

CHARACTER PORTRAYAL IN  
SENECA'S TRAGEDIES

A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research  
The University of Manitoba

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

by  
Joyce Leonie Johnson  
October 1967



## PREFACE

In this thesis I have followed the text and translation of Frank Miller in his edition of Seneca's Tragedies , Vols. I and II, The Loeb Classical Library.

I wish to express my gratitude to Professor B.L. Hijmans, my advisor, whose guidance was invaluable for the accomplishment of this work, and I also wish to thank Professor E.G.Berry, Head of Department, for his patience and valuable suggestions and corrections.

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The tragedies of Seneca, written in the first century A.D., are the only surviving representatives of tragic drama at Rome. They are based on subjects of Greek mythology and are largely on themes of horror and violence.

The purpose of this thesis was to examine these tragedies in an effort to show Seneca's method of characterization. Since it was impractical to examine every character in detail, only a few were chosen namely Hercules, Atreus, Thyestes, Oedipus, Deianira, Medea and Andromache. For convenience, the characters were grouped under the headings male characters, female characters, with a chapter on characterization of minor roles.

Seneca's rhetorical training and Stoic philosophy are seen as important factors influencing his treatment of characters.

In the plays basically two types of characters are depicted, the rational and the irrational. However, since emphasis is on the action of evil and the emotions which generate it, his irrational characters are portrayed in great depth.

The major characters are for the most part dominated by passion and show how the conquest of passion over reason leads to disaster. A notable exception however, is Hercules who is presented as a Stoic hero and therefore, the passion-reason conflict found in most of the other characters, is not dominant in his character.

Since the plays are psychological dramas, inner conflict and introspection are important aspects in Seneca's portrayal of character. The most common motive of his characters is that of revenge. The dominant passions are anger and hatred.

The major characters do not belong to any specific group but are rather portrayed as individuals in spite of the similarity of their situations and conflicts. These characters are also portrayed in greater detail than the minor ones.

The minor characters also do not conform to any fixed pattern. There are those who are individualized, and those such as the tyrants, nurses, and messengers who fall roughly into the category of a certain type and may be labelled as 'stock characters' but who are portrayed with some degree of individuality.

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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

Seneca's tragedies have been condemned by many scholars largely on the grounds that they are too rhetorical or too unlike their Greek counterparts. As Kingery puts it:

"It has been the fashion to dismiss Senecan tragedies airily as unworthy of serious attention, but such criticism seems to have been based in most cases on slight first-hand acquaintance with them."<sup>1</sup>

Most critics too, dealing with the question of character portrayal have been largely concerned with whether the characters are presented as types or individualized persons. It is the purpose of this thesis to examine the tragedies of Seneca in an attempt to determine his method of characterization. The thesis is not only concerned with whether the characters are typical or individualized but also with Seneca's devices of characterization.

Since it will be impractical to examine every character in detail, a task already undertaken by Herrmann<sup>2</sup>, a few of the characters will be looked at closely and it is hoped that through an examination of those characters Seneca's method of characterization will be clearly brought out. The characters will be treated under the headings of groups: male characters, female characters. A chapter will also be concerned with characterization of minor roles.

It should be noted that since shades of character melt into one another and the various aspects are blended and balanced,

therefore all classification must be arbitrary.

Roman tragedy dates back to 240 B.C. when Livius Andronicus adapted a Greek tragedy to the Roman stage. From this time the writers of tragedy have been largely concerned with fabula crepidata or tragedy based on Greek themes. The tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides which dealt with the great legends of Greek mythology were the models for Livius and his successors.

Themes on the Trojan war were very popular. This suggests an interest in the legends linking early Rome with Troy. Eight titles of the tragedies of Livius have survived, each one dealing with some aspect of the Trojan War.

Gnaeus Naevius, the successor of Livius, also wrote tragedies dealing with the Trojan War but he "was a more original poet and gave Latin literature a nationalist direction."<sup>3</sup> This is shown by his two praetextae or plays on historical Roman subjects. He established a precedent for later writers of tragedy. Ennius, Pacuvius and Accius are among the best known.

Ennius showed a preference for tragedy rather than comedy and according to Moses Hadas, "It was he who raised tragedy to a pitch of popular favour which it enjoyed to the time of Cicero, and it was his divergencies from Greek models which shaped the tragedies of Seneca."<sup>4</sup>

Accius, the successor of Pacuvius seems to have exhausted the possibilities of the genre for Rome. After him interest in

tragedy was soon overshadowed by the growing popularity of the comedy. It is unfortunate that only fragments and titles of the tragedies of these early writers have survived.

The tragedies of Seneca, written in the first century A.D., hold a unique place in literature. Aside from the fragments, they are the only surviving representatives of tragic drama at Rome. Tradition assigns to Seneca, the philosopher, ten tragedies. However, scholars differ in their opinion as to which, if any, are truly his. Various arguments are put forward to support or refute Senecan authorship but there seems to be some agreement on the basis of the manuscript, codex Etruscus, that nine of these are most likely his. These are in the order of the manuscript: Hercules Furens, Troades, Phoenissae, Medea, Phaedra, Oedipus, Agamemnon, Thyestes, and Hercules Oetaeus. The Octavia which is the only fabula praetexta extant presents the greatest problem. Two arguments cited most often against Senecan authorship of the Octavia are the fact that Seneca himself is one of the dramatis personae, and also the presence of the lines (629 - 631) which forecast the fate which befell Nero three years after the death of Seneca.

The chronological order of the plays and the period of Seneca's life during which the dramas were written are other areas of speculation. According to Butler,<sup>5</sup> most scholars assign the writing of the plays to the period during which Seneca was in exile (41-9 A.D.). There seems to be no conclusive evidence, however to support this date or any other as the exact

time. With regards to the chronology of the plays most critics accept the order given by the codex Etruscus.

The purpose for which the plays were written supplies an interesting subject for conjecture. Scholars are divided in their opinion as to whether they were written to be presented on stage or to be read. Those such as Butler,<sup>6</sup> who contend that they were not written for the stage base their argument largely on the fact that murders and horrible deeds occur coram populo. For example Medea kills her children and fling their bodies at Jason. Hercules too, kills his wife and children in full view of the audience. To support his view Butler says that "even under Nero it is scarcely credible that the introduction of the mangled fragments of Hippolytus upon the stage would be possible or palatable."<sup>7</sup>

Herrmann<sup>8</sup> however, on the basis of internal evidence expresses the view that the plays could have been presented on stage. Perhaps the problem is best stated in the words of Moses Hadas:

Whether or not the plays were intended for presentation is a moot point; the probability is that they were not, though they were written with the conditions of presentation in mind. Perhaps they were real to audiences, by a cast of readers, without the appurtenances of a regular performance.<sup>9</sup>

Howard Canter<sup>10</sup> is of the opinion that the rhetorical interest of the plays is the predominant one. This view is also held by Miller who states: "This was the age of the declaimer, and it was from the standpoint of declamation that we must both

explain the composition of the tragedies and attempt an interpretation of their meaning and appreciation of their style."<sup>11</sup>

The tragedies do show evidence of a rhetorical interest. Long descriptions, sententious remarks, speeches of a forensic nature, exaggeration and a multiplicity of crimes, an abundance of figures of speech and a tendency to depict themes of horror are prevalent. But as there is also evidence of a strong influence of Stoicism in the tragedies; any attempt at a satisfactory solution to Seneca's main object in writing these plays must be conjectural.

Berthe Marti<sup>12</sup> who supports the view that Seneca's aim was to teach Neo-Stoicism bases her arguments on the arrangement of the plays according to the codex Etruscus. According to this system the plays on Hercules are the framework; the Troades and Phoenissae deal with problems of life, death and destiny; Medea and Phaedra provide exemplars for a treatise on the passions; the Agamemnon, Oedipus, and Thyestes deal with free will, sin and retribution. Such an interpretation, while valuable raises doubts since it involves the question whether the dramatist's purpose was primarily literary or philosophical.

Whatever was his purpose, Seneca found material for his plots in the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. Thus, the plays deal with subjects of Greek mythology and for the most part follow the Greek plays closely in terms of plot.

However a careful examination such as that of Miller,<sup>13</sup> shows that Seneca has introduced new material in many instances and has altered the arrangement and relative importance of certain scenes. For example, the opening scene in the Hercules Furens, in which Juno foreshadows the catastrophe, is not found in the corresponding play of Euripides.

Seneca retained the chorus but there is very little direct participation of the chorus in the development of the plot. The chorus' role is merely to recite the choral odes which generally deal with topics of a philosophical nature.

The names of the characters in Seneca's tragedies are in most cases similar to those found in the Greek tragedies. In matters of detail and in treatment they differ. According to Kingery, it is "in his handling of the characters our author carries to a extreme an innovation of Euripides."<sup>14</sup>

The most important factors which seem to have influenced Seneca's treatment of his characters are his rhetorical interest and his Stoic philosophy. The conflict between reason and passion which is fundamental in Stoicism, permeates the plays and has made a deep imprint upon their nature. For example, the character of the nurse in every play seems primarily to be the voice of reason against passion displayed by her mistress. According to N.T. Pratt, Jr.;

Stoicism contributed largely to make Senecan drama a drama of character, full of strong emotions and violence, and marked by the intensity of tone: a landmark, in fact, in the development of psychological drama.<sup>15</sup>

Seneca's characters are basically of two types, the rational and the irrational, but the latter predominates because of the Stoic belief that it is corruption or weakness of character which causes such crimes and disasters as were the traditional subject of tragedy. Outstanding traits of his irrational characters are fear, hatred, anger, greed and pride.

There is also the positive aspect of Stoicism as is seen in the portrayal of Hercules who through suffering and endurance attains wisdom, and in characters such as Astyanax and Polyxena who face death with resignation.

With this conception of character, Seneca portrays his characters by the techniques of direct and indirect description, self revelation, by contrast particularly of mood, and by the crises in which they find themselves.

Rhetoric is one of the elements used by Seneca in his powerful portrayal of introspection throughout the plays. The demonstration of persuasion or proof in the form of exaggeration is also prevalent. According to Charles Garton,<sup>16</sup> much of Seneca's characterization derives from the rhetorical use of inference, extension and exaggeration.

The characters which are the vehicle for plot development will be the subject of this thesis.

## CHAPTER II

### MALE CHARACTERS

In this chapter the characters Hercules, Atreus, Thyestes and Oedipus will be studied. These characters have been chosen not because they represent any particular type but because they emphasize Seneca's treatment of character.

In the portrayal of Hercules, Seneca exemplifies his conception of the Stoic hero. Atreus on the other hand, represents the unstoic element that is, the irrationality of passion. Oedipus proves that as a Stoic Seneca does not think that disaster comes through predestined evil, but from one's character. This idea is also clearly brought in the portrayal of Thyestes, who nullifies evil by his passive endurance.

#### Hercules

Denis Henry and B. Walker, have stated that, "the Hercules of Seneca has so few positive qualities at all that it is hard to regard him as a 'character' in any accepted sense of the word."<sup>1</sup> By this statement, the authors seem to suggest that the criteria for determining 'character' is based on positive qualities, and that since Hercules has so few positive qualities, he cannot be regarded as a character. The authors' refusal to regard Hercules as a character merely on the grounds of positive qualities, seems unjustified in terms of Garton's definition of character. According to him: "Character is simply the whole impression which a persona makes, and how he makes it depends on the play."<sup>2</sup>

Hercules is no ordinary man. He is the son of Jupiter,

who has been made famous throughout the world because of his physical strength. He occurs in two plays: Hercules Furens and Hercules Oetaeus. In both plays he is the central figure around whom the action is directed. Although he is portrayed as a demigod, he shows some basic human qualities. He plays the role of husband and father, and shows filial affection for his stepfather, Amphitryon in the Hercules Furens, and for his mother Alcmena in the Hercules Oetaeus.

The character of Hercules will be considered first as he appears in the Hercules Furens. In this play the madness brought upon him by Juno, and his subsequent actions are the important issues. The analysis of the character of Hercules will consider the role of Juno as an influencing force controlling his actions, and will try to determine whether or not Hercules is guilty, that is, responsible for the slaying of his wife and children.

