‘Let them die, they are not mine: let them perish, they are mine’ (that is, whether she forswears them as her own children or not, they must die). This sounds conclusive, it could be the moment. But again the next lines would force the audience to reject that possibility. But of course in performance there is no difficulty for the audience: they *see* that Medea is not yet at the point of killing her children.

Later in this monologue the distraught Medea has a vision of her dead brother, whom she herself killed, seeking recompense for his death. She says to him, *utere hac, frater, manu | quae strinxit ense. victima manes tuos | placamus ista*. ‘Use this hand of mine, brother, which has drawn the sword. With this victim I appease your shade’ (969–71). Then immediately, in the same line, *Quid repens affert sonus* ‘What is that sudden noise?’, as she hears Jason and his men approaching. So an audience listening to a reading, with no action to guide them, might well conclude that her imminent intention of sacrificing a child to her brother was forestalled by the sudden arrival of Jason and the soldiers. Only four lines later does it become explicit in the text that she has in fact killed one of the children, when she says that she will climb to the roof of the house carrying the body of one child and leading the still living child. But clearly it would be quite unsatisfactory for a listening audience not to be certain when the critical action takes place.

The conclusion, then, is similar to the conclusion for the *Thyestes*: namely that the critical moment of the *Medea*, the critical few seconds for which the whole play prepares, depends for its effect on an action, the killing of the child. The text is allusive, it alludes to the action, and would not in itself be a sufficiently clear indication of this crucial action. So the scene is composed for performance, in which the words can play off an action, rather than having to substitute for it.

This in itself is a vitally important conclusion. Braun, however, wanted to push things still further: he wanted to conclude that such scenes as these absolutely could not be presented in *recitatio*, because the audience would not know just when the critical action occurred. This seems to me to go beyond the evidence, because we have no idea how *recitationes* were conducted. It is conceivable that the *recitator* or some

other person provided spoken stage-directions at opportune moments: for example, at the climax of *Thyestes* he might have commented, *Atreus fratri capita liberorum monstrat*. True, no such stage directions have been preserved from antiquity, but if they existed they would by definition have been extraneous to the text, prepared only for *recitatio*, and therefore might well not have been preserved.

Another possibility is that the *recitator*, or again another person, accompanied the words of the text with gestures which would clarify the action for the audience. Pliny the Younger in one of his letters speaks of an impending *recitatio* of some of his verse, and wonders whether he as the author should accompany the *recitator* with gestures (*Ep.* 9.34.2). These possibilities, then, cannot be excluded. After all, we know that some plays, tragedies and comedies both, *were* presented in *recitatio*. So there may well have been some method or methods in *recitatio* of letting the audience know what is happening on the imaginary stage, in addition to the words of the text itself.

What Braun's evidence does establish beyond doubt is that such methods would be only second-best for certain scenes in Senecan drama. In the scenes in question, Seneca is clearly writing for performance, where the action can have its full impact. The text at these moments becomes secondary to the action, in the sense that it refers to the action and depends upon it. In *recitatio*, the impact of the action would inevitably be diminished, and with it the impact of the whole scene. It is conceivable that Seneca presented his plays first through *recitatio*, before they came to performance. We know that Seneca's contemporary, Pomponius Secundus, did exactly that – i.e. presented his plays first to a circle of literary people in *recitatio*, and then to a wider public in the theatre. Seneca may well have done the same. But at least for the more theatrical scenes in Seneca, *recitatio* would be merely preliminary to the real thing. To coin a phrase, *recitatio* would be only foreplay.

Can we make any further progress on this issue? It is noteworthy that Braun's argument depends on particular scenes which have a theatrical quality, i.e. act 5 of *Thyestes* and of *Medea*. There is in fact a strong dichotomy in Senecan Tragedy between scenes which are theatrical, in the sense of relying on action and visual effects, and those scenes which rely chiefly on words and ideas and are static in terms of physical action. Which are some of the more theatrical scenes? Act 2 of *Phaedra*, where Phaedra declares her obsessive passion for Hippolytus: she faints, she kneels before him, Hippolytus draws his sword to kill her. Act 3 of *Trojan Women*, with its intense struggle between Andromache and Ulysses, and the strong physical presence of Hector's tomb. Act 4 of

*Hercules*, where Hercules in madness kills his wife and children. Act 5 of *Hercules*, with its fierce argument about whether Hercules' weapons should be returned to him now that he has recovered his sanity.<sup>7</sup> These are climactic scenes within their respective plays.

