ARTICLES • ARTIKELS

FORM AND MEANING IN SENECA’S ‘DAWN SONG’
(H.F. 125–201)*

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§1. The philological gigantomachy raging around Seneca’s Hercules shows no signs of relenting in vigour, ingenuity or even acrimony. The learned ranks, briefly put, are locked in opposing positions over the issue of whether the tragedian intended to portray the protagonist of the H.F. as a virtuous hero or as a villain justly punished for his hybris. Both views are represented in the survey articles in ANRW 2.32.2 (1985); and since the appearance of that bulky tome on Seneca the debate has, if anything, intensified, being associated most recently with the names of Otto Zwierlein and John Fitch. With the central controversy thus clearly demarcated and with names like these in the vanguard, any further belligerent entering the fray is less likely to open up a new front or to do battle ‘evolis trunci’ than to side with one or other critical viewpoint; indeed, the most he can hope to do is to bring new arguments to bear, or to illuminate the problem from a different perspective. The present paper aims to do no more than this. Discussion of the choral odes, and of the first ode in particular, is a convenient point of entry into the Herculean controversy, for this ode, in the manner of an exposition, introduces the principal issues in the drama.

The first ode in the H.F., the ‘dawn song’ as it has not inappropriately been dubbed, has been approached in various ways and with diverse ends in mind. Like many other Senecan choruses, this ode too has invited prospecting for philosophical themes — an entirely legitimate line of enquiry, of course, but one which of necessity turns its spade to the rich veins; much else is left untouched.¹ Then again, fragmentary and sectional study have been encouraged since the ode is, to a large extent, a mosaic of motifs and translucent borrowings from Euripides, Vergil, Horace and Ovid, which has made it fertile terrain for parallel hunters; in the process however the individual details have monopolized attention to the detriment of the larger question of how they are fused into a coherent, contoured and
meaningful whole. Thus criticism of the ode has generally been analytical rather than unitarian, the impression created in the secondary literature is of a somewhat disjointed and fragmentary edifice. This dislocational tendency has also obfuscated rather than elucidated the question of Seneca’s originality in the chorus: simple identification of the literary models has become pretty well an end in itself — but precisely because Seneca’s affinity to his sources is so transparent, the questions of how and why he used these sources become all the more pressing. The same applies to the presence in the ode of well-known topoi such as the contrast between *rus* and *urbs,* or the advantages of an unambitious life; it is not sufficient simply to register their presence and document their literary genealogy (which is apt to create the impression that the author is a deft, if unoriginal, compiler and re-arranger): much rather the critic should attempt to discern the tragedian’s originality, to identify the specific contextual and argumentative functions of these topoi.

A few commentators, it is true, have taken a broader view and attempted a global characterization and interpretation of the ode; but important issues remain untouched, other problems unresolved. The analyses of Bishop and Rose pay insufficient attention to structural artistry, the transitional subtleties between the various segments and above all to the crucial question of the reciprocal relationships and lines of cohesion, thematic and philosophical, between these blocks. These questions have indeed been confronted with considerable acumen by Grisoli; and Fitch too, in his recent commentary, although apparently unaware of Grisoli’s study, attempts an overall characterization of the ode, paying some attention to the ‘remarkable series of shifts in thought and feeling’ through which it passes (161). ‘Et adhuc sub iudice lis est’: two considerations prompt a reappraisal of the ‘dawn song’. On the question of the ode’s intrinsic artistry, structural cohesion and philosophical import, I differ from all the above commentators on many points of detail. These issues are in turn linked to a second more fundamental problem. Any interpretation of the first chorus is perforce related to one’s reading of the whole drama, and on this latter question I find myself in disagreement with a larger body of criticism. The present study therefore attempts first to elucidate the philosophical thrust of the ode by means of a structural analysis with unitarian emphasis, and then to relate and reconcile the results thus obtained with the drama as a whole.

I. HARENA SINE CALCE?

§2. Iam rara micant sidera prono
languida mundo, nox victa vagos
contrahit ignes luce renata,
cogit nitidum Phosphoros agmen;
signum celsi glaciale poli
septem stellis Arcados ursae
lucem verso temone vocat.
Iam caerulcis evectus aquis
Titan summa prospicit Oeta;
iam Cadmeis incluta Bacchis
aspersa die dumeta rubent
Phoebique fugit reditura soror.
Pendet summo stridula ramo
pinnasque novos tradere soli
gestit querulos inter nidos
Thracia paelex,
turbaque circa confusa sonat
murmure mixto testata diem. 7

The immediate thematic impulse to the first ode is provided by the final words of Juno’s prologue, ‘clarescit dies / ortuque Titan lucidus croceo subit’ (123-4); this motif is now elaborated by the chorus in a detailed description of daybreak (125-36). Anaphoric ‘iam’, echoing Euripides (cf. Fitch ad loc.), imposes some formal order, but more notable as cohesive principle are the recurrent military metaphors: ‘nox victa’ – ‘vagos / contrahit ignes’ – ‘cogit ... agmen’ – ‘fugit’. Reference to the literary models alone cannot adequately account for this cluster; Seneca’s purpose in employing the metaphors is to underline the controlled orderliness of the celestial phenomena. This point is hinted at again in other ways. The progression from ‘Titan summa prospicit Oeta’ to ‘dumeta rubent’ suggests the gradual rise of the sun which to an observer lights up first the mountain peak and then, as it ascends, also the lower ground. Here too the celestial comes into contact with the terrestrial, the first indication of a narrowing focus. The notions of cyclical regularity and eternal cosmic rhythm are hinted at in the balancing and complementary pair ‘luce renata’ – ‘Phoebique fugit reditura soror’: now night is routed, but she will return. 8 This suggestion of an orderly, rhythmic sequence is very similar to and may indeed have been inspired by Horace C. 4.7, ‘diffugere nives, reductae iam gramina campis’ (1) – ‘et mox / bruma recurrit iners’ (12), where the seasonal cycle ends where it began, while the recomposes, as in Seneca, imply eternal cyclicity. In both texts the notion of celestial waxing and waning effectively demarcates and rounds off a train of thought. Seneca’s description, which owes details to both Euripides and Ovid, is longer and more elaborate than either ‘model’: it was expanded to convey the ideas of cosmic order and rhythmic regularity — ideas which are not of primary importance in the ‘sources’. 9 This and subsequent adaptations of the literary models deserve the closest scrutiny insofar as they are indications of the specifically Senecan ponderation.
The closing of the ring structure marks a slight pause rather than a major incision, and is followed by a description of the nightingale. The transposition of 146–51 to follow after 136 is based on Zwierlein’s examination of scribal, thematic and structural criteria. His remarks on 146ff, which amount to the most comprehensive interpretation to date of this tricky section, leave no doubt about the uninterrupted logical development of the earlier train of thought. The systole dynamic noted in the sweep from celestial activity down to Thebes continues as attention is further narrowed to the animated world and its response to the breaking day. The nightingale announces the new day and sounds the signal for work to commence; appropriately, therefore, the earlier emphasis on the visual (‘micant’, ‘nitidum’, ‘caeruleis’, ‘rubent’) here shifts to the acoustic (‘summo stridula’, ‘sonat’, ‘murmure mixto’). These verses, still closely linked to the preceding description through the common idea of daybreak (‘novo tradere soli’, ‘testata diem’), operate as a hinge or transitional motif by means of which the progressively narrowing focus turns to the world of man.

§3. Labor exoritur durus et omnis agitat curas aperitque domos: pastor gelida cana pruina grege dimisso pabula carpit; ludit prato liber aperto nondum rupta fronte iuvenecus, vacuae reparant ubera matres; errat cursu levis incerto mollis petulans haedus in herba. Carbas a ventis credit dubius navita vitae laxos aura complemente sinus. hic exesis pendens scopulis aut deceptos instruit hamos aut suspensus spectat pressa praemia dextra: sentit tremulum linea piscem.

Through the idea of successive reactions — the nightingale responds to the dawn, and man in turn to the bird — the initial sweeping focus is narrowed from stellar and cosmic activity via the animated world to the activities of man. The rustics are introduced, superficially at least, in a sequence of cause and effect as taking their cue from the bird’s signal; after a review of their activities and function within the ode we may legitimately enquire after any additional significance in this transition (below §8).

In the generalizing ‘headline’ 137–8, which is then illustrated by three examples, ‘labor’ and ‘curae’ are identified as the shaping motifs in this
This thematic curve commences unobtrusively with the ‘pastor’, whose hardships are only hinted at rather than explicitly articulated: ‘pabula carpit’ probably means that ‘the shepherd himself plucks fodder’ for his herd (Fitch ad loc.); and the juxtaposition of ‘gelida’ and ‘cana’, corresponding in sense though not syntactically related, has the effect of putting a slight emphasis on the early morning chill — muted allusions, in either case, to the realities of an existence which is after all ‘patiens operum’. But the ‘labor’ motif remains very much in the background and while the ‘pastor’ toils, his animals frolic in verses redolent of Vergil and Horace; simply in terms of quantity, the impression of carefree idealization outweighs ‘labor’, and it is on this Arcadian atmosphere that the reader lingers (‘ludit’, ‘petulans’, ‘molli ... in herba’). The unequal length of this first item is related to the dynamic curve, for the extended pastoral vignette with its emphasis on a mood of gay unconcern serves as a thematic foil to the subsequent two members where ‘labor’ and ‘curae’ progressively impinge upon and supplant these idyllic elements.