The play begins with a prologue, spoken by Juno, which throws light on the role of Hercules as seen by her. Juno has always been the bitter foe of Hercules. From his infancy and right through his career she has devised various tasks which seemed impossible for him to perform but he has been successful. From her speech we learn of these former deeds and their significance to the plot of the play. She tells how he has conquered the lion and hydra, and whatever monsters she sent

against him: "whatever fearsome creature the hostile earth produces, whatever the sea or the air has borne, terrific, dreadful, noxious, savage, wild, has been broken and subdued." (30-33)

Hercules' tasks have not been confined to performances on earth. His latest and most hazardous one was to capture Cerberus the hound of the Underworld. Even this task proved possible for Hercules (47-48). Juno dwells so much on Hercules' achievements that her speech, although spoken in anger and jealousy, can be seen as an indirect praise of him. She is somewhat despondent and remarks:

He overcomes and thrives on trouble; he enjoys my wrath; to his own credit he turns my hate; imposing too cruel tasks, I have but made known this sire, but given room for glory. Where the Sun, as he brings back, and where, as he dismisses day, colours both Ethiop races with neighbouring torch, his unconquered valour is adored, and in all the world he is storied as a god. (33-40)

Juno expresses her concern for heaven. She sees Hercules as a proud rival ready to overthrow Jupiter and reign in heaven (64-65). His valour has been made known throughout the world but the earth is not large enough for him (46). His ambition, therefore, will cause him to seek a way to heaven, not in a peaceful way but by a ruina, for:

robore experto tumet,  
et posse caelum viribus vinci suis  
didicit ferendo; (68-70)

Hercules' toils therefore, are not over: Juno has a new plan. Hercules has conquered all the monsters and has outmatched whatever cruelty she has imposed. Consequently, there seems to be no match for him save himself, and so "bella iam secum gerat"(85)

and "se vincat cupiat mori." (116-117) Hercules' war against himself is essentially the problem of the play. Up to the time of his madness, it is doubtful exactly how this will come about: almost half the play, that is, in terms of number of lines, is finished before Hercules actually comes on stage, and the image which is presented of him by the chorus and particularly by Amphitryon gives the impression that such a disaster is not possible. The words of Juno, on the other hand, throw some light on the problem. In the eyes of Juno, Hercules is proud and boastful and one whose valour lies in his unequalled physical strength. He seems to be a sort of robot acting according to orders, but one who enjoys her commands, for,

"minorque labor est Herculi iussa  
exequi, quam mihi iubere; laetus  
imperia excipit." (41-42)

His main object seems to be that of occupying a place in heaven. There is a suggestion in Juno's words that this ambition would be a destructive force for Hercules. She rejoices in her new plan and states with obvious sarcasm: "scelere perfecto licet/ admittat illas genitor in caelum manus!" (121-122)

A different image of Hercules is presented by Amphitryon, his stepfather, and Megara, his wife. His achievements are seen as actions performed for the amelioration of mankind. This aspect is also stressed by the chorus which seems to be sympathetic towards Hercules throughout the play. Amphitryon in particular, seems to emphasize the benevolence of Hercules. He goes to all lengths to tell of the labours of Hercules.<sup>3</sup>

Hercules is not only the protector of his family but he is seen as "actor pacis" in whose absence, according to Amphitryon, "once again prosperous and successful crime goes by the name of virtue; good men obey the bad, might's right and fear oppresses law." (251-253)

Amphitryon bemoans the absence of Hercules and longs for the return when the rule of Thebes, now usurped by Lycus, will be handed to the rightful king.<sup>4</sup>

Megara's concern about Hercules' absence seems to be chiefly that of a wife longing for her husband to return. She is even willing to join him if he does not find a way back. However, she urges him to return at any cost, "if there is no backward way, and the road is closed, rend earth asunder and return; and whatever lies hid in the hold of murky night, let forth with thee." (280-283) In general, Megara is not as hopeful as Amphitryon who says with confidence that "great-souled" Hercules would return "qualis ex omni solet labore, maior." (312)

Lycus, the tyrant, refuses to believe that Hercules has any divine power. He thinks Hercules is no more than a slave filled with false valour because he has conquered wild beasts. When Megara refuses to marry him he asks, "Scepтрone nostro famulus est potior tibi?" (430) Again when Megara reminds him of Hercules' valour, Lycus taunts her thus, "obici feris monstriisque virtutem putas?" (434) Lycus accuses Hercules of acting effeminately while he was serving Queen Omphale.<sup>5</sup> He mockingly asks:

"Are we to call him brave from whose shoulders fell

the lion's skin and club, made present for a girl, and whose side shone resplendent, decked out in Tyrian's robes? Call him brave, whose bristling locks are ripped with nard, who busied those famous hands with unmanly strummings on the tambourine, whose warlike brow a barbaric turban crowned?"

The accusations of Lycus are refuted by Amphitryon who puts Hercules on the level with other gods. He shows that Hercules' trials are not unique. Bacchus and even Jupiter had similar trials. (472-476)

Up to this point in the play, Hercules is still in the underworld and there is no evidence available to the actors that he has been successful. But the audience knows from Juno's outburst that "he has broken down the doors of infernal Jove, and brings back to the upper world the spoils of a conquered king." (47-48)

Theseus rescued from the underworld by Hercules, gives a description of the underworld. He tells not only of its desolation and darkness but of Hercules' attitude which throws some light on his character. Although Hercules' visit to the underworld is seen as a task imposed by Juno, he is still considered audax to attempt the journey where as Theseus says, "As oft-times the waves sweep on unwilling ships, so does the downward breeze drive, and the greedy void, and never do the clutching shades permit a backward step." (677-679) From Theseus' account it seems that Hercules is not affected by the grimness of Hell. It is not certain whether he is present at all until his encounter with Charon. The entire description

of this encounter, shows Hercules' daring and desire to show off his strength. He immediately demanded passage as the crowd moved back but was stopped by Charon. Without delay, he overpowered Charon and climbed on board. The boat large enough for a whole nation was weighed down by him. (775-776) The similarity here between Hercules and Aeneas when the latter boarded Charon's boat is noteworthy.<sup>6</sup> But the essential difference which is notable is that Aeneas was invited on board after he had shown the "golden bough".<sup>7</sup> While this was Aeneas' passport, Hercules' strength was enough to gain him admittance.

The capture of Cerberus is another display of Hercules' physical strength. It might be recalled that in Aeneas' visit to hell, the priestess had to drug the dog in order that Aeneas might cross the Styx.<sup>8</sup> Hercules' task, however, is to capture the dog and he does this in the only way he knows:

"Then from his left arm the hero looses the fierce-grinning jaws, thrusts out before him the Cleonaeon head and, beneath that huge shield crouching, piles his mighty club with victorious right hand. Now here, now there, with unremitting blows he whirls it, redoubling the strokes." (797-780)

When Hercules first appears on the stage, he is boastful and proud. He has just returned from the underworld where he overpowered Cerberus and rescued Theseus. The horror of hell seem to have utterly escaped him. He boasts that he has conquered Juno:

"To appoint me penalties and tasks earth is not broad enough for Juno's hate. I have seen places unapproached by any, unknown to Phoebus, those gloomy spaces which the baser pole hath yielded to infernal Jove, and if the

regions of the third estate pleased me, I might have reigned." (604-610)

He admits that he was under orders: "iussus in lucem extuli/ arcana mundi" (596), and thinks he is capable of any task Juno might impose. Therefore, he is very anxious for her next bidding and challenges his persecutor: "If aught is left to do, give it to me, O Juno; too long already dost thou let my hands lie idle. What dost thou bid me conquer." (614-615)

Hercules seems so preoccupied with himself that there is a lapse of time before he notices that his family had been ill-treated. However, when he does notice the mourning clothes of his family, he becomes angry, and is shocked that after he had done so much for mankind, no one came to the aid of his family in time of need. He cries out:

"Ingrata tellus, nemo ad Herculae domus auxilia venit? vidit hoc tantum nefas defensus orbis?" (631-633)

He learns that Lycus is the culprit and hastens to take revenge. Lycus is not only a personal foe but a threat to the peace which Hercules has struggled to maintain. In his anxiety to avenge Lycus, Hercules even postpones the embraces of his stepfather and wife. (638-639). This seems strange for one so devoted to his family, but it is just another instance of Hercules' pride. Lycus has shown no regard for his might, and to a proud man such as Hercules, that is an unpardonable sin, therefore, he says,

"mactetur hostia, hanc ferat virtus notam  
fiatque summus hostis Acidæ Lycus. (634-635)

Hercules kills Lycus and his comrades, the accomplices of his crime, and feels no remorse for he has not only answered a challenge to his pride but has also acted as "defensus orbis." He has freed Thebes from the oppression of a tyrant. Another monster has been destroyed. He boasts of his success and without first purifying his hands, he makes preparations to offer due sacrifices to the gods. He expresses his desire to pour out to the gods the blood of the man he hates for, "no more pleasing stream had stained the altars, no greater, richer victim can be sacrificed to Jove than unrighteous king." (922-923)

In the role of "auctor pacis," Hercules offers prayers which as he says are worthy of Jupiter and him. (926) Instead of a purely personal prayer as Amphitryon suggests, he prays for universal peace:

May heaven abide in its own place, and earth and sea;  
 may the eternal stars hold on their way unhindered; may  
 deep peace brood upon the nations; may the harmless  
 country's toil employ all iron, and may swords lie hid;  
 may no raging tempest stir up the sea, no fires leap  
 forth from angered Jove, no river, fed by winter's snows  
 sweep away the uptorn fields. Let poisons cease to be.  
 Let no destructive herb swell with harmful juice. May  
 savage tyrants rule no more. (927-937).

The tone of this prayer does not seem to fit the character of Hercules as it is depicted in his earlier speeches though quite in keeping with what Amphitryon had said about him. Most of his utterances have been arrogant and boastful. The following lines, however, are more typical of the Herculean image:

si quod etiamnum  
 est scelus latura tellus, properet,  
 et si quod parat monstrum, meum sit.  
 (937-939)

The feeling of admiration which his prayer for peace has aroused is quickly changed into one of sympathy when the dramatic significance of the last words is realized. As N.T.

Pratt has pointed out, "The dramatic irony in the words meum sit is especially noteworthy: the monstrum is his, because he himself is the monstrum." <sup>9</sup>

Suddenly as if in answer to his challenge, the madness begins to come upon Hercules. He imagines strange things: suddenly darkness comes upon the earth although it is midday, and the stars begin to gather in the sky. He sees the lion, the first monster he had conquered about to seize a star and attack the Bull.

In his madness, Hercules displays arrogance. For the first time he expresses quite frankly his desire to occupy heaven: "The earth has been subdued, the swollen seas are at rest, the infernal realms have felt my onset, heaven is yet untried, a task worthy of Alices." (956-959) Hercules imagines the pathway to divinity impeded by Juno and so he is going to prove once again the effect of his strength. He wishes to take the heavens by assault. He says, "Let the Titans prepare war, with me to lead their rage; rocks, woods and all, will I bring, and with my right hand I'll snatch up ridges full of Centaurs." (967-969)

Hercules then sees his children, imagines that they are Lycus' and kills them. He also mistakes Megara for Juno and with a feeling of triumph kills her too. Amphytrion is

the only relative who escapes his mad fury. Amphitryon describing Hercules' fall says "now his knees give way and his whole body goes crashing to the ground, like an ash-tree felled in the woods, or a falling mass of rock that will give a breakwater to the sea." (1046-1047). The comparison of his fall to an ash-tree or a mass of rock emphasises not only his bulkiness but also his helplessness. Seneca invokes pathos here when Hercules the embodiment of physical strength and endurance is reduced to a state of helplessness.

The chorus laments his fate. They pray that he may remain mad and so be free from a sense of guilt:

"solus te iam praestare potest  
furor insontem. proxima puris  
sors est manibus nescire nefas.