We might consider putting this fact alongside external evidence concerning performance of extracts from tragedies, rather than full plays. It was quite common, from the Hellenistic period on, to stage public performances of extracts from tragedies. The evidence has been collected by Albrecht Dihle (1983) and H.A. Kelly (1979); Dihle was particularly interested in the Hellenistic evidence, and Kelly in the evidence from the imperial period from both Greece and Italy. These extract performances took place in theatres, with costumes and props; in Greece they were usually part of dramatic competitions, but that was not always the case at Rome. Kelly shows that such excerpt-performances were more frequent in Rome than performances of whole plays. He suggests that writers of tragedy in Rome in the first century AD might have had in mind excerpt-performances of the 'climactic scenes' (37, 43) of their tragedies.

This ties in well with the nature of Seneca's plays themselves, which, as we have seen, tend to have their strongest theatrical effects concentrated in certain scenes. That is, Seneca may have expected or thought it likely that his plays would be performed in excerpts more often than in the full text. So when he composed the plays his imagination became more theatrical in the climactic scenes than elsewhere. I do not mean that Seneca had *no* expectation of performance of the whole text, but only that he had a more lively expectation of performance of individual scenes.

If Seneca's plays were performed in excerpt, then, these performances would have taken place in permanent theatres. Indeed, the setting and resources implied by the text of Seneca's dramas are those of a full-scale theatre. *Medea* needs to appear on the roof of a stage-building, and to be lifted from it in a dragon-chariot. *Phaedra* appears on a balcony in the upper storey of the *scaenae frons*.<sup>8</sup> And use of the *exostra* to reveal an interior scene is implied in the *Thyestes* and *Hercules* (Fitch 1987, 413). But these indications are scarcely conclusive, since it could have been simply conventional practice to write tragedy as if for a full-scale theatre. Certainly one should not think of large-scale theatres as the only possible setting for performance; in view of the popularity of literary and dramatic entertainment in social settings among the Roman upper classes, it is highly likely that performances of excerpts or full texts of Seneca's plays took place also in private mansions and perhaps in the imperial palace (Calder 1975, 32).

The performance itself would surely have been stylized, with much attention to set pieces and less to such details as management of stage entrances and exits. Modern performances of opera (minus the music, of course) offer a better analogy than modern dramatic performances, which often observe naturalistic conventions. Contemporary critics sometimes retroject too much naturalism into the original. For example, Fortey and Glucker (1975, 712–13) believe that Seneca intended Phaedra to be onstage during the messenger-speech of her play, so that the audience will understand why in the next act she knows about Hippolytus' death in some detail. But nothing else in Seneca's text suggests her presence during the messenger's speech. The audience at 1154ff. would probably be too preoccupied with Phaedra's dramatic entry, sword in hand, to ask *how* she knows of Hippolytus' death. If not, they would surely infer, reasonably, that house-slaves have informed her as queen about the messenger's report.

In the same way, inappropriately naturalistic criteria underlie some discussions of the chorus' 'presence' or 'absence' between odes, and its knowledge of events.<sup>9</sup> It is true that in fifth-century tragedy the chorus normally remains present from its first entry on, and aware of events transpiring onstage, though it is occasionally absent from the scene and consequently unaware of events. Its engagement with the stage situation is marked by the fact that the chorus-leader not infrequently addresses or converses with the *dramatis personae*. Already in late Euripides, however, the chorus is becoming detached from the ongoing dramatic situation; and Senecan drama comes after several centuries' further evolution of dramatic technique (of which unfortunately we know very little with regard to the tragic chorus). In Senecan drama, there are almost no indications of choral arrival or departure, and the chorus' awareness of events is what the text indicates it to be in any given ode, rather than a reflection of the chorus' 'presence' or 'absence' during the previous act, or even of the stage situation as it sings its ode.<sup>10</sup> The chorus, then, is neither 'present' nor 'absent' between odes, but rather in abeyance in dramatic terms: after singing an ode, the chorus ceases to have any dramatic existence until the next ode. Seneca's occasional employment of the chorus-leader in dialogue, where no other suitable interlocutor is available, is a surviving remnant of fifth-century dramatic technique, preserved for the sake of convenience, and does not imply a continuous choral engagement with, or awareness of, events between the odes.

We have Vitruvius' testimony that choruses in Roman theatres delivered their odes on the stage, not in the orchestra (5.6.2). Since

the Senecan chorus ceases to exist dramatically between odes, where would the actors representing the chorus be stationed at these times? Calder (1975, 35) argues that they would often leave the stage between odes: since the playing area of the Vitruvian stage was relatively small, and the chorus fewer in number than the 15 of the Sophoclean age, 'discreet withdrawal and re-entry became simple matters.' On the other hand, the fact that the chorus-leader is available to participate in dialogue as necessary might suggest that Seneca envisaged the chorus as remaining onstage between odes, though not as 'present' in a dramatic sense. In excerpt-performance, however, the choral odes would presumably be dropped (at least if the excerpt were a single act), and the chorus would not therefore be present, except for the chorus-leader if needed in the dialogue.