With ‘navita’, the notion of danger becomes explicit, ‘dubius / navita vitae’, and this motif is sustained in the description of the angler, perched precariously on an insecure cliff, ‘exesis pendens’ ‘scopulis’. This final sketch develops more fully the motif of hardship: ‘suspensus’ carries a nuance of mental tension, ‘deceptos ... hamos’ brings out an element of uncertainty and frustrated patience, and finally the panel culminates in the evocative detail ‘sentit tremulum linea piscem’. The climactic character of this verse is skilfully enhanced through the abrupt change in subject from ‘hic ... aut ... instruct ... aut ... spectat’ to ‘sentit ... linea’: grammatical isolation brings out the autonomous weight and significance of the detail. Personification of ‘linea’ has the effect of making this the focus of all attention — the angler’s attention is so intense (‘suspensus spectat’) that he and his line effectively coalesce. The unresolved suspense is further heightened by the enallage ‘tremulum ... piscem’: normally it is the line that vibrates when the fish nibbles, but transferrence of the epithet to the fish weakens and all but negates the initial signal. Both the angler and his prey are poised; irresolution and reciprocal tension heighten both expectancy and uncertainty — and at this apex of unresolved suspense the sequence breaks off. In the course of the enumeration too the kinetic gives way to the static, and the spatial focus is sharply narrowed. ‘Ludit’, ‘errat’ and ‘petulans’ all imply motion and activity, the swelling sails likewise suggest movement, but the rock angler is completely motionless (‘pendens’, ‘suspensus spectat’), the ‘tremulum piscem’ barely perceptible; concomitantly the notion of breadth and openness (‘grege dimisso’, ‘ludit prato liber aperto’) recedes until we are left with the angler perched on his narrow ledge (‘exesis pendens scopulis’). A rise in mental tension is accompanied by a diminution of physical motion and space until the panel
culminates in intensely expectant immobility.

§4. Haec, innocuae quibus est vitae
tranquilla quies
et laeta suo parvoque domus.
spes immanes urbibus errant
trepidique metus:
ille superbos aditus regum
durasque fores expers
colit, hic nullo fine beatas
componit opes gazis inhians
et congesto pauper in auro.
Illum populi favor attonitum
fluctusque magis mobile vulgus
aura tumidum tollit inani;
hic clamosi rabiosa fori
iurgia vendens
improbus iras et verba locat.
novit paucos secura quies,
qui velocis memores aevi
tempora numquam reeditura tenent.

The panel 137–58 (§3) constitutes the first component in an elaborate synkrisis of urban and rural life, and interpretation of it is conditioned by this antinomy. The transition is effected by way of the ‘hinge’ 159–63 which looks both backwards and forwards; at the same time this transitional segment and its thematic complement in 175–7 form the outer frame which encloses the urban panel. ‘Innocuae ... vitae / tranquilla quies’, ‘laeta suo parvoque domus’: this retrospective characterization of rustic existence emphasizes motifs which were in fact nowhere hinted at in 137–58. In allusion to the well-known topos of the moral superiority of rus over urbs, these motifs are introduced as tertium comparationis between the two sections. Since this contrast is in no way thematically anticipated in the first panel, the sudden appearance in the pivotal section of moral criteria retrospectively throws a new light on the rustic panel, by implication superimposing a new dimension on the ideas already present there; but more on this in a moment (§8). Without thematic foreshadowing, the unmistakable moral tinge in 159–63 has the effect of suggesting a different perspective; as observer and commentator the chorus in these lines gives a positive evaluation of rural life in a manner reminiscent of Vergil’s makariosmos ‘O fortunatos ninium, sua si bona norint,/ agricolas’ (G. 2.458–9) to the extent that only juxtaposition with an alternative bios brings out the
advantages of rural life, blessings which the subjectively involved exponents are themselves unaware of.

‘Labor durus’ and ‘curaе’ were directly related to the physical existence of the rustics; ‘innocua vita’, ‘tranquilla quies’, ‘laeta suo parvo domus’ shift the focus and probe the concomitant inner disposition. This is the point of contrast between the two groups: ‘suo parvo’, implying modest contentment, has its counterpoise in ‘spes immanes’ (first hint of the avaritia motif); ‘tranquilla, quies’ and ‘laeta ... domus’ are negated in ‘trepidique metus’. If ‘innocua vita’ and ‘tranquilla quies’ contribute to the quasi-philosophical or at least moralizing tinge in these lines, we are on firmer ground with ‘spes’ and ‘metus’, often coupled in philosophical contexts; they appear as key words in the ‘headline’ to indicate the perspective from which the subsequent activities are viewed. The best commentary on the pair is provided by Seneca himself:

... apud Hecatonem nostrum inveni cupiditatum finem etiam ad timoris remedia proficere. ‘Desines’ inquit ‘timere si sperare desieris’. Dices: ‘Quomodo ista tam diversa pariter sunt?’ Ita est, mi Lucili: cum videantur dissidere, coniuncta sunt. Que madmodum eadem catena et custodiam et militem copulat, sic ista, quae dissimillia sunt, pariter incedunt: spem metus sequitur. Nec miror ista sic ire; utrumque pendentis animi est, utrumque futuri expectatione sollicitum. Maxima autem utriusque causa est, quod non ad praesentia aptamur, sed cogitationes in longinqua praemittimus. (Ep. 5.7–8).\(^{18}\)

The two are symptomatic of an existence whose point of orientation is the future. To enhance the impact of the headline, the abstracts are dramatically personified as ‘spes immanes ... errant’, possibly ‘suggesting muggers roaming through dark city streets’ (Fitch ad loc.); their victims are enumerated in the catalogue that follows (164–74).

§5. A client opens the sequence. ‘Expers somni’ implies an early rising to perform the morning salutatio (cf. Brev. Vit. 14.4, ‘illis miseris suum somnum rumpentibus ut alienum expectent’, of the clients; Fitch ad loc.). The point has obvious structural relevance in making the second sequence begin in the early morning, just as the first had done (‘gelida cana’), and this motif in turn creates a line of cohesion with ‘novo ... soli’ and ‘testata diem’; such studied parallelism challenges comparison of the respective sections. Individual details underline the harsh and demeaning side of this bios: the haughty patron (enallage of ‘superb as’, as at Hor. Epode 2.7f), ‘durasque fores’ (harsh because they are closed; cf. Tib. 1.2.6; Prop. 1.16.18). ‘Durasque fores expers somni’ has an elegiac ring, recalling the sleepless exclusus amator (thus Fitch). That unfortunate individual is on occasion represented as spending the entire night outside a locked door (Prop. 1.16.45/6; cf. Hor. C. 1.25.7); allusion to the idea of the interminable
and frustrating wait would certainly not be out of place in our verse. But perhaps the elegiac patina has additional significance. The lover is led on by promises and expectations; he endures present discomfort in the hope of future returns; in fact he lives (like the client) in a continual state of expectation — which establishes a link with the spes motif.

Thematically the client also looks forward to the subsequent bioi. His hardships are self-imposed (cf. Brev. Vit. 2.1, ‘sunt quos ingratus superiorum cultus voluntaria servitute consumat’) and have an inner motivation: Fitch suggests, correctly to my mind, that ‘Seneca has in mind here not simply a dutiful cliens but an ambitious social climber’; in support of this one might add Claudian Laud. Stil. 2.114–5, ‘ambitio, quae vestibulis foribusque potentum / excubat’. This leads on to the next and perhaps most important point (one not discussed by the commentators), namely that everything the client does is at the behest and caprice of another, and that his ambition has placed him in a position of dependence and subservience with the result that he is no longer his own master.

An easy association between the kindred vices of ambitio and avaritia (e.g. Sen. Ep. 47.17, 56.10, 71.37, 75.11, 78.13 etc.) facilitates progression from cliens to avarus (166–8), color Horatianus supplies the distinctive complexion. Trapped in a spiral of insatiable (‘congesto pauper in auro’) and therefore perpetually kinetic vice, the happiness ironically hinted at in ‘beatas’ is as elusive as the waters of Tantalus; not for him the ‘tranquilla quies’ of the ‘innocui’. Earlier motifs reappear in these lines. The paradox of 168 underscores the notion that for the avarus amassing wealth is an end in itself, his ‘gazae’ are in fact never put to use — an idea articulated more fully in one of Seneca’s sources:

congestis undique saccis
indormis inhians et tamquam parcere sacris
cogeris aut pictis tamquam gaudere tabellis
(Hor. Sat. 1.1.70–2).

Philosophically such hoarding may be assessed by reference to the temporal contrast present–future: insatiable greed is by its very nature prospective, to the extent of becoming oblivious of the present and of present enjoyment. Thus the avarus in Sat. 1.1.64ff; thus too, with greater poignancy, the hoarder in C. 2.14.25ff,

absumet heres Caecuba dignior
servata centum clavibus et mero
tinguet pavimentum superbo,
pontificum potiore cenis.

Something of this notion is present also in Seneca’s description. Next, the motif of the individual not being potens sui is intensified in the progression
from the client's position of social subservience to the psychic infatuation of the avarus: 'gazis inhians', encapsulating the addiction to his vice, clearly marks a shift in focus to the psychological.