(1097-1099)

Hercules wakes from the deep sleep in his right mind. He is dazed and not sure where he is. When he sees the corpses, not recognizing them as those of his children, he thinks they are simulacra inferna and expresses his fear: "Even after my return do troops of ghastly things still throng before my eyes? With shame I confess it -- I am afraid." (1145-1147). It may be recalled that while Hercules was in the underworld, the phantoms did not seem to have any emotional effect on him but now Hercules the brave, is afraid. His fear springs both from his ignorance of what has actually happened and from the presentiment which he has. This is the first evidence of a change in his character which seems to come about after his madness.

Seneca's treatment of character, particularly at this time, is noteworthy. The change is gradual and dealt with subtly.

In his fear, Hercules looks for his family and his weapons with which he may protect them. When he realizes that his weapons have been removed he becomes very angry and curious to know who has been bold enough to attempt such a deed. He asks:

arma quis vivo  
mihi detrahere potuit? spolis quis  
tanta abstulit iqsumque quis non  
Herculis somnum horruit?

(1153-1155).

Hercules recognizes his dead wife and children and immediately thinks of revenge. He is shocked at the crime and asks, "quis tanta Thebis scelera moliri ausus est/ Hercule reverso?"(1162). In a roundabout way Hercules learns the truth. He had hoped to find it out from Theseus or Amphitryon, but their silence at first and also Amphitryon's terse answers help him to realize that he is the murderer. Here Seneca uses rhetoric to create dramatic suspense. There is a feeling of sympathy for Hercules particularly when he cries out, "Miserere, genitor, supplices tendo manus." (1192), and again when he addresses his step-father thus;

ad vos revertor; genitor, hoc  
nostrum est scelus?/tacuere --  
nostrum est.

(1199-1200)

Although Amphitryon blames Juno for the crime, Hercules accepts full responsibility: "laudanda feci iussus; hoc meum est."(1268)

Ronald Tobin with reference to this line has said, "It is interesting to observe that even in his sorrow Hercules is proud, refusing the slightest responsibility for one of his acts to anyone but himself."<sup>10</sup> But it seems that it is not a question here of pride but admission of guilt. Hercules' sense of guilt has compelled him to accept responsibility for the crime. Moreover, he not only acknowledges his guilt but feels remorse and asks for help. He call to his father:

"succurre, genitor; sive te  
pietas movet seu triste fatum  
sive violatum decus virtutis."  
(1269-1271)

It is quite evident that Hercules has undergone a change at this point in the play. He is less boastful and arrogant. For the first time he thinks he is no longer useful, and therefore wishes to die. He says:

Why should I longer stay my soul in light of day, and  
linger here, there is no cause; all that was dear to  
me I've lost: reason, arms, honour, wife, children,  
strength -- and madness too! No power could purge a  
tainted spirit; by death must sin be healed. (1258-1262).

Hercules feels such revulsion for his crime, that he thinks that only by death he can expiate himself: "si vivo, feci scelera; si morior, tuli." He is resolved to die in spite of the entreaties of Theseus and Amphytrion. However, he decides to live when Amphytrion threatens to commit suicide if Hercules kills himself and point out that the hero will be guilty of parricide since he will be acting "volens sciensque" (1301). His decision to live seems to be motivated by his filial affection for his stepfather. Hercules realizes that things will not be the same

for him. He has lost his loved ones and moreover no place can cleanse him from his guilt. He sees no place fit enough for him to hide and so he pleads with Theseus: "Take me back, I pray thee, and restore me to the nether shades; put me in thy stead, loaded with chains, that place will hide me-- ~~but~~ it too, knows me!" (1338-1340). Theseus in recompense for the favour Hercules had shown him, offers him refuge at Athens. He tells Hercules:

" illa te, Alcide, vocat,  
facere innonentes terra quae superos solet" (1343-1344)

By these words Theseus raises Hercules to the level of the gods, and so once again Hercules is triumphant. In his decision to live he has defeated Juno. His madness was not an end in itself, but a means to an end, a victorious one for Hercules.

Hercules is not a "static" character. According to Herrmann, "Ainsi Hercule d'abord triomphant, puis égaré, criminel, malheureux, est de nouveau absous ou presque à la fin de la tragedie et peut reprendre sa carrière glorieuse."<sup>11</sup> He develops through the play. We gradually understand the main- his actions. He is characterized by the speeches of other characters as well as by his own. At the beginning of the play he is bold and arrogant, but towards the end of the play he is submissive. Hercules is defined mainly by his past actions. His glorious deeds are not an integral part of the action of the play but they are significant to the plot of the play.

Only one of the twelve labours actually takes place during

the play. The other significant actions of the play are, the slaying of Lycus, his madness and consequent slaying of his wife and children. The slaying of his family is the catastrophe of the play. This scene is the most appalling but the scene in which Hercules learns the truth is the most pathetic. The tragedy is a psychological one and it is at this point that Seneca is most skilful. The mental anguish which Hercules suffers is great. It is brought about through his sense of guilt.

Amphitryon says that Hercules is not guilty because he is in ignorance, and also because his madness was the work of Juno. The chorus suggests that Hercules' madness would make him guiltless, and Hercules thinks that his present knowledge of the crime makes him guilty. Thus one may conclude that guilt depends on one's knowledge of the act.

It seems that Hercules' guilt lies not in his knowledge of the crime but in the fact that his irrational actions are the offspring of his hubris. Ronald Tobin said, "Seneca handles this scene deftly, and creates the impression that it was simply by goading Hercules' self-love and ambition to extreme that Juno produced the fit of insanity. And so Hercules will be responsible for the murders in the measure that his own self-esteem was a partial cause."<sup>13</sup> However, he does not say how Juno does this.

Hercules is proud and ambitious but it seems that he has won a place among the stars by continually defeating Juno.

She motivated by jealousy can hardly be acting for a just cause. It seems that Juno is just advocating what is inevitable for one so proud.

Hercules not only incites sympathy, but at times a feeling of admiration, particularly, in his relationship to his stepfather. But he is not a very impressive character. His unequalled physical strength which is emphasized throughout the play, makes him an unbalanced character. However, he rises to a challenge and shows courage in his decision to live. He sees it as another task and urges himself on: "Strong soul of mine, yield, do a father's will; add this task also to Hercules's toils--and live!" (1315-1317)

The Hercules Oetaeus is also based on the myth of Hercules, the son of Jupiter. It might be conceived of as a sequel to the Hercules Furens. The major issue of the play is the suffering and deification of Hercules. These events follow Hercules' madness and the slaying of Megara and their children. This becomes evident when Deianira, Hercules' present wife, contemplating revenge for Hercules' infidelity, asks: "After all this, why do I harmlessly keep back these hands until he feigns another fit of madness, with deadly hand bend his bow, and slay me and my son?" (428-30)

As the plots of the plays differ, so do the characters. Hercules has not only remarried but he has a son, Hyllus. The action of the play takes place in Euboea and in Trachis. At the beginning of the play, Hercules has come to Euboea from

Oechalia after having killed king Eurytus. The king was killed because he refused to give his daughter Iole to Hercules in marriage (100-101). As a result, the amicable husband-wife relationship which existed between Hercules and Megara in the Hercules Furens is absent from this play.

In his opening speech which begins as a prayer to Jupiter, Hercules lays claim to his place among the stars. He recounts the mighty deeds which he performed on earth, where according to him, peace has been established (16-27). He is very proud of these achievements for which he hopes Jupiter will reward him. He feels he should be admitted among the stars not only because of these services to mankind but also because of his divine parentage. He therefore asks his father:

I have crushed all who merited thy bolts. But to me, father, is heaven still denied? Of a surety have I everywhere proved worthy Jove; and that thou art sire of mine my stepdame testifies. Yet why dost still contrive delays?" (6-10)

Hercules also justifies his claim to divinity by pointing out that all the creatures which he has conquered have been admitted to heaven by Juno and consequently, "non habent pacem dei" (64), and moreover:

victor e terris meos  
specto labores, astra portentis prius,  
ferisque Iuno tribuit, ut caelum mihi  
faceret timendum. (73-76)

Hercules is really convinced that he deserves a place among the stars. Therefore, he asks his father to grant him

permission: "permitte tantum, genitor, inveniam viam" (33).

He is convinced too, that, "dabitur Alcidae locus", for:

"si post feras, post bella, post Stygium canem  
 haud dum astra merui, Siculus Hesperium latus  
 tangat Pelorus, una iam tellus erit;  
 illinc fugabo maria." (79-82)

Hercules is proud not only of his physical strength but of his daring. He boasts that he has conquered the beasts with his bare hands, (57-58); as evidence of his daring he says: "O quanta fudi monstra quae nullus mihi rex imperat! institit virtus mihi/ Junone peior." (61-63) It is worthy of note that while Hercules in the Hercules Furens admits that he was acting under orders: "laudanda feci iussus" (H.F.1268), in this play Hercules takes full responsibility for his actions. He is also more proud and boastful. Almost the entire opening speech is one of self-praise. It is largely concerned with the hero's own successes and his claim to equality with the gods.

In the eyes of the chorus, a band of Oechalian captives, Hercules' actions do not seem as praiseworthy. They bemoan the fate of Oechalia which has been overthrown by Hercules (162), and as victims of his cruelty they refuse to believe the story concerning his birth:

"False is the story of the double night when,  
 the stars lingered in the sky o'erlong, when  
 Lucifer changed place with Hesperus, and Delia  
 too slow, kept back the sun." (147-150)

He seems so hard-hearted that they believe he is probably some Titan, (142) or that some wild beast has nurtured him. (145-146)

He has shown no mercy towards them nor to any of his other opponents. In his ability to withstand any attack he defies mortality:

"in nudo gladius corpore frangitur  
et saxum resilit, fataque negligit  
et mortem indomito corpore provocat" (153-155)

Therefore, the Oechalians consider their defeat at the hands of Hercules their greatest evil. Hercules' words that "'tis Hercules now begins to hold the place of monster", (55-56) become significant when the chorus says:

" nil superest mali--  
iratum miserae vidimus Herculem." (171-172).

The Oechalians in their wretchedness, do not fail to recognise Hercules' might. It is because of his might that they accept their fate with resignation.

Iole resents Hercules' victory over the Oechalians and her present situation. She has witnessed the cruel murder of her father, (207-210) and now: "iam iam dominae captiva colus/fusosque legam." (219-220). She, preferring death to captivity, laments her fate and blames her beauty for her present calamity.

Hercules has not only wronged Iole and the Oechalians but has shown little concern for his wife. When she sees Iole's beauty she becomes very distressed. Her anguish is aroused by her jealousy, and fear that Iole may bear children for Hercules. "Iole meis captiva germanos dabit/natis Iovisque fiet ex famula nurus?" (278-279) she asks with indignation.

The angry Peianira and her nurse companion expose another

aspect of Hercules' character. The nurse tries to console Deianira by telling her that Hercules' love for Iole, as all his former love affairs, (363-377) was merely transient:

"dilexit Iolen, nempe cum staret/parens regisque natam peteret" (353-354). But Deianira is convinced that her fear is justified for "'tis the wont of Hercules to love captive maids" (362). Furthermore, she not only accuses him of being levis (416), but thinks his past actions were dishonourable.

She says:

"he is a trifler, nor does the charm of glory urge him on. He goes wandering o'er the earth, not in the hope that he may fare illustrious through Grecian cities. Some one to love he seeks; his quest is maidens' chambers. If any is refused him, she is ravished; against nations doth he rage, midst ruins seeks his brides, and unrestrained excess is called heroic." (416-422)

In spite of these accusations, Deianira loves Hercules. She has enjoyed the honour of being his wife and the daughter-in-law of Jupiter and only death can deprive her of it. In her determination to win back Hercules' love, Deianira sends him a robe which she thinks is dipped in a love-charm but which really was dipped in some poisonous blood which Nessus<sup>14</sup> had given to her with these words:

"A garment, smeared wit this very gore, shalt thou give to him, if ever a hated mistress should usurp thy chamber, and thy fickle husband should give another daughter to his high-thundering sire."  
(527-530)

It is noteworthy that Nessus, too, considered Hercules fickle. Deianira at this point does not know what the true effect of the charm will be; she thinks it is a love-charm but the

audience is given a hint when she tells her nurse :

perge ut nitentem virus in vestem datum  
mentem per artus adeat et tacitum means <sup>15</sup>  
intret medullas" (536-538)

Hercules puts on the robe in his preparations to offer sacrifice to Jupiter. It is while he is praying to Jupiter and asking him to lay down his thunderbolt since, "Peace has been given to earth, to sky, to sea;" (794) that the poison begins to take effect. A pathetic figure is portrayed. According to Hyllus, "the limbs and thews of Hercules a mysterious plague is wasting; and he who conquered monsters, he, he, the victor, is vanquished, is in grief, in agony." (751-753) The antithesis, victor vincitur (753) heightens the pathos which is created when Hercules' son, a witness of his defeat, reports it to Deianira.