So far, so good. We have seen positive evidence that Seneca strongly envisaged performance of at least some scenes of his plays, and evidence too of the circumstances under which performance might have taken place. But what of the contrary view that certain scenes cannot be performed? As critics have often pointed out, that view was based on the criteria of fifth-century BC Attic tragedy, rather than those of the Roman stage, and on an overly restrictive concept of what can be staged. B. Walker, in an incisive review of Zwierlein's *Rezitationsdramen*, pointed out 'how impossible it is to set any bounds, other than those of accepted convention within a particular theatrical tradition, to what may be done or said on any stage' (1969, 184–5, following Hadas 1939, 220). Zwierlein, for example, believed that the scene in *Oedipus* in which Jocasta stabs herself with a sword, which is then expelled by a strong flow of blood, is (once again) 'scarcely actable' (1966, 28 n.6). But the business of the sword could be managed by any skilful actor, perhaps with use of a retractable sword-blade; and the flow of blood could be simulated (if it were not simply evoked by description) through use of a blood-bag. Both retractable swords and blood-bags are attested for the period of the empire (Sutton 1986, 63, 67).

There is, however, one scene which is clearly not written in such a way as to lend itself to stage performance: it is the scene of animal sacrifice in the *Oedipus*. In this scene Tiresias' daughter Manto describes to her blind father the progress of an animal sacrifice and an extispicy which is intended to discover the cause of the plague in Thebes. The text of her description, if one reads it or listens to it being read, is a fine example of the florid baroque style familiar in Ovid, in Seneca and in Lucan. But if one tries to envisage it enacted onstage, there are substantial problems. Two animals are destined for sacrifice, a bull and

a heifer. The behaviour of the bull is ill-omened from the beginning. When stationed to face the east, he panics and shies away (*fugit*, 339) from the rays of the sun. When he is struck, the first blow is not fatal: he requires a second, and even then he rushes (*ruit* 343) hither and thither before he dies. Once the animals are dead, they are opened up and Manto examines their entrails, which are full of the most ghastly omens. Then as a climax of the evil omens, the previously beheaded and disembowelled bodies take on new life, they struggle to their feet and the bull attacks the priests with his horns.

Could this scene have been staged? Presumably so, on Walker's principle that almost anything can be staged, but surely not in a style appropriate to tragedy. Sutton suggests the cattle would be represented by calves which had been drugged (1986, 23). They could easily be led on stage, and Sutton suggests they would not actually be killed, but at the moment of the supposed sacrifice their legs would be kicked from under them and in their drugged state they would collapse. This has two difficulties. First, the Romans knew the difference between a calf and a bull, and would not be impressed by the substitution. Second, Sutton's theory does not account for the most difficult movements, namely the bull rushing around after being struck, and then rising up again to attack the priests. Sutton also mentions the possibility of trained animals, which seems more promising. A bull can be trained. Pliny the Elder reports that he had seen bulls in a show trained to fall and get up again, to lie down and be lifted up, and even to stand in chariots like charioteers and be carried along by galloping horses (*HN* 8.70.182). So it must be conceded that a bull and heifer could be trained to do the actions specified by the sacrifice scene.

The problem then becomes one of 'accepted convention', in Walker's phrase. Animals trained to perform are all very well in the *spectacula*, the shows, but would surely have seemed incongruous in the very different context of tragic drama. Thomas Rosenmeyer in a recent discussion of the sacrifice scene (1993, 242–3) has made the essential point, namely that the power of the scene depends on the word, on the verbal description, whose effect is on the imagination. Even if the scene could be enacted, and however well it might be enacted, enactment with its visual effects would compete in a distracting way with the spoken word and its appeal to the imagination.