This nuance of psychological enthrallment runs over, as connecting motif, into the next member of the quartet: the aspiring politician, representing the φιλότιμος, is 'attonitus' and 'tumidus': his dependence on the shifting favours of the mob is reflected also in his grammatical status as object in the sentence, 'illum populi favor ... / ... tollit'. The motif of dependence, as a negation of potens sui, is more pronounced, just as its basis has become more shifting and precarious: 'fluctus' and 'aura' evoke a capricious seascape, 'tumidum' is splendidly punctured by the epithet 'aura ... inani', whose effect is enhanced by delay. An element of illusion, delusion and affectus is unmistakable.

The lawyer, like the politician, operates in a crowded and tumultuous milieu; the collocation 'clamosi rabiosa', comparable stylistically to 'gelida cana', contrapuntally balances 'tranquilla quies' (160). Venality, notorious hallmark of the profession, harks back to the avaritia motif. But what gives this last item its climactic character is that here the negation of potens sui reaches its most shameless and egregious apex, and this moreover not as the result of a compulsive addiction (as suggested in 'inhians' and 'attonitum'), but as a matter of choice. The idea 'offering his services' is put metonymically as 'hiring out his persona' while the notion of the persona is in turn stressed by an amplifying hendiadys, 'iras et verba' for 'irata verba': meretricious predication of his personality upon the needs of the particular 'iurgia' is tantamount to abdicating and negating his own individuality. An explicit note of censure in 'improbus' is appropriate to the climactic item.

In sum, the urban panel reveals meticulous attention to structure, contour and dynamic. Insofar as its four members are all striving after wealth or fame, their temporal orientation is towards the future ('spes', 'metus'). This quest places them in some sort of subservience. Psychic enthrallment is explicitly articulated in the two central items while the outer pair emphasizes rather a social dependence; thus a thematic chiasmus is superimposed on the formal parallelism 'ille' (≈ ambitio) — 'hic' (≈ avaritia) — 'illum' (≈ ambitio) — 'hic' (≈ avaritia).

Verses 175–7 answer 159–63 in theme and style. Personifying enallage 'novit paucos secura quies' gives the key motif of 'quies' a stylistic emphasis comparable with 'spes ... errant', 'tranquilla quies' reappears as 'secura quies', and while 'spes' and 'metus' had looked towards the future, verses 176–7 offer a contrasting philosophy, 'tempora tenere', which in terms of both style and content points in the direction of the Horatian carpe diem. There has been some discussion as to the identity of the 'pauci' who embrace this philosophy — Grisoli equates them with the Stoic (sic) sapientes
— but in view of the close responsion between the two parts of the frame, it is reasonable here too to look to the ring structure for a clue, i.e. ‘paucos’ may be identified with the earlier ‘quibus’, which in turn points back to the rustici. More on this in a moment (below, §8). The structural emphasis on the frame is a means of articulating the thematic significance of time as evaluative criterion; it seems in order now to enquire to what end this leitmotiv was introduced at all.

§6. Time, and more particularly man’s attitude towards time, form a central philosophical problem in Seneca, and, as is well-known, Stoic ideas on this subject share some common features with the Epicurean view; consequently the remarks that follow will take into account both these sources. The philosophical connexion, in the urban panel, between frame and descriptive nucleus, in other words between future orientation and a concomitant negation of personal autonomy, is elucidated in Seneca Ep. 1.1, ‘vindica te tibi, et tempus ... collige et serva’; this in turn may be glossed by Brev. Vit. 2.4, ‘nemo se sibi vindicat ... ille illius cultor est, hic illius; suus nemo est’. ‘Les deux réalités, celle de la personne (vindica te tibi) et celle du temps, sont donc indissolublement liées par Sénèque, comme si le temps était le lieu par excellence de tout être particulier et si, pour libérer l’âme et lui assurer son autonomie, il fallait commencer par délivrer la personne de la contrainte du temps’. The four types in the urban catalogue live in a state of continual expectation, and this attitude is censured by the philosopher: ‘fac ergo, mi Lucili, quod facere te scribis, omnes horas complectere. Sic fiet, ut minus ex erastino pendeas, si hodierno manum inieceris’ (Ep. 1.2; cf. Brev. Vit. 16.1). The Epicurean affiliation is too well-known to require detailed exposition; as a single representative example, one could cite a few verses of Horace which clearly articulate the nexus future-present-personal:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{prudens futuri temporis} \\
\text{caligiosa nocte premit deus} \\
\text{ridetque, si mortalis ultra} \\
\text{fas trepidat. quod adest memento} \\
\text{componere aequus...} \\
\text{ille potens sui} \\
\text{laetusque deget, cui licet in diem} \\
\text{dixisse ‘vixi: cras vel atra} \\
\text{nube polum pater occupato...} \quad (C. 3.29.29ff).29
\end{align*}
\]

The four individuals in the urban catalogue represent a negation of this attitude.

§7. The views on time discussed thus far could be labelled Stoic no less than Epicurean, and the inclusion of this topic alone does not suffice to
give the chorus a distinctive complexion; but there are some indications that Seneca intended to emphasize the particularly Epicurean slant of the ode’s argument. It is worth recalling, first, that the contrast *rus* — *urbs* appears in a number of arguments with clear Epicurean thrust; in such contexts the antimony also has clear spatial relevance in suggesting the physical withdrawal of the disciples of the Garden, their ideal λάθε βιώσας. This idea is also present in our ode. More specifically, ‘tranquilla / secura quies’ gives the argument an unmistakable Epicurean patina; Lucretius 5.1129–30 comes to mind, ‘ut satius multo iam sit parere quietum / quam regere imperio res velle et regna tenere’. Of the parallels cited by Fitch ad 174 to support this claim, the most relevant seem to me to be Ovid, *Ars* 1.639/40, where the Epicurean conception of the gods is rejected in their own terminology, ‘nec secura quies illos similisque sopori / detinet’; and, more specifically, Vergil’s praise of rustic life in G. 2.467, ‘at secura quies et nescia fallere vita’ — for in that makarismos the poet interprets rural quietude as a condition analogous to Epicurean ἀταραξία. It is perhaps no coincidence that Vergil’s ‘nescia fallere vita’ in the quoted verse has its thematic counterpart in Seneca’s ‘innocuae quibus est vitae tranquilla quies’: in either case the inner disposition is predicated upon a particular lifestyle. ‘Tranquilla / secura quies’, then, is the first hint of a specifically Epicurean tinge. Symmetrically, the vices of the *urbani* — striving after wealth and position — are also coupled in Epicurean texts (Epicurus fg. A 81, D 85 Bailey; Lucr. 2.13; cf. below n. 46). The point is worth noting at this stage already since this Epicurean complexion assumes deeper colours towards the end of the ode.

§8. So far, so good — but what has all this to do with the rest of the ode? Since the *urbani* are a counterfoil to the *rustici*, and since their activities are assessed by reference to the yardstick of time, it is reasonable to enquire, in retrospect, whether this same criterion may be applied also to the rustics. Absence of explicit references to time in 137–58 does not in itself mean that this motif is not in some way perceptible; all it means is that the idea has its locus not in the panel itself, but, more allusively, in the transition from the celestial to the rustic sections. It is only now possible to appreciate the full significance of that transition. At its simplest, the country dwellers take their cue from the nightingale, harbinger of the new day, to commence their quotidian toil. Superficially this is the same kind of response as at Hor. C. 3.29.17–24,

iam clarus occultum Andromedae pater
ostendit ignem, iam Procyon furit
et stella vesani Leonis,
sole dies referente siccos;
iam pastor umbras cum grege languido
rivumque fessus quaerit et horridi
dumeta Silvani caretque
ripa vagis taciturna ventis.

But just as the Horatian transition is suggestive of an underlying philosophical response and attitude — 'Es ist die natürliche Reaktion auf das, was die Stunde fordert. Ein Leitmotiv der horazischen Lyrik klingt hier an: der Mensch muss bereit sein, auf den Ruf des Augenblicks, der Stunde, der Jahreszeit zu hören' 34 — so too in Seneca the transition suggests the rustics' *vita secundum naturam* :35 the progression is from absolute physical time in the cosmic section to subjective ethical time, 'temps vécu', in the rustic panel (the two dimensions are underpinned and contrasted by the verbal echo 'Phoebique fugit reditura soror' — 'qui ... tempora numquam reditura tenent'), and in the philosophical terminology which appears only later, this reciprocity and concinnity between physical and moral time could be described as an embryonic illustration of the concept ‘tempora tenere’.

When the chorus introduces into the urban panel a philosophical element with a demonstrable backward reference and relevance also to the rustics, it offers, from its own perspective, an interpretation of country life which would never have occurred to the *rustici* themselves — for they would hardly regard ‘tranquilla quies’ as the chief attraction of their bios, nor could it be said that they are consciously ‘velocis memores aevi’. This philosophical interpretation of a *materies* which is itself inherently unphilosophical, this view of the rustic as a prototypical ‘philosophe malgré lui’ is the same kind of procedure as is hinted at in Vergil’s makarismos, ‘O fortunatos ninium, sua si bona norint / agricolas’; for a fuller elucidation of the kind of thinking involved, we might cite from Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*, chapter 10:

> Here was a man some twenty thousand miles from home... thrown among people as strange to him as though he were in the planet Jupiter; and yet he seemed entirely at his ease; preserving the utmost serenity; content with his own companionship; always equal to himself. Surely this was a touch of fine philosophy; though no doubt he had never heard that there was such a thing as that. But, perhaps, to be true philosophers, we mortals should not be conscious of so living or so striving.36

The philosophical observer can use also the intrinsically unphilosophical to make a point. Thus the motif of time and man’s relationship to it, which appears first in an allusive and unobtrusive manner, and which only later is allowed to crystallize out into explicit articulation, constitutes the central axis, the unbroken thematic line around which all the discrete elements cohere.
§9. This motif provides the connecting idea to the next segment, a panel of crucial significance, for here — at last — mention is made of the protagonist, and that moreover in the form of an indictment by reference to those ideas which in the chorus’ view are normative.