Hercules is not insensible to pain. He groans and weeps but in his agony he seeks revenge. He seeks out Lichas the messenger who brought him the robe. Once again Hercules shows no mercy. Although Lichas "embracing the altar with trembling hands, through sheer terror tasted the pangs of death and left small part of his life for punishment" (810-812), Hercules indignant that Lichas might be considered his conqueror, slays him adding these words: "fiat hic summus labor" (816).

At this point in the play, Hercules undergoes a significant change in character. He loses his physical

attributes, his power to conquer, and his emotional stability. He raves and tries in vain to tear off the robe. He becomes helpless and according to Hyllus, "fuimus Alcidae pares" (833). He is now like an ordinary human being.

Hyllus however, believes that his father will endure the pain and recover but Deianira who is less optimistic says:

"Vinci Hercules cum potuit, hinc coepit mori" (983).

Death is imminent and Hercules realizes this. He also feels that chaos may result from his death. The chorus seem to express the same opinion when they say:

"The palace of heaven shall sink, dragging down East and West, and death in some form and chaos shall o'erwhelm all gods in one destruction; and death shall at last bring doom upon itself." (1112-1117)

He prays that the world may be shrouded in darkness and so, "obsta novercae" (1134), and also because "caecum chaos/ reddi decebat" (1134-1135). The darkness is appropriate, for Hercules, the light of the world, is dying. Hercules once more shows concern for heaven, and his desire to maintain the status quo. He urges Jupiter to be on the alert, emphasizing the need for concern:

"Since I thy son, who on earth have been in place of thy bolt and lightening flash, am turning me back to Styx, Enceladus, the fierce, will rise and the mass 'neath which he is now crushed will he hurl against the gods; yea, father, thy whole realm of air will my death put to hazard." (1143-1148)

It may be noted that at this point Hercules does not claim a place among the stars although he indirectly puts himself on the same level as Jupiter. On the contrary, he says he is going to the Styx. This seems to be consistent with the

new concept of his character.

Hercules is not afraid of death per se but he resents the cause of death. He grieves that he is overcome without an enemy and considers it a shame to his manhood that "summus Alcidae dies/ nullum malum prosternit;" (1171-1172) But this is not his greatest shame. He does not know the true cause of his disaster but, blaming Deianira, he exclaims: "Oh cruel shame to me, oh, end most foul-- a woman will be called author of Alcides' death! And for whom is Alcides dying?"(1176-1178) He is very much concerned about having a glorious end. It might be recalled that he showed similar contempt for Lichas who brought him the robe: "By such a hand, by such a hand as this, ye fates, shall I be said to have been undone? Has Lichas conquered Hercules?"(813-814) He is not merely concerned because his assumed conqueror is a woman but the fact that she is a mortal is a greater blow to his integrity. He says:

"If the fates unchanging have willed that by a woman's hand I fall, if through distaff so base the thread of my death has run, ah me, that I might have fallen by Juno's hate! 'Twould be by a woman's hand, but of one who holds the heavens" (1178-1183)

Hercules sees his body wasting away by the plague and laments his fate. His groans and weeping do not arouse as much sympathy as when he addresses the plague bidding it to come forth, and by a series of questions tries to find out its origin.(1249-1260) His greatest torture is that he does not know or cannot see what is gnawing at his flesh.

His inability to conquer the plague and subdue the pain





Iole, Hercules proves himself worthy of a hero's death. He tries to console his mother by reassuring her he will live on because of his heroic deeds. Hitherto, Hercules has been chiefly concerned with his divine parentage. Now he says:

"thou I be falsely called the son of Jove, I have deserved to be his son, glory on heaven have I conferred, and to Jove's glory did my mother bring me forth." (1502-1504)

Hercules shows courage not only in his willingness to accept death but in the manner of his death. He mounts the pyre with such a joyous countenance that he makes death a triumph and now, "inter labores ignis Herculeos abit." (1616) He forbids his mother to weep for him adding "tis a sin to tear the breasts and womb that bore Alcides." (1678-1679) Lying on the pyre, he addresses his final prayer to his father, Jupiter:

"if no cities groan and no man stains with sin his altar-fires; if crimes have ceased, admit this soul, I pray thee, to the stars! I have no fear of the infernal realm of death, nor do the sad realms of dusky Jove affright me; but to go, naught but a shade, to those gods I overcame, O Sire, I am ashamed."  
(1701-1707)

It is important to note the difference in tone and content between this prayer and the opening prayer (1-98), Hercules is more humble in his final request. He does not boast of his former achievements but on the contrary, says:

"leve est quod actum est; Herculeum hic, genitor, dies inveniet aut damnabit." (1714-1715)

Hercules accepts his fate calmly and bravely. He does not utter a sound while the fire engulfs him and even when "threatening fire assaulted his face and the hot tongues licked about his head, he did not close his eyes." (1753-1755)

Hercules is admitted to the skies and his final words are addressed to his mother: "In living presence, mother, from the stars Alcides speaks;" (1972) and in true Herculean style he says, "Alcides once again has conquered hell." (1976).

The Hercules in this play shows some traits similar to those of Hercules in the Hercules Furens. He is proud and boastful but more heroic. In the Hercules Furens, Hercules' valour lies mainly in his past deeds but in this play, Hercules rises to the level of a hero in his ability to endure pain, and, through suffering, to attain his goal.

The character of Hercules develops throughout the play. He is a dynamic character and this makes him all the more interesting. He is not a very likeable character at the beginning of the play but he rises to glory through his suffering and apotheosis at the end.

The character of Hercules as is seen in the Hercules Furens and the Hercules Octaeus is an example of the stoic hero who attains wisdom through suffering and endurance.

#### Atreus and Thyestes

Atreus' role in the Thyestes is not specifically that of a tyrant but of a villain seeking revenge. However, he also is an example of the evil of tyranny. As king of Argos he has the power and the will to wreak vengeance upon his brother Thyestes whom he has driven into exile. It is his desire for revenge which forms the basis of the plot.

Norman T. Pratt Jr. suggests that in Seneca's plays two

conceptions of evil seem to prevail. Evil which is externalized as the workings of fate or fortune but which can be nullified by reason or endurance, and evil which is caused by the deterioration of character when passion destroys reason.<sup>17</sup> The distinction between these two conceptions of evil is brought out in the contrast between Atreus and Thyestes. The fact that they are the grandsons of Tantalus whose house has been doomed to sin (18-20) seems to suggest an evil trait which is predestined. But in the portrayal of Atreus' character it is the conception of evil which results when passion destroys reason that stands out. Thyestes on the other hand, although he is reported as being evil by Atreus, is presented as a passive sufferer. This role seems to demonstrate the conception of evil brought about through external forces but which can be nullified by endurance.

When Atreus first appears he is a vicious person. In his opening speech he urges himself to commit something atrocious by which he may be avenged upon his brother:

"Up! my soul, do what no coming age shall approve but none forget. I must dare some crime, atrocious bloody, such as my brother would more wish were his. Crimes thou dost not avenge, save as thou surpass them." (192-196)

The efforts of the attendant to dissuade him help to bring out Atreus' determination and the viciousness of tyranny. In reply to the attendant's question whether public disapproval does not deter him (204-205), Atreus says:

"the greatest advantage this of royal power, that their master's deeds the people are compelled as well to bear as praise" (205-207). Again when the attendant tells him that pudor, cura iuris, sanctitas, pietas and fides are necessary as a basis of secure kingship (215-217), Atreus replies :

sanctitas pietas fides  
privata bona sunt;qua iuvat reges eant."  
(217-218)

In his selfish pursuit Atreus finds no room for brotherly love. He tries to justify his actions by mentioning the crimes which Thyestes has committed against him:

" Whate'er is wrong to do unto a brother is right to do to him. For what has he left untouched by crime, or where has he failed to sin? My wife he has debauched, my kingdom stolen; the ancient token of our dynasty by fraud he gained, by fraud o'erturned our house." (220-224)

Although Thyestes' crimes are not trivial, Atreus gains no sympathy because of his ruthless attitude.

He is eager for revenge and so urges himself to follow the precedent established by Tantalus and Pelops: " At last begin, put on thy courage; Tantalus and Pelops--look on them; to work like theirs my hands are summoned." (242-245) These words remind the audience of the banquet of Tantalus<sup>18</sup> and consequently foreshadow the catastrophe of the play. Suspense is heightened when Atreus discusses with his attendant the possible means by which he may seek revenge.

The dialogue between them shows how the irrationality of passion is a progressive condition. When the attendant

suggests murder as a means of revenge Atreus declares:

"Thou speakest of punishment's completion; I punishment itself desire. Let the mild tyrant slay; in my dominion death is a boon to pray for" (246-248).

Atreus is so cruel that murder cannot satisfy his craze for revenge. Nor will he be deterred by pietas (249). He is conscious of his potential and seeks the crime which is consistent with his conception of himself. Therefore, he calls upon the Furies to increase his frenzy: "not great enough the frenzy with which my bosom burns; with some greater horror would I be filled" (252-254).

He does not think that the "sword" and "fire" are suitable means to take revenge. He finds his weapon in "Ipsos Thyestes" (259). Norman Pratt Jr. has noted that:

"it seems not impossible that the progression from ferrum to ignis to Thyestes' self may be intended as a reference to the steps in the preparation of Thyestes' children for the banquet. If this is so, ferrum would refer to the murder and dissection, ignis to the cookery, and Ipsos Thyestes to the banquet itself." <sup>19</sup>

This interpretation is significant in view of the attendant's remark that: "maius hoc ira est malum" (259).

Atreus confident that "hic placet poenae modus" (279), reveals his plans. (277-278) As he views the picture before his eyes there is a moment of hesitation (283-284). This momentary hesitation at the thought of the crime is characteristic of the conflict between passion and reason which dominates most of Seneca's characters. It also emphasizes man's

freedom to choose between good and evil. That he is bent on evil has already been established and is now being reaffirmed. He shows no mercy for Thyestes and seems to be encouraged by the thought that the crowning outrage in the crime will be done by Thyestes:

"quod est in isto scelere praecipuum nefas,  
hoc ipse faciet." (285-286)

But Atreus has to find a means to bring Thyestes to Argos so that he may carry through his plans. He therefore decides to send his sons with a message inviting Thyestes to share the kingdom with him. (296-299) He is convinced that Thyestes' "old thirst for power" (302), and "grim want and unfeeling toil by their many woes" (303-304) will induce him to return to Argos. His only concern is that his sons may betray him and so he decides: "let them know of how great a matter they are the ministers." (332-333)

It is interesting to note that Atreus does not trust anybody and is willing to deceive his sons so that he may achieve his purpose. There is in him:

"a kind of stolid dedication to the mere act of revenge, a dedication which steam rollers out of him any deviousness of character." <sup>20</sup>

This trait is typical of the avenging character in Seneca's plays.

Thyestes returns but not with the motives which Atreus suggested. He states a preference for the humble life of exile where one is free from fears and anxiety (449-453). His reluctance to face Atreus and to share the kingdom gains him sympathy

and at the same time emphasizes Atreus' heartlessness.

He expresses his fear of Atreus and his suspicion of treachery (473). His son, Tantalus, tries to persuade him to accept Atreus' offer since:

"Redine pietas unde submota est solet  
reparatque vires iustus amissas amor."  
(474-475)

Thyestes, convinced that there can be no brotherly love between himself and Atreus (476-482) reiterates his suspicion of trickery (483-484) and his fears for the safety of his sons (485-486) but finally yields.