Rosenmeyer believes that Seneca's dramas including the *Oedipus* were intended for performance. His solution for this scene is that the sacrifice takes place off-stage. Manto stands at one end of the stage, looks into the wings, and describes what she sees, but what Tiresias cannot see

because he is blind, and what the audience cannot see because it is happening offstage. An attractive solution, but unfortunately the text is conclusively against it. At the beginning of the sacrifice, Tiresias commands 'drive the cattle here, *huc*, and sprinkle their necks with salted meal' (334–5). 'Here' cannot mean offstage because Tiresias is standing onstage. And later Manto examines the entrails with her own hands – that is explicit at line 354. So since she is onstage, the carcasses must be onstage also. There cannot be the physical separation between them which Rosenmeyer implies: if Manto were physically at a distance from the carcasses, she would not be able to describe the condition of the entrails in minute detail, as she does.<sup>11</sup>

This scene, then, is not written with the practicalities of stage performance in mind. On the contrary, it is intended for *recitatio*, where its vivid and detailed descriptions would have a spectacular effect in the audience's imagination. How can this conclusion be reconciled with the evidence we saw earlier for performance? Only by recognizing that the corpus of Senecan drama is not monolithic in this respect, any more than it is in other respects. Some scenes clearly are intended for performance; one scene from the *Oedipus*, just examined, is equally clearly not intended for performance. Is there any possible explanation for the anomalous status of Seneca's *Oedipus*, i.e. the fact that it contains the only scene clearly not written for performance? On the hypothesis about the dating of Seneca's dramas proposed by Fitch (1981), *Oedipus* would be one of Seneca's earliest plays. So one could construct a hypothetical development in which Seneca began writing tragedies for purely 'literary' reasons, thinking only of *recitatio*, but then for whatever reasons became interested in performance, and began to write with performance very much in mind, at least in particular scenes of the later plays.

Thirty years ago John Herington (1966) wrote an article which probably contributed more than anything else written in English to the resurgence of interest in Seneca's dramas. In that article Herington looked forward to live performances of the Senecan plays, but predicted that they would not happen until we had an 'actable, speakable translation'. The translations are now appearing: I think particularly of Fred Ahl's versions, also those of A.J. Boyle, and some of the individual translations in the Johns Hopkins series, particularly Dana Gioia's version of *Hercules*. And these translations are indeed, as Herington predicted, inspiring theatrical performances. Good performances will demonstrate just how powerfully *some* of Seneca's plays, and I emphasize *some* of them, can work in the theatre.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This paper was first given, in an earlier form, at the ‘Crossing the Stages’ conference in Saskatoon, in October 1997. I am grateful to Dr Harrison, and to the participants of the Xavier conference, for the invitation to publish it among the papers of their conference.

<sup>2</sup> ‘der Literaturpapst der deutschen Romantik’ (Stroh 1994, 249).

<sup>3</sup> Schlegel (1809) in Lefèvre 1972, 14.

<sup>4</sup> The production was by K. Springfield, and was directed by Gillian Raby of the Shaw Festival Theatre.

<sup>5</sup> Fantham (1982, 34–49) puts the case that neither of these options is correct, and that Seneca wrote primarily for the private reader.

<sup>6</sup> Atreus as director: Tarrant on 885–919 and 898–901. By the term ‘implied spectators’ I mean that since the play is written in accordance with ancient theatrical conventions, it implies a theatre peopled with actors and audience, whether or not actual performance was intended.

<sup>7</sup> Fitch in his edition of the *HF* concludes that the murder scene contained in lines 987–1053 of act 4 ‘is deliberately designed to combine practicability for the stage with a maximum of emotional impact’ (1987, 352). He also believes that the text of the climactic moment of act 5, viz. 1300–13, is not self-explanatory and requires some accompanying physical action to elucidate it (450).

<sup>8</sup> *Pha.* 384. That the word *fastigia* here refers to an upper-storey balcony is suggested by Suetonius’ report that Nero used to watch plays *e proscaenii fastigio* (*Nero* 12.1). Vitruvius 5.6.9 mentions *fastigia* as a feature of *scaenae* for tragedies.

<sup>9</sup> Further discussion in Fitch (1987, 255–6). Does it make sense, for example, to debate whether the chorus is absent (so Davis 1993, 29) or present (so Fortey and Glucker 1975, 708) during Phaedra’s attempt to seduce Hippolytus? The unconvincing nature of the arguments on each side points to the unreality of the issue itself.

<sup>10</sup> In Ode 4 of *Thy.* the chorus does not know the sun has turned back (e.g. 802, 817), though it was given the explanation in the preceding act (776 ff.). In Ode 2 of *HF*, the chorus shows no awareness of the imminent danger to Hercules’ family (506–8, 514), nor of Hercules’ imminent arrival (520–3).

<sup>11</sup> Töchterle in his *editio maior* of *Oedipus* believes the play was intended for performance, and calls the technique of this scene ‘Teichoskopie’ (1994, 39, 310), which I take to be shorthand for narration onstage of events occurring simultaneously offstage – the same view as Rosenmeyer’s. Tanner (1985, 1102) suggests that Manto stands in the *valvae regiae* and looks at a ‘hidden altar’, which must therefore be in the palace; but altars for major sacrifices were regularly outdoors for practical reasons, and in addition the smoke from this altar must settle on Oedipus (325–6), who is onstage. Tanner further proposes that the entrails were brought onstage ‘in a bronze dish’ for Manto’s inspection. But no, she is clearly examining the entrails in the carcasses, for she notes the relative position of the heart and other organs (356, 366–9), the absence of a caul (369–70), and the location of the foetus in the heifer (374–5).