Dum fata sinunt, vivite laeti:
properat cursu vita citato
volucrique die rota praecipitis
vertitur anni.
durae peragunt pensa sorores
nec sua retro fila revolvunt.

At gens hominum fertur rapidis
obvia fatis incerta sui:
Stygias ultero querimus undas.
nimium, Alcide, pectore forti
properas maestos visere manes:
certo veniunt tempore Parcae,
nulli iusso cessare licet,
nulli scriptum proferre diem:

Two gnomic segments describing the law of nature, a law whose recognition determines the correct (in the chorus’ view) attitude towards life (178–82 and 188–91), enclose a kernel relating how unenlightened man really lives (183–7); this patterning, with the frame as corrective comment on the nucleus, essentially reproduces the disposition of 159–77. At the same time, however, there is an intensification in the thought progression, for if the wrong attitude towards time had resulted in perverse behaviour in the urban panel, this perversity becomes even more pronounced when measured on the metaphysical scale — and in this panel the touchstone is inevitable death (‘fata, sorores, manes, Parcae, urna’).

Style underpins this advance in thought. Apostrophe lends emotional emphasis and sounds a note of urgency; increasingly, from this point on, the chorus articulates its personal convictions. ‘Dum fata sinunt’ has an elegiac ring that cannot be overheard (Prop. 2.15.23, ‘dum nos fata sinunt, oculos satienus amore’; Tib. 1.1.69); this is the first in a series of stylistic hints used to characterize the position of the chorus (cf. §10 below).

‘Vivite laeti’, harking back to ‘laeta ... domus’, suggests an affinity between the chorus and the rustic bios, and furthermore recalls an element of Epicurean wisdom:

ille potens sui
laetusque deget, cui licet in diem
dixisse... (Hor. C. 3.29.41–3).37
Color Horatianus enhances the Epicurean perspective. For heightened urgency and immediacy, ‘vita’ is calibrated into ‘dies’ and ‘annus’, the carpe diem philosophy is implicitly enjoined by the adjectives ‘cursu ... citato’, ‘volucrique die’, ‘praecipitis ... anni’, and above all by the inexorable Sisters.

‘At gens hominum...’: the abrupt incision carries a hint of censure, the wisdom deriving from the chorus’ insight is lost on man. He is swept along, ‘fertur’, the passive verb suggesting that like a helpless victim and without control over his destiny, he is rushed along to life’s end (‘rapidis obvia fatis’). He is the victim of ignorance, ‘incerta sui’.\(^{38}\) the self-knowledge and actualization that derive from recognition of physical time and the resulting ethical imperative — these are denied him.

The nucleus 183–7 is given shape and meaning by a clear climactic contour: passivity and ignorance (‘fertur’, ‘incerta sui’) give way in the second item to a wilful act of perversity in ‘ultro quaerimus’: man actually hastens towards the end that inevitably awaits him. ‘Stygias ultro quaerimus undas’ probably refers to the same kind of rashness that risks mors immatura and which is perhaps best exemplified by seafaring.\(^{39}\) Insofar as this is a conscious act of volition, it is more deserving of censure than the preceding ignorance. The rising curve is reflected also stylistically in the plural verb ‘quaerimus’, for although the chorus condemns this attitude, it abandons the ‘I–you’ pose implied in ‘vivite laeti’ to include itself among the unenlightened: this coalescence of speaker and addressee adds a tinge of pathos and commiseration.

The theme of death is varied in ‘Stygias ... undas’. An intentional ambiguity facilitates the transition to Hercules. Within verse 185 the expression is used as a common periphrasis for death, more specifically the idea is mors immatura; but, anticipating Hercules, it can also designate quite literally the locality (‘Stygias ... undas’ as the object of the xατάβαςις, and it is this aspect that is relevant to the protagonist. Arguably the chorus subordinates the notions of death, temerity and even mors immatura as implied thus far to Hercules’ defiance of nature’s temporal rhythm — for his physical descent, as a living being, means that he has unnaturally entered a different ‘time zone’ (one normally entered only by the dead), and in this sense the ‘spatial’ or ‘local’ aspect of the xατάβαςις entails also a violation of the temporal order. By pre-empting the ‘appointed time’ (cf. ‘certo veniunt tempore Parcae’, 188) Hercules has negated the temporal principle which is basic to the chorus’ philosophy (‘venit ad pigros cana senectus’, cf. ‘sera nos illo referat senectus’, 864). Thus the xατάβαςις, preceded as it is by two instances illustrating man’s ignorance and indeed defiance of the law of time, becomes the supreme example of an attitude which subverts the chorus’ ideals of ‘tempora tenere’, ‘secura quies’ and ‘laetum vivere’: the constant touchstone remains the theme of time. The climactic character of
this third item is underlined stylistically by the switch to apostrophe, while
the note of censure detected above is intensified (‘quaerimus’ is sharpened
to ‘properas’, ‘ultro’ augmented to ‘nimium ... pectore fortis’); ‘nimium’
in particular carries an unambiguous nuance of censure. Thus within
the broad ethical dichotomy that pervades the ode, the chorus aligns itself
with the rustics, while the wrong attitude which began with the urbani is
pushed to its most extreme and perverse point in the person of Hercules.
The manner of his introduction — again by reference to the controlling mo­
tif of time and the overarching cosmic pattern — is intended to reinforce
the thematic and philosophical cohesion of the ode.

Finally, as thematic counterpoise to 178–82, verses 188–91 restate the law
of nature that was subverted in the kernel. The lapidary end-stopped lines,
appropriate to the gnomic utterances, reinforce the austere simplicity of
the universal truths: first a gnome (188), then the anaphoric pair ‘nulli’ —
‘nulli’ (cohering through verbal ellipsis) to emphasize that this law brooks
no exception, and finally, in another splendidly isolated verse (cf. 158),
the graphic detail ‘recipit populos urna citatos’. The image may owe
something to two Horatian passages —

omnes eodem cogimur, omnium
versatur urna serius oculus
sors exitura... (C. 2.3.25–7);
omne capax movet urna nomen (C. 3.1.16) —

but at the same time Seneca’s ‘populos’ looks very much like an attempt to
give substance to and to amplify Horace’s ‘omnes’ and ‘omne ... nomen’.

§10.

Alium multis gloria terris
tradat et omnes familia per urbes
garrula laudet caeloque parem
tollat et astris,
alis curru sublimis eat:
me mea tellus lare secreto
tutoque tegat.
venit ad pigros cana senectus,
humilique loco sed certa sedet
sordida parvae fortuna domus:
alte virtus animosa cadit.

All the diverse thematic strands are woven together in a concluding pri­
amel which, sphragis-like, distils the essence of the whole ode and articu­lates ideas previously only hinted at. The synkrisis alium–alis–me allows
the chorus, in the manner of a Horatian ‘Ich-Schluss’, to emerge as the
personal advocate and embodiment of the ideal which has been gradually
unfolding;\textsuperscript{42} but since this configuration is clearly a ‘Wertpriamel’, expression of this subjective position is also intended as a condemnation of the Herculean modus vitæ — for plainly ‘alius’ refers to the protagonist.

A clear dynamic runs through the preambular ‘foil’\textsuperscript{43} Its first part consists of a tricolon with the two ascending lines ‘multis terris’ — ‘omnes per urbes’ — ‘caeloque parem et astris’, and ‘tradat’ — ‘garrula laudet’ — ‘tollat’; and the climactic item in the triad is formally weighted and amplified as ‘caeloque parem et astris’, a species of the ‘bis idem’ which is also followed by a slight pause (cf. n. 41). Grammatical structure effectively underpins this contour, for the man described appears first as the object in the sentence (‘alium’), with ‘gloria’ and ‘fama’ as its subjects\textsuperscript{44} — this creates the impression that his reputation precedes him — while it is only after the provisional apex and subsequent pause (‘caeloque parem tollat et astris’) that he becomes the grammatical subject and appears in person, so to speak: ‘alius curru sublimis eat’. Here again the short autonomous sentence, after a triad cohering around the shared ‘alium’, isolates verse 196 and enhances its expressivity. With ‘alius ... eat’ the foil has worked up to a splendid crescendo. Nor can there be any doubt about the identity of the unnamed ‘alius’, for the terms in which he is described anticipate motifs subsequently used of Hercules himself.\textsuperscript{45}