Why Thyestes has returned is not quite clear. It is evident however that he has no evil intentions but rather displays stoic virtue in his acceptance of his fate.

Atreus pleased with his success in luring Thyestes and his sons into a trap exclaims:

"The prey is fast caught in the toils I spread; both the sire himself and, together with the sire, the offspring of his hated race I see. Now on safe footing does my hatred fare. At last has Thyestes come into my power; he has come, and the whole of him! Scarce can I control my spirit, scarce does my rage admit restraint." (491-496)

He however, calms himself and in a most deceitful manner feigns brotherly love and compassion for Thyestes. He invites Thyestes to share the throne and offering the crown says: "This crown, set on thy reverend head, wear thou; but I the destined victims to the gods will pay." (544-545)

The double meaning of the words foreshadows Atreus' intention to sacrifice Thyestes' children. It gives unity to the plot and

also makes Atreus appear more loathesome.

That Atreus is ferus, acer, nec potens mentis and truculentus (546-547) is most evident in the scene where he rejoices that Thyestes has feasted upon his sons.

Proud of his achievement, Atreus exclaims:

"Peer of the stars I move, and towering over all, touch with proud head the lofty heavens. Now the glory of the realm I hold, now my father's throne. I release the gods, for the utmost of my prayers have I attained. 'Tis well, 'tis more than well, now 'tis enough even for me"  
(885-889)

But Atreus is not so easily satisfied. There seems to be no limit to his anger and hatred. At this point his sadism is aroused. He asks the slaves to open the temple doors so that he may see Thyestes for

"'Tis sweet to note, when he sees his children's heads, what hue his cheeks display, what words his first grief pours forth, how his body, breathless with shock grows stiff." (903-906)

Thyestes is revealed trying desperately to be cheerful (922) but his "mind gives warnings of distress at hand, presaging its own woe." (957-958) The pathos is increased when Thyestes tells Atreus: "I have had my fill of food, and no less of wine. My pleasure by this crowning joy can be increased, if with my sons I may share my happiness." (973-975)

Atreus now appears most monstrous. He speaks words with double meaning and prolongs Thyestes' suffering by holding back the truth. When Thyestes asks him to be allowed to bury his sons, Atreus replies:

Quidquid e natis tuis  
superest habes, quodcumque non superest habes." (1030-1031)

Thyestes is shocked at the heinous deeds of Atreus.

The latter, however is still not satisfied for he thinks moderation should be shown in crime and not in revenge.(1052-1053) He shows complete lack of mercy for Thyestes and taunts him with the remarks: "I had wasted my crime, didst thou not suffer thus. Now do I believe my children are my own, now may I trust once more that my marriage-bed is pure." (1095-1098)

Atreus is characterized in a consistent manner. He is completely evil. He wavers very little in his determination to avenge an injustice done to him. He shows love for no one, not even his own sons.

In contrast to Thyestes who is presented with some traits of the Stoic Sage, he seems most monstrous. The magnitude of Atreus' crimes causes the whole cosmos to react. (1035-1036)

For the most part Atreus is characterized by his own speeches. The attendant assumes the role of the confidant who act as a foil in many of Seneca's plays. His part is similar to that of the nurse of Medea, Deianira, Clytemnestra and Phaedra. He helps us to understand Atreus better.

While Thyestes represents the wise man governed by reason. Atreus exemplifies the irrational man guided by passion.

### Oedipus

In studying the character of Oedipus, one has to grapple with the problem as to whether he is a victim of fate or of his own nature. To solve this problem we must turn to Seneca's Stoic philosophy which undoubtedly influenced his plays.

Although the Stoics recognize the concept of determinism they also accept the contrasting view of man's free will. In the portrayal of Oedipus Seneca seems to synthesize these two concepts. Superficially Oedipus is a victim of fate, since it was destined that he should kill his father and marry his mother. (15-21) A closer examination, however, reveals that the disaster comes about through failings in his human nature. According to Pratt, "In Stoic terms catastrophe can come only from the mechanism of human character." <sup>21</sup>

Since the initial errors are already committed before the drama opens, the genesis of evil is placed outside the body of the action. But Oedipus is the embodiment of evil in his role as a tyrant, obsessed with the consciousness of guilt and one who fails to surrender to his fate. From Seneca's point of view Oedipus cannot be a good man suffering unjustly. He holds the view that :

"nihil accidere bono viro mali potest; non miscentur contraria." <sup>22</sup>

From the beginning of the play Oedipus is troubled by things unknown. He feels that somehow he is responsible for the plague at Thebes. He therefore complains about the dangers of royalty which chance threw in his way (6-13). His sense of guilt makes him afraid and mistrustful. He remarks that:

"when thou darest some great calamity, though thou thinkst it cannot befall, still do thou fear. I dread all things exceedingly, and I do not trust myself unto myself." (25-27)

He is suspicious because it seems that he has been saved from

the plague for some greater evil. He therefore complains about the harshness of fate in general and of his in particular: "O saeva nimium numina, O fatum grave!" (75) The irony of the situation is that he does not know that he has not and cannot escape his destiny.

His moral weakness is brought to light by Jocasta, his wife, who chides him with words of Stoicism that courage in the face of adversity is manly and regal and that lamentations make woes heavier (81-86). It is his answer however which reveals his real weakness. He, failing to recognize the distinction between moral and physical weakness, says:

"Far from me is the crime and shame of cowardice, and my valour knows not dastard fears. Should swords be drawn against me, should the bristling power of Mars rush on me, against even the fierce Giants would I boldly bear opposing hands" (87-91).

He then boasts that he solved the riddle of the Sphinx in the face of great danger to himself (92-102). His moral weakness becomes evident when Creon, his brother-in-law appears with the report of the oracle which he has been sent to consult. Oedipus with the same feeling of insecurity which pervades the prologue says:

"With dread am I shaken, fearing the trend of fate, and my fluttering heart wavers betwixt two moods; where joy with grief commingled lies in doubt, the uncertain soul fears though it longs to know" (206-209)

Creon informs Oedipus that the plague is caused by the unatoned murder of Laius, the former King of Thebes (217-220). He describes the scene at Delphi, reporting the oracle as it was given (233-238).

In spite of Oedipus' boast that he alone can read riddles (216) he does not understand the significance of the oracle. He pronounces a curse upon the murderer of Laius in which he hopes that the culprit may commit the sins of parricide and incest which he himself has escaped. (248-273) The irony of this culminates in Oedipus' oath in which he swears that he will not spare the murderer. He calls on the gods to witness his words:

"So may my father spend peaceful age and end his days secure on his lofty throne; so may Merope know the nuptial torches of her Polybus alone, as by no grace shall the guilty one escape my hand." (270-273)

In his desire to find the murderer and so free himself from blame, Oedipus is blinded to the truth. Creon describes the place and circumstances under which Laius was killed (276-287) but this does not seem to drive home the point that he is the murderer. His confidence based on the ignorance of his true parentage drives him to seek from Tiresias, the old prophet, the name of the murderer:

"Memora quod unum scire caelicolae volunt,  
contaminarit rege quis caeso manus." (388-389)

The blind Tiresias instructs his daughter Manto to describe the omens resulting from the rites. The description is long and vivid (301-383) and does not directly answer Oedipus' question but increases his fear and anxiety. The suspense is further heightened when Tiresias cannot summon up the name from the usual source, the sacrificial victim, but has to try some other path: the king himself must be called up to point out the murderer. (390-395)

Seneca's portrayal of Oedipus as a tyrant is most evident in the scene where Creon returns after the rites of necromancy were performed. Creon is hesitant to reveal what he has learnt and Oedipus threatens him: "Speak out thy tidings or, by severe suffering broken, thou shalt know what the power of an angered king can do." (518-519) However, when Creon reports the words of Laius which reveal Oedipus as the culprit (634-641) the latter accuses him of planning treachery with Tiresias:

"iam iam tenemus callida socios doli  
mentitur ista praeferens fraudi deos  
vates, tibi que sceptrum despondet mea."  
(668-670)

Oedipus' pride forbids him to believe what he fears most, that is, his own responsibility for evil. Even now he justifies his rash actions as those of retaliation. He tells Creon who pleads for mercy: "facitis exemplum, sequor." (698)

His anger is aroused when Creon remarks that "who harshly wield the sceptre with tyrannic sway, fears those who fear; terror recoils upon its author's head." (705-706) Consequently he orders that Creon be locked up in a rocky dungeon (707-708). Oedipus' cruelty results from fear. He is not so sure of his innocence and so his fears are renewed: "Curas revolvit animus et repetit metus" (764). The following lines seem to indicate clearly that Oedipus does not believe Creon is guilty of treachery:

"obisse nostro Laium scelere autumant  
superi inferique, sed animus contra innocens" (765-766)

He slowly remembers the old man whom he killed on his way to Thebes and decides to resolve his doubts by having Jocasta describe the

appearance and death of Laius (773-775). By a number of questions, Oedipus is almost convinced that he is guilty when there is a glimmer of hope. A messenger from Corinth announces that: "The Corinthians summon thee to thy father's throne. Polybus has gained his everlasting rest." (784-785) Oedipus rejoices at the thought that he is free from the charge of parricide but is afraid that he may still commit incest. This leads to the revelation that Merope is not his real mother (802). Oedipus is not satisfied. He is determined to find his true parents in spite of the warnings of the senex:

"Whether design or chance conceals these things, suffer to lie hid forever what has lain so long; truth often is made clear to the discoverer's bane" (825-827).

In his determination to discover the truth he once again displays the powers of a king. He tries to persuade Phorbas, the keeper of the royal flocks to speak by threatening him: "Speak, lest pain force thee to truth" (852) He also does not value Phorbas' loyalty to another. He exclaims:

"Huc aliquis ignem! flamma iam excutiet fidem" (862)

When Oedipus learns his true identity and is thus aware that he has committed the double crime, he is filled with despair and seeks to atone for his crime by punishment. He cries out: "Yawn, earth! And do thou, king of the dark world, ruler of the shades, to lowest Tartarus hurl this unnatural interchange 'twixt brood and stock" (868-870).

He then appeals to his soul to dare a deed worthy of his crimes: "nunc aliquid aude sceleribus dignum tuis" (879).

This self-exhortation to crime is typical of Seneca's characters. It is an indication of the struggle between reason and passion. In the case of Oedipus however, the evil is not directed towards another person but towards himself, although he seems to implicate his mother when he says: "Go, get thee to the palace with hurrying feet; congratulate thy mother on her house enriched by children" (880-881).

The messenger tells us that Oedipus wishes to commit suicide but is repelled by the thought that death is not sufficient:

"Thy death-- for thy father 'tis enough; what then to thy mother, what to thy children shamefully begot, what to her who with utter ruin is atoning for thy crime, thy mourning country, wilt thou give?"  
(938-941)

In a fit of mad passion Oedipus blinds himself. In order to emphasize the view that irrationality ultimately leads to disaster, he is described in a manner which is characteristic of Seneca's villains:

"He speaks and raves with wrath; his cheeks burn threatening with ferocious fire, and his eyeballs scarce hold themselves in their place; his face is full of reckless daring and mad savagery as of one in boundless rage; with groans and dreadful cries, his hands to his eyes he thrusts" (957-962).

Oedipus in his blindness is content that he has paid his debt (998). He has blinded himself not only in remorse but with the hope that he may find forgetfulness by shutting out the world (1001). Therefore, he refuses to listen to his mother's pleas. (1020-1023)

When Jocasta commits suicide, Oedipus once again feels a sense of guilt. He accepts responsibility for her death by which he thinks he has surpassed his fate. Therefore he calls the god a liar: "O Phoebe mendax, fata superavi impia" (1046).

Having accepted this responsibility, Oedipus decides to leave Thebes but not without taking along the evils which had come over Thebes:

"Go, bear ye aid to those given up to death; all  
pestilential humours of the land I take with me.  
Ye blasting Fates, thou quaking terror of Disease,  
Wasting, and black Pestilence, and mad Despair, come  
ye with me, with me. 'Tis sweet to have such guides"  
(1059-1061).