PRODUCTION OF SENECA'S *TROJAN WOMEN*,  
ANCIENT? AND MODERN

*Elaine Fantham*

In the more than fifteen years since I published my commentary on *Troades*<sup>1</sup> most specialists of Senecan tragedy have renewed the arguments that Seneca intended his plays for the stage – whether public or private. Some scholars, such as W.M. Calder,<sup>2</sup> or A.J. Boyle, who has devoted so many years and pages to the Senecan corpus,<sup>3</sup> have never really been willing to consider the objections put forward against stage production, perhaps regarding them as tiresome nineteenth-century pedantry, perhaps because at heart they would feel that the plays had lost value if they acknowledged that Seneca had not originally intended them for the stage. No one has a good word to say for closet drama, and I freely admit that I do not find all the points of argument originally raised by Otto Zwierlein in his definitive *Die Rezitationsdramen Senecas* (Meisenheim am Glan 1966) equally convincing. In the year I went to press Ludwig Braun advanced substantive objections to the hypothesis of recitation which had been Zwierlein's assumption and my own: taking *Hercules Furens* as his sample, he argued that elements in the text depended on visible performance for intelligibility.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps, then, it is high time for a palinode, but after due consideration I have not brought myself to offer you more than a partial recantation. In this paper I will consider only Dana Ferrin Sutton's brief monograph *Seneca on the Stage* (Leiden 1986) and two studies of *Troades* by scholars responsible for actual stage productions, Filippo Amoroso's *Seneca: Uomo di Teatro* (Palermo 1984) and Wilfried Stroh's 'Inszenierung Senecas' co-authored with Barbara Breitenberger.<sup>5</sup>

It is a great advantage to have the benefit of John Fitch's judicious paper 'Playing Seneca' also appearing in this volume: he is surely adopting a wise position in presenting the arguments in favour of tragedies conceived for production, while recognizing that Seneca need not have conceived every play, or all parts of any given play, in terms

of performance. In terms of language and emotionality these plays contain so much superb theatre: in fact the sheer theatrical power of scenes like the third act of *Troades* is the main reason I asked George Harrison to let me combine my conservative position on the question of ancient production with a more radical proposal of how I would want to present the *Trojan Women*, given the physical advantages of the modern theatre and its freedom from binding conventions – or better, its free eclecticism in choosing which conventions to combine.

Now scholars who believe that Seneca intended his plays for stage performance often reproach sceptics like myself with wilfully applying to Senecan tragedy the standards of dramaturgy familiar from Greek tragedy or the more purist standards suggested by reading Aristotle's *Poetics*. But when I came to the study of Senecan tragedy, it was not from Greek drama, but from many years of working on Roman comedy. This certainly shaped my expectations of functional dramaturgy – not, that is, the dramaturgy which is concerned with the design, focus and interpretation of the tragic action, but the nuts and bolts of entrances and exits. About the time I began work on *Troades* Richard Tarrant produced a brilliant paper establishing the background of Senecan dramaturgy<sup>6</sup> which has not been superseded. In it he showed that many dramatic features of Seneca's text were technically closer to Roman comedy, and before that, to the *Phoenissae*, Euripides' most freewheeling tragedy, than to the normative practice we would extrapolate from Sophocles and Euripides. At the same time he demonstrated Seneca's imitation of Hellenistic techniques also found in the entrance and exit monologues and asides of comedy. It is true that comedy has nothing as disjointed as, for example, the last act of Seneca's *Agamemnon*, with its four new entrances and separate dialogues in less than a hundred lines,<sup>7</sup> but intrinsically Seneca seemed to be composing in a tradition I understood.

Even so, Roman comedy had achieved continuity by systematically eliminating or pasting over the exits and entrances that determined original Greek act divisions,<sup>8</sup> and Roman comedy had no choruses.<sup>9</sup> And it was above all the shifting identity and erratic behavior of Senecan choruses which remained an obstacle to faith that our dramatic poet had been composing for the stage. It is in fact the texts assigned to the chorus(es) of *Troades* which create the main obstacle to believing Seneca could have planned to stage this play.

So my argument that Seneca could not have intended to stage his *Troades* came not from a pedantic obsession with conventions but from a strong concern with theatrical efficacy. It was no great problem that