Rejection of the Herculean bios with its attendant fame carries a hint of the Epicurean ideal and points to the same convictions that prompted Horace’s ‘iure perhorrui / late conspicuum tollere verticem’ (C. 3.16.18–9);\textsuperscript{46} at the apex of the whole priamel (197–201) and as an alternative to the lifestyle it condemns, the chorus elaborates its personal preferences in a strongly self-assertive and self-defining manner: ‘mea tellus ....’\textsuperscript{47} This position is in every way the antipode of all that Hercules stands for. The contrast ‘high–low’ (‘caeloque parem tollat et astris’, ‘sublimis’, ‘alte’ — ‘humilique loco’) merely gives outward expression to a profounder polarity: through withdrawal (‘lare secreto’) and inactivity (‘pigros’) the chorus seeks personal safety (‘tutoque tegat’, ‘certa ... fortuna’); its mention of ‘cana senectus’ as something devoutly to be wished involves a rejection of the reckless heroics that risk mors immatura and violate the laws of time, a rejection, in short, of the Herculean ideal defined as ‘virtus animosa’. The verse ‘venit ad pigros cana senectus’, quite apart from its function as thematic counterfoil within the ode, once again has an elegiac ring, and recalls the Tibullan ideal,

\begin{quote}
quam potius laudandus hic est, quem prole parata
occupat in parva pigra senecta casa (1.10.39/40).\textsuperscript{48}
\end{quote}

The literary association is introduced to good effect, for Seneca’s phraseology not only recalls a specific passage, but also evokes the programmatic antinomy between elegiac inaction and the vita activa which is fundamental
to the genre. A parallel syzygy informs and gives shape to the Senecan ode. The elegiac patina is directly functional in emblemizing and additionally reinforcing, through concrete images, the chorus’ ideal of λήθε βιόσας. What the chorus here advocates could be paraphrased in Epicurean terminology as ἡ ἐκ τῆς ἠσυχίας καὶ ἐχωρήσεως τῶν πολλῶν ἀσφάλεια (K.Δ. 14).

The priamel’s apex not only caps and rounds off the last section of the chorus, but also puts several earlier ideas in their correct perspective. ‘Parvae ... domus’ harks back to ‘laeta suo parvoque domus’ (161) and reinforces the inner affinity between chorus and rustics; similarly ‘tranquilla quies’ (160) and ‘secura quies’ (175) have their counterpart in ‘pigros’, while ‘innocuae ... vitae’ (160) is balanced by ‘tutoque tegat’: by means of the ‘Ich-Schluss’ the chorus thus personally endorses the ideals it sees exemplified in rustic life. All this makes for clear lines of thematic cohesion. In addition, mention of ‘cana senectus’ at the end of the whole ode suggests temporal progression within an ordo naturalis and in this sense too creates an impression of finality and completion; in this connexion too one recalls the ideas of birth and youthfulness at the ode’s beginning (‘novo ... soli’, ‘nondum rupta fronte iuvencus’). And finally a typical terminal sententia formally rounds off the priamel and the whole ode (201).

§11. Both structurally and thematically, therefore, in its discrete segments no less than in its entirety, the ‘dawn song’ is a remarkably coherent and close-knit construct. The above analysis has disclosed the gradually unfolding motifs, the suggestive transitions and, most important, the unbroken philosophical axis. The procedure here followed seems justified on two counts (cf. above §1). It is now clear that the philosophical and moralizing ideas are not in fact confined to particular segments, but that their broad and subtle ramifications must be identified if they are to be seen in their correct perspective. And secondly, it is essential to go beyond the simple noting of parallels and echoes to enquire how Seneca accommodated these into his particular scheme. Of course there is a basis to the impression that the ode is a mosaic of motifs and other ‘borrowings’ from other sources (one thinks also of comparable sentiments expressed in other Senecan passages such as Phaed. 483–558 and Thy. 336–403, 446–70); but at the same time the individual tesserae have been regrouped in order to give the mosaic its specific complexion. Allusions freighted with associations have produced a distinctive patina; they have been incorporated to enhance, in multifarious and shimmering ways, the central notion of time, and to suggest also an unmistakable Epicurean slant. It has also emerged, in passing, that the Horatian influence in particular is not limited to verbal echoes and allusions, but extends also to structural techniques. The general impression created in the secondary literature of the ode as a rather
incoherent and disjointed affair is thus completely misleading.

§12. The ideas expressed in the ode acquire their full contextual and philosophical significance through interaction with the major intellectual concerns of a given tragedy; typically the Senecan chorus offers a different perspective on a central dramatic issue, it is used as an ‘observer whose philosophy provides a counterpoint to the philosophies of the other characters. Its words and its moods offer a background against which we can judge the words and actions of the other characters’. An excellent example of this choral function is the ode on kingship, *Thy.* 336–403, where the meditation on true (i.e. philosophical) ‘regnum’ serves as corrective foil and reinterpretation, from Stoic perspective, of the misguided notions of both Atreus and Thyestes. In its role as antipode and modifier, the Senecan chorus typically contains ‘a set of reflections which permits the audience to comprehend the events of the drama at a level inaccessible to the emotionally involved participants’. Obviously the ‘dawn song’ too must be discussed in these terms.

Because a good number of the odes are repositories of philosophical reflection, they are often held to be the mouthpiece of the philosopher-poet. Often there is indeed a sound basis for this assumption; in the case of the kingship ode, for example, few would challenge this view of the chorus — for where the protagonists so plainly subvert and invert the principles of Stoic ethics, where in a word they are conceived of as apotropaic paradigms, it is hard to avoid seeing in an overtly Stoic ode the protreptic intent of the author. But let it be said again that this view of the chorus rests upon the counterpoint and dialectic between odic and dramatic lines (to use the terminology of Bishop): the views expressed in the odes should not necessarily or invariably be regarded as absolute auctorial statements. Where the criminality or moral failings of the various protagonists determine the dramatic line there is a strong case for assimilating the alternatives articulated in the odic line with the views of the author himself. In the *H.F.*, however, where scholarly debate is split into opposing camps precisely over the question of whether Hercules is represented positively or negatively, as hero or villain, it would be rash to assume without further ado that the choral criticism reflects the auctorial point of view. The chorus’ criticism of Hercules in our chorus points clearly to the contrapuntal relationship between odic and dramatic lines in the *H.F.*, but this should not tempt us to jump to conclusions. Detractors of the Senecan Hercules, never in short supply, naturally assign to the chorus the role of absolute moral arbiter. We read, for example, that ‘the ode is . . . indispensable for our understanding of the play. It establishes a standard of normality in the conduct of human life, and indicates that by that standard Hercules is condemned. It was essential for Seneca to formulate these judgments early in the play, so that
the developing action could be viewed in these terms’ (Fitch 163). Greater caution recommends itself: the ‘standard of normality’ is not necessarily an absolute yardstick, but represents rather the subjective norms to which the chorus subscribes; similarly Hercules is ‘condemned’ for his failure to conform with the chorus’ norms — and I hesitate to take it for granted that this is also Seneca’s verdict. Nor indeed does the ‘Ich-Schluss’ automatically imply the equation chorus—author: this may on occasion be the case, but only if the views thus introduced are reconcilable with Seneca’s philosophy as we know it from the prose works. Each case needs to be individually examined. The question of the chorus’ identity in our ode is dramatically irrelevant; what does matter is whether the views expressed in this chorus are echoed again in subsequent odes, i.e. whether the chorus represents a consistent attitude towards Hercules (cf. below §14). A verdict on the validity of the chorus’ criticisms and on the function of the ‘dawn song’ — in other words on its relationship to the dramatic line — is conditioned by one’s interpretation of the protagonist, and must therefore be suspended until a few words have been said on Hercules himself.

II. THE SIREN SONG OF OTIUM

§13. Critici in bivio: interpretation of Seneca’s Hercules confronts the commentator with choices no less divergent and mutually exclusive than those faced by the hero himself. Fitch’s commentary represents the most recent continuation of a long and hostile tradition which sees Hercules as a hybristic and aggressive bully whose pride and ambition are punished by madness; on this negative and highly critical view of the protagonist, the first ode reflects also auctorial opinion, its function is to establish the norms which Hercules violates and by reference to which he is condemned. The chief defect in this line of interpretation is that it downgrades the role of Juno, reducing her vital dramatic function and making her a mere personification of Hercules’ alleged hybristic tendencies — whereas the studies of Lawall and Zwierlein (cf. below, nn. 59, 60) have demonstrated quite conclusively that Seneca conceived of her not as an abstraction but as an autonomous dramatic personage modelled on the Junos of Vergil and Ovid precisely in order to incorporate the personal animosity and vindictiveness which are the goddess’ principal characteristics in those literary sources. Moreover, Juno’s description of the hero and his motives in her prologue is a distorted and subjective account which is not supported by Hercules’ words and actions (cf. Lawall). If then the labours are imposed on Hercules by an external agency, he cannot reasonably be castigated for simply executing these commands; and similarly if he is driven to madness by this same goddess, he cannot be held personally accountable for a crime committed during his insanity. On the positive interpretation of Hercules, his
heroic stature is revealed in three areas, demarcated according to his respective antagonists: his superhuman physical ‘vis’ in performing the tasks imposed by Juno; his political role as slayer of the tyrant Lycus; and finally, in Stoic terms, his supreme moral triumph over himself when he heroically subdues the overwhelming impulse to self-destruction. Compelling additional arguments in support of this positive picture of Hercules have been adduced by Zwierlein in his recent monograph — sufficient, in my view, to tip the balance. On this positive evaluation of the protagonist, the opinions, reservations and criticism of the chorus will obviously not represent the author’s view; much rather the ode will now serve as a contrastive foil which permits the specific nature of the hero to stand out more clearly.