Oedipus is not a dynamic character. He is consistently naive in his fears and anxiety about his fate and in his failure to perceive truth, although he boasts that he solved the riddle of the Sphinx. However, he is not a dull character. He is presented as a tyrant in his dealings with Creon and Phorbas but his concern for the welfare of his people--even though he might be motivated through self-interest-- makes him different from Atreus who is a complete villain.

### Conclusion

In his portrayal of male characters Seneca seems to emphasize the effect of evil on man's actions and man's ability to combat evil through reason. Hercules who represents the Stoic hero is not an evil character but one who combats evil by endurance. Atreus on the other hand is an evil character. He thrives on evil and shows no desirable traits. Thyestes is not a perfect Stoic Sage but belongs to a class

of Stoics who strive to attain wisdom, a trait which is characteristic of Seneca himself.<sup>23</sup> Oedipus brings out the Stoic belief that evil prevails when reason is subdued.

These characters are not members of a stock type but are individualized and depicted in detail. Atreus has an attendant who acts as a foil and so emphasizes his evil trait. Hercules, Thyestes and Oedipus are for the most part characterized by their own speeches and actions although the other characters in the plays, particularly in the case of Hercules, help us to understand them better.

## CHAPTER III

### FEMALE CHARACTERS

The females among Seneca's characters exhibit every type of emotion and are generally portrayed in great depth. They are differentiated, however, according to age, social status and role, the dominant roles being those of mother and wife. Some female characters are more complex than others and are therefore more difficult to define.

It will not be practical to describe every female character in the plays of Seneca. Three, namely Deianira, Medea and Andromache will be dealt with in detail in an attempt to show that in spite of some similar traits each character is distinct and different. Medea and Deianira are faced with the same basic problem, they are both betrayed in their love but each tries to solve her problem differently. Andromache's problem is quite different. She is a passive character who endures the evil of misfortune.

#### Deianira

Deianira the wife of Hercules and mother of Hyllus, has an important role in the Hercules Oetaeus. She is instrumental in the suffering of Hercules which is the important event in the play. Much of the action of the play surrounds the suffering of Hercules and it is at this point that the salient features of Hercules' character emerge. Thus Deianira not only advances the plot but also helps to throw light on the character of Hercules.

At the beginning of the play Deianira is portrayed as an angry, jealous woman. Hercules having fallen in love with Iole, the daughter of King Eurytus, killed her father and captured her, when the father refused to give his daughter in marriage to him (222-224). He sent Iole from her home town Oechalia to his palace at Trachis as a gift to Deianira (409).

The nurse tells us that when Deianira saw Iole's beauty:

"even as one distraught the wife of Hercules stood there with lowering gaze as a tigress, lying big with young 'neath some Armenian rock, at the sight of an enemy leaps forth; or as a maenad, bidden to toss the thyrsus what time she bears the god within her breast, in doubt where she shall take her way, she stands still a while; then through the house of Hercules she madly dashed and scarce did all the house give space enough. Forward she rushes, wanders aimlessly, stands still. All her passion has come forth into her face;" (240-248)

Seneca by using rhetorical description of emotion shows how intense emotion is revealed in one's physical features.

Hercules has had other mistresses before Iole. The nurse trying to console Deianira says, "ubique caluit, sed levi caluit face." (377) Deianira too calls him levis (416). However she seems to be greatly disturbed by Hercules' love for Iole. She resents being replaced by a slave and so asks with indignation "capta praeripiet toros?" (287) But her anguish seems to be aroused more from her jealousy of Iole's beauty. She laments that her own beauty is fading because of old age and motherhood and suggests that this is the reason for her replacement: "what'er in me was sought in former days has vanished or is failing along with me ." (387-388) After commenting on Iole's beauty which

shines out amidst her misfortune, Deianira confesses, "O nurse, this fear of her racks my heart; this dread doth destroy my slumbers." (395-396)

Deianira has enjoyed the honour of being Hercules' wife and the daughter-in-law of Jupiter (279) and thinks that death alone should deprive her of it, either her death or his. She remarks "Ah, sweet, 'tis sweet to go to the shades as bride of Hercules, -- but not without my vengeance." (344-345) She not only threatens to kill Hercules (306) but swears that "If Iole from my Hercules has conceived a child, with mine own hands will I tear it forth untimely, and by her very wedding torches' glare will I face the harlot." (345-347) The cruelty expressed by these words shows "how bloody is the rage that goads women on, when to mistress and to wife one house has opened." (233-234)

Although Deianira is angry and threatens to kill Hercules, she vacillates. She is aware that she will be committing a great crime, and although she says "dolor fieri iubet," (331) yet she has to goad herself on. She therefore accuses Hercules of winning undeserved fame, for in his wanderings over the earth, "virginum thalamos petit," (419) and "si qua est negata, rapitur;" (420). After recalling how Megara, Hercules' former wife was slain by him she asks, "Why art inactive then, thou sluggish rage? (434) Deianira's indecision is characteristic of her ambivalence which is clearly depicted in her conversation with the nurse:

Deianira:

Thinkest thou a mistress is light evil for a wife?  
Whatever fosters anguish, count this beyond all bounds.

Nurse:

Has thy love for glorious Alcides fled away?

Deianira:

Not fled, dear nurse; it still remains, believe me, deep-seated and fixed in my heart's core; but outraged love is poignant misery. (447-452)

Since she stills loves Hercules, the nurse persuades Deianira to try to win back her husband's love by magic arts and prayers. The nurse offers her own charms but Deianira hesitates thinking that these will have no effect on Hercules (465-472), but changes her mind when she remembers the blood Nessus had given to her as a love charm. According to him:

"By this charm magicians have said love can be firmly fixed; so were Thessalian wives by the wise Mycale instructed, whom only, midst all wonder-working crones Luna will forsake the stars and follow." (523-527)

In all good faith she decides to use this to regain her husband's love. She then prays to the god of love that Hercules may learn to love his wife and "if Iole's beauty hath kindled fires in the breast of Hercules, extinguish them every one, and of my beauty let him deeply drink." (555-557) It is evident that Deianira thinks that it is beauty which instils love in Hercules. This also seems to be opinion of Iole who lamenting her fate says: "O cruel beauty, and form doomed to bring death to me, for thee alone is all my house undone." (219-221)

Deianira sends the nurse to get the blood which up to this time had been kept away from the light of the sun or fire, and also the robe which she had woven for Hercules while according to her, "he was wandering o'er the earth, or, spent with wine, was

holding in his doughty arms the Lydian queen, or seeking Iole." (572-574)

After the robe is smeared with the blood, Deianira sends Lichas the messenger with it to Hercules with the following instructions:

"non ante coniunx induat vestes iube  
quam ture flammis pascit et placet deos  
cana rigentem populo cinctus comam."  
(576-578)

She then retires to her chamber to offer prayers to "the mother of relentless love." (580) It might be noted that the nurse brings the robes and tells Deianira:

"nunc congeratur virus et vestis bibat  
Herculea pestem; precibus augebo malum."  
(565-566)

and at the sight of Lichas remarks: "celanda vis est dira, ne pateant doli." (568) The double meaning of the words has dramatic significance. It creates suspense and is a good example of dramatic irony.

After Deianira sends the robe she is suddenly filled with fear. (706) She has a premonition that Nessus planned some treachery,<sup>1</sup> and so decides to test the effect of the blood. Nessus had told her that the blood should not be exposed to light. She therefore exposes a piece of material smeared with the blood to the rays of the sun. Much to her surprise, the material melts and vanishes immediately. This convinces her that Nessus had tricked her. The results of the test do not only fortell what Hercules' fate might be but throw some light on the question of Deianira's guilt. The instructions of Nessus were: "This let no light behold,

let darkness only, thick and hidden, cover it; so shall the potent blood retain its power," (531-533) Deianira believing that the blood was a love charm, naturally thought these conditions held only for the purpose of storage. Nessus knowing that if this blood was ever used as a love charm it will be exposed to light, was definitely planning a trick in order to avenge Hercules who had slain him.

No sooner has Deianira expressed her fear when her son Hyllus brings a report which confirms her suspicion. According to him, "membra et Herculeos toros/urit lues nescio qua;"(751-752) Although Deianira did not plan treachery she feels a sense of guilt and so feels partly responsible for the crime. She feels sure that death alone can absolve her but she wavers as to who should inflict it. She first appeals to Jupiter to strike her with his thunderbolt but suddenly changes her mind thinking that "the wife of Hercules should be ashamed to pray for death; this hand shall grant my prayer; from myself let death be sought." (856-858). But her problem is not solved. She cannot decide what weapon is suitable. Should she die by the sword or throw herself over a cliff? Neither will suffice so she calls to all nations to cast rocks and huge firebrands at her. Although this wavering is consistent with the character of Deianira, Seneca seems to be emphasizing here Deianira's awareness of the serious results of her action. At this point Deianira is not so much concerned with her private loss as with the loss to humanity. Hercules, the benefactor of mankind is defeated and as a result:

"Now with impunity shall cruel kings wield sceptres;  
yea with impunity now fierce monsters shall be born;  
again shall altars be found wont to behold victim like  
to worshipper. A highway to crime have I prepared; I  
have exposed you to tyrants, kings, monsters, wild beasts,  
and cruel gods, by slaying your avenger." (874-879)

Hyllus tries to dissuade her from punishing herself by pointing out that it is destiny that led her to the disaster. He tells her that she has not committed a crime but an error: "From error springs wholly whatever crime is here. He does no sin who sins without intent." (886-887) To this Deianira replies:

"Quicumque fata ignoscit et parcit sibi  
errare meruit. morte damnari placet. " (887-888)

The points of view expressed by Deianira and Hyllus on the question of guilt and error (885-901) are similar to those expressed by Hercules and Amphitryon in the Hercules Furens. (1237-1239; 1258-1300) It is noteworthy that both Hercules and Deianira believe that they are in part responsible for the crimes committed while Hyllus and Amphitryon exonerate them from blame. The latter hold the view that no one commits a crime if there is no intent. Hercules and Deianira express the view that even an error deserves punishment.

Although Deianira accepts the fatalistic view point expressed by Hyllus and admits that she has been tricked by Nessus, she is still convinced that she must be punished for "Tis death alone can make the beguiled innocent." (890) She is firm in her decision and when the nurse Hyllus try to dissuade her from accepting death as a punishment she tells them:

"Whoever, perchance, dissuades the wretched from death,

He is the cruel one; sometimes death is a punishment, but often 'tis a boon, and to many a way of pardon has it proved" (929-931).

Deianira makes her final plea to Hyllus. She begs him to slay her(925), suggesting that it will be an act of filial piety. She says that by killing Hercules she has taken away more from Hyllus than she has given him at birth and so he should take revenge for his father. While she is trying to goad him on, she imagines that she is being pursued by the Furies and in a mad fury rushes off and commits suicide (1458).

Deianira is characterized mainly through her own speeches. But the nurse and Hyllus in their dialogues with her, help us to understand her better. She is characterized in a consistent manner. Whenever her physical features are mentioned it is in order to describe her feelings. She is a highly emotional character motivated for the most part by fear. It is through fear of being replaced by Iole that she decides to win back Hercules' love, and when the true effect of the charm is known she says:

"Vague shivers steal through my trembling limbs, my hair starts up in horror; fear sticks in my soul till now so passionate tossed; my heart leaps wildly and my quaking liver throbs with pulsing veins" (706-709).

At the beginning of the play she is an outraged woman and when she leaves the stage it is with mad fury. Therefore, although she is a victim of misfortune she is never really a sympathetic figure. However she is real and clearly indicates the Stoic belief that disaster is inevitable for one who is so irrational.

Medea

Medea, one of Seneca's most outstanding female characters, is entwined in a complexity of roles. Not only is she endowed with superhuman power but she is also a wife and mother. She is the wife of Jason and mother of two children. These children are not named and do not have speaking roles in the play but they are significant to the plot of the play. Jason's undying love for the children gives Medea a means for revenge. Their murder is the catastrophe of the play.