Die gleiche Antithetik zwischen dem Streben nach bescheidenem Glück in Ruhe und Zurückgezogenheit und dem rastlosen, mühe- und gefahrvollen Einsatz des Hercules prägt die Äußerungen des Chores. Sein Votum im 1. Lied für das epikureische Lebensideal, für die unbeschwerte Ruhe des selbstgenügsamen Seelenfriedens bedeutet nicht — wie man gefolgert hat — Kritik des Philosophen Senecas an dem Wagemut des Helden, der die Gefährdung seiner herausragenden Stellung verkenne... Vielmehr bildet das epikureische Lebensideal des Chores wiederum ... die Folie, vor der die in beherztem Mannesmut in Kauf genommene Gefährdung eines aktiven Lebens stoischer Prägung, das sich allen Widrigkeiten entgegenstellt, umso deutlicher hervortritt.

With this view I am in full agreement; but on the basis of the results derived in the first part of this study, it may be possible to take the argument a step further.

§14. The polarity ‘secura quies’ — ‘virtus animosa’ which characterizes the respective ideals of chorus and Hercules and which is fundamental to the first ode has wider ramifications. The transition from the first ode to the second act hints at the chasm between the ideal of withdrawal and the real world. Amphitryon speaks in terms intended to recall (and challenge) the position of the chorus:

    nulla lux umquam mihi
    secura fulsit: finis alterius mali
    gradus est futuri. protinus reduci novus
    paratur hostis; antequam laetam domum
    contingat, alius iussus ad bellum meat;
    nec ulla requies tempus aut ullum vacat,
    nisi dum iubetur (207-13).

These remarks have the effect of stressing the intellectual remoteness and isolation of the chorus’ solution.
The second chorus (524-91) begins by contrasting Hercules and Eurystheus in terms reminiscent of the first:

O Fortuna viris invida fortibus,
quam non aequa bonis praemia dividis!
Eurystheus facilis regnet in otio,
Alcmena genitus bella per omnia
monstris exagitet caeliferam manum? (524-8).

The tyrant's 'facile otium' is a foil to the man of action, to whom repose is foreign (cf. 33, 614-5, 642-5). Given the nature of the contrast Hercules-Eurystheus, the chorus' sympathies are with Hercules — but there is no real understanding of, still less appreciation for his exertions. Incomprehending amazement blends with censure in the lines

qua spe praecipites actus ad inferos,
audax ire vias inremeabiles,
vidisti Siculae regna Proserpinae? (547-9);

the chorus' negative evaluation is implied in its parallel between Hercules and Orpheus, 569ff. and, more generally, by its emphasis on the background of sterility: 'In Ode I, lives of tranquilla quies were set in a context of living nature, of sunrises, animal life, winds, and sounds (125-61); here, the life of virtus animosa is set in a context of barren landscapes, silence, stillness and death' (Fitch 253).

The third chorus (830-94), on death and afterlife, provides a counterpoise to Theseus' preceding descriptio inferorum, and this contrastive juxtaposition allows the distinctive attitude of the speakers to stand out more clearly. In Theseus' account (762-829) the underworld serves as a scenario to enhance the vitality and heroic exploits of Hercules; for the chorus, on the other hand, the melancholy description and the sure knowledge that all must die (cf. 188-91) becomes the basis for a reaffirmation of the philosophy of caution and the avoidance of risk which had been articulated paradigmatically in the first ode:

sera nos illa referat senectus:
nemo ad id sero venit, unde numquam,
cum semel venit, poterit reverti.
quid iuvat, durum, properare, fatum? (864-7).

Finally, the antinomy 'quies' — 'virtus animosa' is hinted at again in the long address to sleep in the fourth ode (cf. Fitch 395); the appositions in particular suggest where the chorus' personal preferences lie:

tuque, o domitor, Somne, malorum,
requies animi,
pars humanae melior vitae, (…)

21
pax o rerum, portus vitae,
lucis requies nocticisque comes,
qui par regi famuloque venis
placidus fessum lenisque fovens... (1065-6, 1072-5).

The positive apposition 'pars humanae melior vitae' calls to mind the Ovidian line 'nec secura quies illos similisque sopori / detinet' (Ars 1.639/40). This final chorus 'has shifted very little from its early resignation to a life of quiet inaction and its determination to avoid misfortune and postpone death'.\textsuperscript{63} A consistent viewpoint is thus expressed in the odes — the chorus' 'philosophy of non-involvement' which represents a complete negation of the Herculean \textit{βλος πρακτικός} and 'virtus animosa'.\textsuperscript{64} The pervasiveness of this antinomy, articulated emblematically in the first ode, suggests that Seneca intended to establish an unambiguous framework of reference. If we abandon the view of the chorus as the author's mouthpiece, the significance of this system must be otherwise explained.

§15. Typologically we are on firm ground. The syzygy action—inaction, with the concomitant antinomy \textit{virtus—otium}, forms the backbone of Stoic polemic against the Garden, and reference to this nexus helps clarify the ideological thrust of the Senecan chorus. The key motifs appear programmatically at the start of Cicero's \textit{De Re Publica}:

\begin{quote}
M. vero Catoni homini ignoto et novo, quo omnes qui isdem rebus studemus quasi exemplari ad \textit{industriam virtutemque} ducimur, certe licuit Tusculi \textit{se in otio delectare}, salubri et propinquio loco. Sed homo demens ut isti putant, cum cogeret eum necessitas nulla, in his undis et tempestatibus \textit{ad summam senectutem maluit iactari}, quam in illa \textit{tranquillitate atque otio} iucundissime vivere... unum hoc definitio, tantam esse necessitatem virtutis generi hominum tantumque amorem ad communem salutem defendendam datum, ut ea vis omnia \textit{blandimenta voluptatis otique vice Tit} (1.1).\textsuperscript{65}
\end{quote}

A related polarity informs the chorus; indeed the ideal of withdrawal there suggested in the contrast \textit{rus—urbs} could be aptly paraphrased in Cicero's terminology:

\begin{quote}
... teneamus eum cursum qui semper fuit optimi cuiusque, neque ea signa audiamus quae \textit{receptui canunt}, ut eos etiam revocent qui iam processerint (1.3).
\end{quote}

This signal is a siren song, from the Stoic point of view it cannot represent a viable option. The lure of an untroubled and passive existence ('venit ad pigros cana senectus', 198) is the exact antipode of the Stoic ideal, and is moreover described by Cicero in terms comparable to Seneca's:

\begin{quote}
adiunguntur pericula vitae, turpisque ab his formido mortis fortibus viris opponitur, quibus magis id miserum videri solet, \textit{natura se con-}
\end{quote}
sumi et senectute, quam sibi dari tempus ut possint eam vitam, quae
tamen esset reddenda naturae, pro patria potissimum reddere (1.4).

The ideological terms and topoi in which the debate is conducted suggest
the stylized and somewhat simplified scheme of school polemic; the matter
is put beyond doubt by the kind of arguments which Seneca gives to an
interlocutor who opposes otium:

Dices mihi: ‘quid agis, Seneca? deseris partes? Certe Stoici vestri
dicunt: “usque ad ultimum vitae finem in actu erimus, non desine­
nus communi bono operam dare, adiuvere singulos, opem ferre etiam
inimicis, eniti manu. Nos sumus qui nullis annis vacationem damus
et, quod ait ille vir disertissimus,
canitiem galea premimus;
nos sumus apud quos usque eo nihil ante mortem otiosum est ut, si res
patitur, non sit ipsa mors otiosa”. Quid nobis Epicuri praecepta in
ipsis Zenonis principiis loqueris? Quin to bene ac naviter, si partium
piget, transfugis potius quam prodis?’ (Sen. Ot. 1.4).

This Stoic ideal finds its most sublime expression in a few outstanding
exemplars — the elder Cato in Cicero, the younger in Lucan, and of
course in Alcides himself:

itemque magis est secundum naturam pro omnibus gentibus, si
fieri possit, conservandis aut iuvandis maximos labores molestiasque
suscipere imitantem Herculem illum, quem hominum fama beneficio­
rum memori in concilio caelestium collocavit, quam vivere in solitu­
dine non modo sine ullis molestiis, sed etiam in maximis voluptatibus
abundantem omnibus copiis, ut excellas etiam pulchritudine et viribus
(Cic. Off. 3.25).68

The polemical tone in the above examples is unmistakable, in each case
the negative Epicurean counterfoil serves to define and enhance the Stoic
conception. The pronounced Epicurean slant in the Senecan ode has a
parallel polemical and propagandistic function.

§16. If the chorus, from its narrowly partisan perspective, expresses reser­
vations and criticism of Hercules, it also fails to comprehend the essential
nature of the Stoic hero and what he stands for; its own interpretation
of the protagonist cannot readily be reconciled with the Hercules of the
drama. The chorus’ criticism in fact contributes less towards objectively
characterizing the protagonist than to defining its own subjective position.
It is an indication of Seneca’s sophisticated contrapuntal technique that this
patently distorted perspective is ‘corrected’ when the hero himself appears.

The chorus had posited a dichotomy of bioi, and, as Fitch remarks, ‘there
can be no doubt on which side Hercules is ranged’ (22); the chorus endorses
the lifestyle of the rustics as exemplifying the correct attitude in relation
to the law of time, and censures Hercules for his violation of these same
norms. Yet the application of such a yardstick — Hercules as the *violator* of nature’s laws — becomes questionable on a wider view of the drama. The exchange between the hero and Amphitryon introduces a new and different perspective:

**AM.** Finiat genitor tuus
    opta labores, detur aliquando *otium*
    *quiesque fessis.* **HE.** Ipse concipiam preces
    Iove meque dignas; stet suo caelum loco
tellusque et aether; astra inoffensos agant
aeterna cursus, *alta pax* gentes alat;
ferrum omne teneat ruris innocui labor
enseseque lateant (924–31; cf. *H.O.* 794f).

Confrontation of opposing interpretations of the notion ‘peace’ gives point to the Herculean ideal. Amphitryon’s ‘otium / quiesque fessis’ represents the exhausted individual’s craving for security and repose after toil. In Hercules’ reply, however, general and collective interests overshadow the narrowly individualistic perspective (‘pax gentes alat; ferrum omne’); in fact, the hero’s prayer is for just the kind of cosmic order and stability as were described and implied in 125–36, and moreover for the kind of conditions _that make possible_ the pursuit of the rustic ‘vita innocua’. In a paradoxical way the chorus fails to perceive, Hercules’ wishes and efforts are directed not towards subverting, but much rather towards sustaining and guaranteeing the same order within which and according to which it pursues its own philosophical ideal. This dissonance between choral censure and Hercules’ prayer compels critical revision of the ode’s premises.

For the chorus, Herculean type activity as represented by ‘virtus animosa’ and the pursuit of ‘tranquilla quies’ are mutually exclusive alternatives; but after what has just been said, the implications of this assumption too deserve scrutiny. An ataraxic _quies_ secured through inaction, withdrawal and eschewing social involvement has its thematic and philosophical counterpart in the _pax Herculea_, a civilizing and altruistic process that is only possible through ‘virtus animosa’, enormous effort and self-sacrifice on the part of the _pacificator_; the _quies_ of the ode and the Herculean _pax_ are polar opposites. In this antithesis too the underlying philosophical polemic shimmers through. Seneca’s emphasis on Hercules as ἀλέξικακος and _pacificator_ accords with the role assigned him at _Ben._ 1.13.3, ‘Hercules nihil sibi vicit; orbem terrarum transivit non cupiscendo, se iudicando, quid vinceret, malorum hostis, bonorum vindex, terrarum marisque pacator’: in either case Hercules is the exemplar of a Stoically tinged _salutem communem defendere_, an ideal well-known from exponents such as the two Catos. The qualitative difference between this and the Epicurean quest for _quies_ through withdrawal is self-evident. The chorus, significantly, uses the
word *pax* only once, and that moreover in the hymn to sleep — a poignant reminder of the distinction between the 'passive' and the 'actively acquired' peace,

\[
pax o rerum, portus vitae,
\]

\[
lucis requies noctisque comes (1072–3).
\]

§17. To conclude. On both lines of interpretation described above the first ode serves as a typical contrastive foil: either a positive foil to show up a negative Hercules (Rose *et al.*), or a negative foil to enhance the specific virtues of the Stoic hero (Zwierlein *et al.*). Accepting the positive interpretation of the protagonist, it is this second view of the chorus I would endorse. The ideas stated emblematically in the 'dawn song' are echoed in the subsequent odes; in terms of the views it represents, the chorus is thus conceived of as a consistent persona. Throughout, it performs its typical function as contrapuntal commentator on the dramatic line, advancing an alternative viewpoint. What is atypical in the *H.F.*, however, is that the chorus is not here the mouthpiece of the author. This modification of the choral role as we know it from other Senecan tragedies may be explained in terms of the particular subject matter of the *H.F.*: where the protagonist does not personify a negation of the Stoic system, but is rather an exemplar of those same values, the function of choral comment is correspondingly altered. The quintessentially Stoic character of the protagonist is enhanced by the tension between odic and dramatic lines, and the terms in which this counterpoint finds expression suggests polemic against the opposing views of the Κῆριος. The presence of such polemic is hardly surprising; within its context it suggests a protreptic, even propagandistic, intent. The alteration of the chorus’ more usual function, far from reducing its import, only entails a qualitative modification: in the *H.F.* the choral arguments acquire philosophical significance in proportion as they are refuted.

**Notes**

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us an impression of the chorus as men of limited perception and simple intelligence whose opinions are shaped primarily by a desire for security'.


8. ‘Reditura’ must be given its full force: the future participle characterizes this return as part of the immutable and eternal rhythm of the universe, as an expression of the certus ordo which governs the cosmos. For the nuance laden participle, see R. Westman, Das Futurpartizip als Ausdrucksmittel bei Seneca, Helsinki 1961; G. Maurach, Enchiridion Poeticum, Darmstadt 1989, § 167.

9. It is wide of the mark to assert that Euripidean motifs are ‘exploited by Seneca to tedious excess’, as does J. Diggle (ed.), Euripides Phaethon, Cambridge 1970, 96f; Seneca’s elaboration of these motifs is demonstrably related to the new function he assigns to these verses.


12. Thus Zwierlein 37f.


14. ‘Exesis’ implies a dangerously unsure foothold, ‘pendens’ that the angler is balanced in such a way that the slightest movement risks upsetting his equilibrium; ‘è questa l’immobilità di chi non si muove per non precipitare’ (Grisoli 78).

15. Cf. Grisoli 78: suspensus ‘denota la tensione muscolare, ma soprattutto quella psicologica, denotazione rinforzata dal successivo spectat, che non indica un semplice guardare, ma uno spiare intensamente’.


17. Contrast Verg. G. 2.458ff: the sequence there is urbs (461–6) — rus (467–74); city life is described in pejorative vocabulary which makes Vergil’s preferences clear even before he gets to the country panel.

18. Spes and metus in tandem also at e.g. Ben. 4.11.5, 7.1.7; Const. 9.2; Ep. 105.1, 110.4; Ag. 283; Phaed. 492; Phoen. 516, 631.

19. For comparable personifications, cf. e.g. Hor. C. 2.16, ‘curas... volantis’ (11–2), ‘scandit... cura’ (21–2); Sen. Phaed. 553–4, ‘tum scelera... per cunctas domos / iere’; below n. 44.
vestibulis abeunt veteres lassique clientes
votaque deponunt, quamquam longissima cenae
spes homini.
21. The point is humorously made in Martial 2.18, esp. 7-8,
esse sat est servum, iam nolo vicarius esse.
qui rex est regem, Maxime, non habeat.
22. For the temporal orientation, see e.g. S. Commager, The Odes of Horace, repr.
Bloomington-London 1967, 286, '[The heir] at least enjoys the present, not fencing himself in from it by a hundred keys. His profligacy is splendid by comparison with the caution of his father'; H.P. Syndikus, Die Lyrik des Horaz 1, Darmstadt 1972, 431f, 'Die hundert Riegel ... deuten auf eine typische Fehlhaltung des Menschen, der glaubt, er könne für die Ewigkeit planen'; E. Keckeis, Die avaritia bei Horaz, Diss. Innsbruck 1978, 53-6. Similarly Pope, Epistle 4.1-2,
'Tis strange, the Miser should his Cares employ
To gain those Riches he can ne'er enjoy.
23. Cf. TLL 2.1154.70ff; P. Pasiani, 'Attunitus nelle Tragedie di Seneca', in A. Traina (ed.), Seneca. Letture critiche, Milano 1976, 194-207. M. Hillen, Studien zur Dichtersprache Senecas, Berlin 1989, 17 argues convincingly that 'tollit' (171) carries the nuance 'erregen, in Aufruhr eines Akteurs versetzen' (cf. OLD s.v. 9a): 'Seneca stellt die Gier in den Mittelpunkt, nicht aber deren Erfüllung in politischer Macht'. This affective nuance, the hint of the politician's ambition, enhances the cohesion among the members of the quartet.
24. For a similar effect, cf. Sen. Brev. Vit. 2.1, 'at alium insatiabilis tenet avaritia, alium in supervacuis laboribus operosa sedulitas ... alium defatigat ex alienis iudiciis suspensa semper ambitio, alium mercandi praecepit cupiditas circa omnis terras, omnia maria spe lucri ducit; quosdam torquet cupido militiae numquam non alienis periculis intentos aut suis anxios; sunt quos intratus superiorum cultus voluntaria servitute consumat...'
26. Grisoli (above n. 5) 83; but this seems to me to be introducing extraneous categories.
29. Cf. further Epicurus Men. 127; fg. A 14, 35, B 78 Bailey; Lucr. 3.957-60; Cic. Fin. 1.62; Hor. C. 1.9.13-5, 1.11.7-8, 2.16.25-8, 3.29.29ff; Plut. Mar. 46.3; Pöschl 217-30 (with further references); K. Büchner, 'Horace et Épicure', in Assoc. G. Budé, Actes

30. Lucr. 2.20ff is fundamental, its influence clearly felt in Verg. G. 2.458–74, 493ff. Cf. also Hor. Epode 2; Sat. 2.6.77ff; C. 3.29.9ff; Sen. Thy. 446–70.