The entire action of the play surrounds Medea who is the center of interest at all times. At the beginning of the play she is a very angry woman. She is rejected by Jason for Creusa, the daughter of Creon, King of Corinth. She expresses bitter anger in her opening speech, the prologue, where an appeal is made to the gods above and those below to bring destruction on Creon, his daughter, and the entire royal stock (1-18). She also prays that Jason may live, but as a hated exile in fear of life, and worst of all, "may his children be like their sire and like their mother" (20-25). Medea however, is not satisfied with a mere curse. The outrage committed by Jason is thought by her to be so appalling that she thinks darkness should fall upon the earth and prevent men from witnessing such wickedness (27-31). She therefore seeks a means of punishment suitable to her grief and to her womanhood. She exclaims:

"Ah, too trivial the deeds I have rehearsed; these

things I did in my girlhood. Let my grief rise to more deadly strength; greater crimes become me, now that I am a mother" (47-50).

Thus Medea conscious of her potential, goads herself on to seek revenge:

" rumpe iam segnes moras;  
 quae scelere parta est scelere linquenda est domus"  
 (54-55).

Although in the prologue Medea is depicted essentially as an enchantress, by mentioning her children she reminds the audience that she is also a mother. This becomes evident from the very first line: "Di coniugales tuque genialis tori" (1). Medea is distraught and speaks wildly and irrationally thus making some of her phrases difficult to interpret. For example, when in her crazed mind she says: "parta iam, parta ultio est:/ peperit (25-26), the exact meaning of these words is not quite clear, but they suggest to the audience or at least remind them of the outcome of the play. In this way Seneca, working on the assumption of preknowledge, creates suspense.<sup>2</sup>

Contrary to Cleasby's<sup>3</sup> suggestion, it does not seem to me that Medea is at this point contemplating the murder of her children as a means of avenging Jason. For when she speaks of her children, Medea's words according to Pratt,<sup>4</sup> "are hardly those of an unfeeling plotter who has coolly determined to slay both her children, and her husband's new wife and father-in-law; they are rather those of a frantic

unreasoning woman whose desire for revenge is at the moment so intense that it leaves no room for the consideration of the means to be employed for the realization of that desire." <sup>4</sup>

The prologue gives us a glimpse of Medea's character which develops as the play advances. Basically she does not change. She remains an angry woman bent on revenge but her "stature grows geometrically as the action proceeds, so that her vengeance cannot possibly be halted or deterred."<sup>5</sup>

The wedding song for Jason and Creusa is recited by the Chorus which is unfriendly to Medea throughout the play. They refer to her as an "unruly wife" (103), and urge Jason to rejoice in his escape from such a marriage as his and Medea's, and to gladly welcome his new bride since "now at last 'tis with the parents' will" (102-106).

When Medea hears this wedding song she returns to reality as it were, and to the realization that she must soon find a means of revenge. In despair she cries out:

"We are undone! Upon my ears has sounded the marriage-hymn. So great a calamity scarce I myself, scarce even yet can comprehend. Had Jason the heart to do this; having robbed me of my father, native land, and kingdom, could he be so cruel as to leave me in a foreign land?" (116-120)

She then thinks of avenging Jason by murdering his new wife since he does not have a brother but wonders "Is this enough to offset my woes?" (126) She recalls all the crimes<sup>6</sup> she had committed for Jason's sake, crimes which she did not in wrath but because of love:

" et nullum scelus  
irata feci;novit infelix amor" (135-136)

Because of her love for Jason, Medea makes excuses for him and frees him from blame (137-38), stating that Creon alone is to be blamed and so "petatur, solus hic poenas luat quas debet" (146-147). The nurse tries to calm her and cautions her about speaking too freely (150-154). But Medea will not be dissuaded. She justifies her actions with various sententious utterances such as, "Fortune fears the brave, the cowardly overwhelms" (159).

In her conversation with her nurse, Medea reveals her image of her own potential. In reply to the nurse's remarks that she has lost everything she says:

"Medea superest--hic mare et terras vides  
ferrumque et ignes et deos et fulmina" (166-167).

She also shows lack of fear, of kings, warfare and even death. This lack of fear seems to spring from her knowledge of her supernatural power.

Her courage and daring are immediately put to the test when she meets Creon. The latter recognizes her "threatening mien" (187), and expresses his concern and fear for his kingdom. He is afraid of her wicked intentions and wishes that she may leave his realm immediately: "Hence in swift flight! remove at once thine abominable presence, dire,horrible!" (190-191). Medea undismayed, asks:"Quod crimen aut quae culpa multatur fuga?"(192).

With skillful rhetoric, Medea gets the king to listen to her case, and to grant a day's respite. At first she tries to arouse a feeling of sympathy in Creon by telling of her misfortune. She tells how she has fallen from her high estate to lowly exile:

"                   rapida fortuna ac levis  
praecepsque regno eripuit, exilio dedit" (219-220)

She then reminds Creon that she had saved Jason and the whole company of Argonauts (225-235), adding that she will confess whatever shameful deeds he might accuse her of "but as for crimes, this only can be charged, the rescue of the Argo"(237-238). Moreover with humility which does not seem consistent with her former daring, Medea asks Creon to grant her "some paltry hiding place" (250). Creon however refuses this request and orders her once more to leave immediately, and to take with her the baleful herbs (269-271). It is noteworthy that Creon fears Medea chiefly because of her supernatural powers.

Medea, determined that she will not be defeated, pretends that she has willingly accepted her exile, and asks Creon for a final favour: "ne culpa natos matris insontes trahat" (283). When Creon decides to adopt the children (284), she shows great concern for them by asking for time to bid them farewell:

"I pray thee be bountiful of a brief stay of my flight while I, their mother, imprint on my sons the latest kiss, perchance my dying act" (288-290).

Up to this point in the play Medea, preoccupied with revenge, had not shown much concern for her children. This

sudden concern for the children has dramatic significance. By a careful choice of words such as extrema, oscula, and morienis, Seneca gives unity to the plot of the play in that Medea's concern is shrouded by the imagery of these words which seem to predict the catastrophe of the play, that is, the murder of the children. It might be noted, however, that Medea has not yet decided on this as a means of avenging Jason.<sup>7</sup>

Creon is hesitant at first because he suspects that Medea is plotting evil, but he finally allows her to stay with the warning that she will be put to death if she does not leave Corinth by daybreak (298).

Medea's confrontation with Creon seems to have increased her desire for revenge. She hastens to put her plans into action much to the distress of her nurse. The latter, familiar with the actions of Medea, recognizes from her expression that she is planning something, efferum, immane, impium (393). The fierce passion of Medea which can be seen in her face is adequately described by the nurse. She likens Medea to a maenad who "raves at the oncoming of the gods" (381), and whose face shows the marks of distracted passion:

" Her cheeks aflame, she pants with deep sobs for  
breath, shouts aloud, weeps floods of tears, beams  
with joy; she assumes the proof of every passion".  
(386-389)

It is interesting to note that at this point in the play, Medea's anger is not confined to her speech but is also reflected in her physical features. Seneca often makes use of the description of physical features of his characters in order to depict

in a vivid manner their emotions. It may be recalled that the nurse in describing Deianira's rage says:

" All her passion has come forth into her face  
in her heart's depth almost naught is left;  
tears follow hard on threats" (H.O.247-249).

Deianira too, frantic in her rage seemed like a maenad.(244)

In both cases the passion is anger so intense, that Seneca calls it madness. It might be noted that in De Ira I.15ff, Seneca shows how the looks of the madman and the angry man are similar. <sup>8</sup>

Ferox and minax adequately describe Medea's words as well as her looks. She seems to thrive on evil. She boasts that nothing can match her rage, not even Scylla or Charybdis (407-414). She appeals to her soul to set the same limit to hate as that of its love, since "her madness shall never cease its quest for vengeance and shall grow on for ever" (406-407). With these thoughts she turns her anger towards Jason. She no longer frees him from blame. She accuses him of cowardice and lack of concern. She asks with obvious sarcasm:

"Did he fear Creon and the threats of Thessaly's king?  
True love can fear no man. But grant that under  
compulsion he yielded and made surrender; he could at  
least have come to me, could have spoken some last  
words to his wife. This also, though bold of heart,  
he feared to do" (415-419).

Medea complains that "one day was given for my children  
twain" (421-422) but boasts that "this day shall do, shall do  
that whereof no day shall e'er be dumb" (423). Once again  
Seneca uses the technique of assuming foreknowledge to create

suspense. There seems to be a double meaning in these lines: "liberis unus dies/datus est duobus" (421-422). This view is held by Pratt.<sup>9</sup> To an audience familiar with the story of Medea, these words are significant because of their implication. It can be inferred from these lines that Medea is planning the murder of her children. When the nurse, afraid of what Medea is planning, asks her to calm her soul, she exultantly replies: "The only calm for me- if with me I see the universe o'erwhelmed in ruins; with me let all things pass away. 'Tis sweet to drag others down when thou art perishing" (426- 428).

It is interesting to note here the development of Medea's character. Her intense anger has rid her of whatever love she may have had for Jason. She shows complete lack of concern for anyone and has no thought for her own safety provided she can hurt and drag down those against whom her resentment is so violent. Her former crimes were committed because of love but now it is hatred and anger which motivate her.

From their very first meeting there is an air of unfriendliness between Medea and Jason. Medea has reached a point where her anger cannot be abated and so she continues the enmity which she showed toward Creon. She begins by reproaching Jason. She asks him to what place she expects her to go now that everywhere is barred to her: "quascumque aperui tibi vias, clausi mihi (458). She then appeals to his sense of gratitude by recalling the crimes she committed for his sake



For the first time she seems content that she has found a suitable means to take revenge on Jason. It might be noted however, that she does not say exactly how she will avenge herself on Jason, although her intentions might be detected from her request:

"As I depart, my final message, at least grant me to speak; grant me to give the last embrace; e'en that will be a boon." (551-553)

Medea suddenly assumes a friendly attitude so that Jason might not suspect her of plotting treachery. She begs him to forget the words which were spoken in anger. (553-557) As soon as Jason turns his back Medea returns to her former self. She derides Jason for forgetting what she is capable of, (560-561) and immediately begins to summon up her magic powers and arts.

Medea informs the nurse of her intentions to send her sons with gifts to Creusa, "but let them first be annointed and imbued with baneful poisons" (575-576). She appropriately calls on Hecate to: "Prepare the death dealing rites; let altars be erected, and let now their fires resound within the palace." (577-578)

Medea's rage is uncontrollable; it has reached its peak, as it were. The chorus likens her rage to the fierce forces of nature:

"Nulla vis flammae tumidive venti  
tanta, nec teli metuenda torti,  
quanta cum coniunx viduata taedis  
ardet et odit;" (579-582)

Medea's sorcery is an important aspect of her character. It is significant of the plot of the play. Seneca describes it



The shade of her brother (963-964) who was as innocent as these children goads Medea into action. Her self-love and the hurt of an injured pride, aided by the furies cause her to slay the children.

After she slays the first one she hesitates once more and even repents, (990) but at the sight of Jason her fury returns and she kills the other with Jason witnessing the crime this time. Nothing however, seems sufficient to appease Medea's wrath. She complains that "Though I slay two, still is the count too small to appease my grief." (1010-1011)

Seneca has not shown too much variation in his characterization of Medea. He puts great emphasis on her anger which is depicted both from her actions and words. Moreover, all the other characters speak in awe of her intense anger. Because of this anger caused through jealousy and the hurt of an injured pride, her cruelty is inevitable. Seneca also stresses her magical powers which instil fear in Jason and Creon in particular. It is this which makes her powerful.

It is important to note that Medea, throughout the play is conscious of her potential and endeavours to live up to her conception of her stature.

In spite of her superhuman qualities, Medea is real and according to Herrmann, "évolue logiquement vers un paroxysme de terreur et d'horreur."<sup>10</sup>

Andromache

In Seneca's Troades, Andromache is portrayed as a faithful wife and devoted mother whose actions are guided by her boundless love. Seneca seems to have found his model in Homer's portrayal of Andromache,<sup>11</sup> a warm-hearted woman who expresses her love and concern for her husband Hector, and son Astyanax, and who has the courage to endure the ills of misfortune.