33. Something akin to this Epicurean ideal, characterized by quies, otium and the quest for personal safety, is hinted at also in Ag. 102–7; Phaed. 1126–7; Thy. 391–403, 469.

34. Pöschl (above n. 27) 214.

35. In another context E. Koßler, Die Naturbilder und ihre Funktion in den Tragödien des Seneca, Diss. Innsbruck 1971, 81, remarks, ‘Die Zeit wird also als Naturgesetz betrachtet und in ihr der Ausdruck einer allgemeinen Ordnung gesehen; der Mensch ist diesem Gesetz unterworfen und muss durch naturgemässes Verhalten zum Bestand der Ordnung beitragen...’; this could apply equally well to the passage under discussion.

36. I am not suggesting that the specific bona of Vergil’s rustics are comparable with those of the country dwellers in the H.F. ode (time is not a criterion in Vergil’s idyll) — simply that the process of idealizing the rustics through comparison with the urbani is analogous. Cf. F. Klingner, Studien zur griechischen und römischen Literatur, Zürich-Stuttgart 1964, 226 on Vergil’s rustics: ‘Der Bauer ist ein Weiser im kleinen, der in seiner Daseinsart das besitzt, was die Philosophie dem Menschen auf dem Wege über die Wissenschaft zu verschaffen verspricht’. Similarly E. Burck, Vom Menschenbild in der römischen Literatur I, Heidelberg 1966, 105; M.C.J. Putnam, Vergil’s Poem of the Earth, Princeton 1979, 144; Barchiesi (above n. 31) 63, 67.


38. ‘Icerta sui’ (184) has causal nuance. For the idea, cf. Thy. 401–3, ‘illi mors gravis incubat / qui, notus nimis omnibus, / ignotus moritur sibi’.

39. Cf. Prop. 3.7.29/30, ‘ite, rates curvas et leti texite causas; / ista per humanas mors venit acta manus’; Sen. Med. 301–8, ‘audax nimium qui... / ... / dubioque secans aequora cursu / potuit tenui fidere ligno / inter vitae mortisque vices / nimium gracili limite ducto’; N.Q. 5.18.9, ‘itaque eamus in pelagus et vocemus in nos fata cessantia. Miseri, quid quaeritis mortem, quaue ubique superest?’

40. Cf. N.T. Pratt, TAPhA 94 (1963), 200 n. 4, who classifies nimis, nimium, nimium with other examples of the Senecan language of ‘unrestraint’. Elsewhere the chorus uses the terms audax (548) and ausus (834) in its censure of Hercules.
41. The c10sural technique in this panel is formally parallel to that at the end of the rustic segment: first aut – aut + syntactically isolated detail (156–8), then nuli – nuli + isolated detail (189–91). The aut – aut forking, like the anaphoric nuli – nuli ‘bis idem’, retards and weights the end of a train of thought which is then additionally sealed by the grammatically autonomous verse: the result is a strong pause and a powerful impression of finality. On ‘forking’ (‘Gabelung’) and ‘bis idem’ as marks of closure, see G. Maurach, ‘Properzische Reihungen’, WJA 10 (1984), §§ 18–20 and id., Enchiridion (above n. 8) §§ 242, 257.

42. The terminology derives from D. Esser, Untersuchungen zu den Odenschliessen bei Horaz, Meisenheim 1976, 9ff. This shift to the first person is often used as a terminal technique in Seneca’s choral odes: e.g. Thy. 393–400, 621–2, 875–84; see however above § 12 on the implications of this.


44. The personification of fama has a long history: see A.S. Pease (ed.), Publi Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Quartus, repr. Darmstadt 1967, ad 173. Seneca’s addition of the adjective ‘fama ... garrula laudet’ (with which cf. Ov. Met. 9.137, ‘fama loquax’) intensifies a bland topos.

45. ‘Gloria’, ‘fama’ (192–3) ≈ ‘indomita virtus colitur et toto deus / narratur orbe’ (39–40), ‘Graium decus’ (619); ‘caeleque paret / tollat et astris’ (194–5, cf. Fitch) ≈ ‘regna ne summa occupet / qui vicit ima’ (64–5); ‘alias curru sublimis eat’ (196), suggesting the triumphant general (cf. H.O. 1683f), anticipates the many references to Hercules’ victories (e.g. 46–52, 58, 84, 278, 619–20, 816, 898–9). The attempt by Bishop (below n. 57) 221 to make ‘alium’ (192) and ‘alius’ (196) refer to Hercules and Lycus respectively is wildly improbable.

46. Cf. Epicurus K. 7, ἕνδοξοι καὶ περιβλέπτοι τινες ἑβουληθησαν γενέσθαι, τὴν ἑξ ἀνθρώπων ἀσφάλειαν οὕτω νομίζοντες περιποιηθήσατο... εἰ δὲ μὴ ἀσφαλῆς, οὐκ ἔχουσιν οὐκ ἔνεκα ἡ ἀρχής κατὰ τὸ τῆς φύσεως οἰκεῖον ἀρέχθησαν; cf. C 43 Bailey.

47. For the self-assertive effect produced by juxtaposition of personal pronoun and adjective, cf. Tib. 1.1.1f,

divitias alius...

tempestatis vita traducat inerti,

dum mea adsiduo luceat igne focus.

48. The idea is paralleled at Thy. 398–400, ‘sic cum transierint mei / nullo cum strepitu dies,/ plebeius moriar senex’, but the motif cluster ‘pigros - senectus - parvae ... domus’ at H.F. 198–200 suggests that Seneca had Tibullus in mind. For the contrast between natural and unnatural death, see e.g. Propertius 3.5: ‘nunc maris in tantum vento iactamus, et hostem / quaerimus, atque armae nectimus arma nova’ (11/12) has its thematic counterpart in ‘optima mors, Parcae quae venit acta die’ (18). Here too there is an implicit rejection of unnecessary heroics and temerity.


50. Cf. P.H. Schrijvers, ‘Comment terminer une ode?’ Mnemosyne 26 (1973), 150f; Esser (above n. 42) 144, 149f.

51. Shelton (above n. 1) 41.

52. Cf. R.J. Tarrant (ed.), Seneca’s Thyestes, Atlanta 1985, 137ff; Brady (above n. 1) 161, 166f; Gil Arroyo (above n. 1) 164–7; G. Picone, La fabula e il reno, Palermo 1984, 66–8.

54. E.g. M. Pohlenz, Die Stoa, Göttingen 1970, 325; cf. W.-L. Liebermann, Studien zu Senecas Tragödien, Meisenheim 1974, 8, 227; N.T. Pratt, Seneca’s Drama, Chapel Hill 1983, 130: ‘In each play at least one-half of the Choruses develop the Stoic meaning intended by the dramatist’.

55. See e.g. Tarrant ad Thy. 875: ‘As with the introduction of personal language at the end of the second and third odes..., it is tempting to see a meaning in these lines that projects beyond the dramatic context’. But on the anonymity and abstraction of the Senecan chorus, cf. O. Zwierlein, Die Rezitationsdramen Senecas, Meisenheim 1966, 74–6.

56. See the important review by O. Zwierlein, Gnomon 60 (1988), 333–42; Fitch gives ‘das bisher wohl schwächste Charakterbild dieses vielfach verkannten Tragödienhelden’ (333).


58. E.g. Galinsky 169: ‘The choral ode that follows Juno’s prologue suggests that, personal and biased as they may be, her objections to Herakles’ hybris do not lack an objective justification. The critical comments of the chorus are an explicit, anticipatory corrective to Herakles’ own claims’; Rose (above n. 4) 102: ‘This idealized world is presented as a foil to the world of Hercules’ actions. Every image in the dawn song finds its reversal or distortion in Hercules’ world, and incorporates allusions to that perversion through language’ (italics mine); Fitch 22: ‘When they [the chorus] draw a contrast between the quiet life and the life of ambitious activity, there can be no doubt on which side Hercules is ranged... We can scarcely fail to perceive that Hercules is the outstanding exemplar of virtus animosa, and we know from Juno’s predictions that he will suffer a great fall... But coming so early in the play... the Chorus’ condemnation of the active, ambitious life is bound to have a great impact on the audience’.


Zwielein 23f.

61. Cf. Shelton (above n. 1) 45; Fitch *ad loc*.


63. Shelton 48; cf. Zwielein 27, with his n. 60.


69. Fitch 27 emphasizes ‘the sheer impossibility of what [Hercules] prays for’, and remarks that ‘the prayer is tainted by the atmosphere of hubris and ambition in which it is spoken’. Of course the tone is hyperbolical (one recalls Friedrich’s phrase ‘die neronische Hyperbel’; cf. also A. Specka, *Der hohe Stil der Dichtungen Senecas und
Lucan, Diss Königsberg 1937, passim) — but that is not synonymous with hybris. We need to recall that Hercules is Jupiter’s son (cf. 926–7), and could say that his wish to uphold the cosmic certus ordo represents an extension of Jupiter’s office (cf. Kroll 403f; Caviglia 73; Lawall 14: ‘Hercules clearly conceives of his special status as carrying with it unique responsibilities’).

70. Lawall 14 has hinted at this antinomy: ‘alta pax’ (929) is ‘quite a different thing from the easy Epicurean ideal of otium quiesque; and again ‘the alta pax that Hercules desires is of a different order in that it involves a transformation of the world of reality rather than a mere withdrawal from it’.

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