When Andromache comes on stage, she identifies with the other captured Trojan women but rises above them in her fortitude based on her conception of the expression of grief. The women express their grief by tears but Andromache chides them saying: "levia perpressae sumus,/si flenda patimur." (411-412) It might be noted, however, that Andromache's display of courage, now that Troy is utterly destroyed, springs from the fact that she considers the physical collapse of Troy as a completion of the disaster which began with the death of her husband, Hector. She tells the women:

" Ilium vobis modo,  
mihi cecidit olim, cum ferus curru incito  
mea membra raperet et gravi gerneret sono  
Peliacus axis pondere Hectoreo tremens."  
(412-415)

It is noteworthy that earlier in the play Hecuba, mother of Hector, expressed a similar view when she urged the women to weep for Hector: "tecum cecidit summusque dies/Hectoris idem patriaeque fuit." (128-129)

Andromache in her loyalty to Hector, or at least to the memory of him, wishes to follow him in death but her duty towards

her son prevents her. (420) She fears for her child although she knows that, "miserum est timere, cum speres nihil." (425) Her fears seem to have been aroused by the apparition of Hector warning her to protect their child: "Rouse thee from slumber and save our son, O faithful wife! hide him; 'tis the only hope of safety." (452-453)

Andromache experiences conflict in her roles of wife and mother. She cherishes the memory of her husband and at times her love for him seems to take precedence over that of her son. At the sight of Hector, her first impulse is to try to grasp him, forgetful of his admonition to save their son. (457-460)

She recognizes in Astyanax's features and gait the likeness of Hector and this seems to motivate her to save him. She therefore hides the boy in Hector's tomb in spite of the ominous association of the tomb with death.

A battle of wits ensues between Andromache and Ulysses, when the latter comes to take Astyanax to his pending doom. The boy has been condemned to die so that the Greeks' fleet may safely sail away from Troy. (336-370) With crafty words she attempts to convince Ulysses that her son is dead. She also tries to hide her fear by displaying courage and willingness to die:

"If thou desirest, Ulysses to force Andromache through fear, threaten her with life; for 'tis my prayer to die." (576-577)

She almost succeeds in fooling Ulysses but her fears give her away. It might be noted that the senex, her companion, was afraid that this might happen. He told her: "The bars protect

their charge; and, that thy fear may not hale him forth, retire thou far from here and withdraw thyself apart" (512-514).

The cunning Ulysses recognizing her agitation decides to use skill to learn the truth (615-618). He pretends that the boy has been found and looks closely at Andromache who shows fear but is able to outwit him with the remark that "'tis but my wonted fear, sprung from long use. The mind unlearns but slowly what it has learned for long" (632-633).

Andromache is willing to save Astyanax but hardly at the price of having Hector's tomb demolished. Therefore, her fears increase when Ulysses decides to destroy it. It is at this point that her inner conflict is most noticeable. She asks:

"Quid agimus? Animum distrahit geminus timor.  
hinc natus, illinc coniugis sacri cinis.  
pars ultra vincet?" (642-644)

This type of conflict is also found in Medea.<sup>12</sup> It should be noted however, that Medea experiences conflict between her love for the children and her desire for revenge which is motivated by her hatred of Jason. On the other hand Andromache's conflict is brought about by her love for both her husband and son.

Andromache is so confused at this point that she does not realize that Astyanax will perish if Ulysses destroys the tomb. Her confusion springs from fear but according to Harsh<sup>13</sup>, "the dilemma of Andromache would appear more important to an ancient audience because tombs were sacred and the obligation of surviving kindred to protect and honor them was extremely severe."<sup>13</sup>

She debates with herself which of the two she should save but finds a solution in the realization that "utrimque est Hector" (659). She thinks that she should save Astyanax because he can still feel pain "and is destined perchance to avenge his father's death" (659-660).

Nevertheless she is firmly resolved to save Hector's tomb at all cost. She tells Ulysses:

"I will resist, will oppose my unarmed hands against you, armed; passion will give strength. Like the fierce Amazon who scattered the Argive squadrons, or like some god-smit Maenad who, armed with the thyrsus only, with frenzied march frightens the forest glades and, beside herself, has wounds, nor felt them, so will I rush against you and fall in the tomb's defence, an ally of its dust." (671-677)

Seneca seems here to be indulging in a bit of rhetorical exaggeration. Surely Andromache is angry but she is fully aware that she is unable to resist Ulysses and his men. She calls on Hector to help her: "O Hector, burst the bars of death, heave up the earth, that thou mayst quell Ulysses" (681-682). Moreover, her anger subsides almost immediately and she begins to think rationally. She realizes that her son is in danger of being killed if the tomb is destroyed and questions her actions: "What art thou doing? dost thou lay low together in common ruin both son and husband? Perhaps thou wilt be able to appease the Danaï by prayer" (686-688).

Andromache abandons her former daring and humbly begs Ulysses to have pity on her: "miserere matris. unicum adflictae mihi/ solamen hic est" (703-704). She is compelled to bring her son out from his hiding place, and asks him to "play



The words plenus mei have great significance for they adequately sum up Andromache's consciousness of all she stands for.<sup>14</sup> She sees in Astyanax all that Hector stood for and realizes that with his death there is no hope for the Trojans.

Helen's participation in the wedding ceremony of Polyxena suggests to Andromache that there is trickery. She therefore reproaches Helen and asks her to reveal whatever misfortune awaits Polyxena for, "all woes are easier to bear than that Pyrrhus be son-in-law to Hecuba and Priam" (934-935).

Helen confesses that Polyxena is to be sacrificed to the shade of Achilles. When Andromache tries to console Hecuba with the thought that Polyxena's fate is better than theirs, Helen tells them to which lord each is allotted. (977-980) Andromache has greater reason to envy Polyxena for she is to become the slave of the hated Pyrrhus.

Andromache learns from a messenger that her son accepted his fate with great fortitude (1091-1003), and is stunned at the cruelty of the Greeks (1104-1106). However, when she hears that, "his skull was crushed, his brains dashed out-- he lies a shapeless corpse" (1115-1117), she remarks: "sic quoque est similis patri" (1117). These last words of Andromache are typical of her outlook on life. She realizes that no one can change ~~his~~ fate and so accepts hers with as much dignity as the situation demands. She finds solace in the thought that Astyanax is like his father in every way, even in death.

Andromache is characterized mainly through her own speeches and in a consistent manner. Her love for Astyanax seems to be based on the fact that he resembles his father and so it is very difficult at times for her to distinguish between the roles of wife and mother.

Unlike Deianira and Medea, there is no nurse to help us to understand her better but she is portrayed with great skill so that we get a glimpse of her rounded personality. She is an admirable character who shows the Stoic concept of wisdom in action. She displays emotions of fear and grief which become hers as a mother, and in her grief she shows fortitude in the conviction that death alone deprives men of misfortune. In her farewell to her son she bids him:

"i, vade liber, liberos Troas vide" (791)

She also shows courage in her willingness to accept death (937).

### Conclusion

Seneca's devices of characterization are the same for all his plays, although he varies in his treatment of individual characters. In his female characters it is their passions which he stresses most, in an effort to show how irrationality ultimately leads to destruction.

His female characters do not fall into one category. There are virtuous women, as Megara and Alcmena, to name two, and there are villains like Medea, Clytemnestra and even Phaedra. It is this second group which seems to attract him more.

For the most part, his characters are depicted mainly through their speeches. Deianira, Medea, Phaedra and Clytemnestra each has a nurse who act as foils to her mistress and thus makes her characterization more interesting. These nurses are by themselves a good example of Senecan characterization and will be dealt with in a later chapter.

## CHAPTER IV

### CHARACTERIZATION OF MINOR ROLES

A discussion of minor roles is important for an understanding of Seneca's method of characterization. Generally, the minor characters are not portrayed in full and tend to be basically stock characters or types. The use of stock characters was common in the rhetorical schools. According to Dimsdale, "the imaginary speeches of the rhetorical schools were largely concerned with types."<sup>1</sup> However, it is not certain whether Seneca's use of stock character is a reflection of his rhetorical training or whether it is influenced by the Greek tragedies which he used as models.

The evaluation of a literary character does not depend simply on whether an author adopts a stock type, but on how well he re-creates and individualizes it. The roles of tyrant, messenger and nurse are recognizably conventional. However, an examination of some of the characters within these groups will show that they are not simply types which can be easily interchanged but have some individual characteristics.

#### Tyrants

It is noteworthy that although the "evil of tyranny" is found in most of Seneca's tragedies, only a few of his characters are actually presented as tyrants. All of his tyrants are not minor characters as is evidenced in the discussion on Atreus and Creon.<sup>2</sup>

Lycus in the Hercules Furens is a tyrant. This is evident not only from his own speeches and actions but also from the words of other characters. When Megara, Hercules' wife catches a glimpse of him, she remarks: "But see, ferocious and with threats upon his brow, the same in gait and spirit, Lycus comes, brandishing another's sceptre in his hand." (329-330) Lycus as most of Seneca's villains has the countenance to suit his spirit. In his opening speech he boasts of his wide possessions, gained not by birth but because of valour (332-340), and at the same time he expresses the desire to strengthen his position. He realizes that he is an upstart and therefore his position is insecure. He admits that: "alieno in loco/haut stabile regnum." (344-345)

The unscrupulous Lycus, having killed Megara's father and brothers (372-373) now hopes to solve his problem by marrying her (345-348). Even this he tries to accomplish with threats.

When Megara refuses he condemns her to die with the following words: "Since my suit thou dost stubbornly refuse and threatenest thy king, now shalt thou know what royal power can do." (501-502) Lycus believes that:

"Qui morte cunctos luere supplicium iubet  
nescit tyrannus esse diversa inroga  
miserum veta perire felicem iube." (511-513)

He lives up to this dogma by refusing death to Amphytrion while he orders a pyre to be prepared for Megara and her children (514-515). However, he does not live to put his plans into action.

He is killed by Hercules when the latter returns from the Underworld. Hercules' hatred of the tyrant is manifested by his eagerness to get rid of him and also by the joy which he displays after he has killed Lycus. He boasts: "Felled by my conquering hand, Lycus first has fallen face downward to the earth, Next whoever had been the tyrant's comrade lies low, the comrade of his punishment" (895-898).

Although Lycus represents the true tyrant it is more because of his past actions that is, the slaying of the king and his sons, than because of any action in the play itself. He is cruel and unjust to Megara but is no match for Hercules.

His role is significant for he advances the plot of the play. His proposal to Megara and his subsequent condemnation of her and the children provide a motive for Hercules to slay him. Thus he not only gives the play unity of action but helps to throw light on the character of Hercules, the hero.

As a minor character, Lycus' role does not offer much scope for character development. He is a static character with all the conventional characteristics of a tyrant: disregard of justice, utter absence of human sympathy, self-aggrandizement, brutality of word and deed. However, he is not dull. As Herrmann puts it:

"c'est un homme sans scrupule et sans crainte, volontaire, ambitieux et qui ne croit qu'à la force. Sceptique et impie, il n'est ni lâche ni bas. c'est une curieuse figure d'aventurier" 3

In the Agamemnon, the theme of tyranny is present but it is not emphasized by the portrayal of a tyrant as a character. For example, from Aegisthus' words that "Mycenae's king he was; he will come back her tyrant" (251-252), one might expect that Agamemnon is a tyrant. But Agamemnon appears in one scene only in which he greets his home, comforts his captive and offers homage to Jupiter and Juno (781-801). There is nothing of the tyrant in this scene, nor does any of the other characters refer to him as a tyrant.

Aegisthus, on the other hand, speaks and acts as a tyrant when he sends Electra, the daughter of Clytemnestra to prison instead of granting her request for death. The similarity between his words and Lycus' is noteworthy. He says, "Shouldst plead against, I'd grant. An unskilled tyrant he who punishes by death." (994-995) But the character of Aegisthus is not specifically that of a tyrant. As Mendell puts it: "the character of Aegisthus, is the villainous one of the play and yet he is not in a position to become a tyrant!"<sup>4</sup>

The role of Creon in the Medea is not easy to define. According to Herrmann<sup>5</sup> he is alternatively the good king and the tyrant. These two aspects of his character are brought out most clearly in his relationship with Medea.

First she complains that Creon has used his power to draw Jason away from her(137), and later when she hears the door creaking she remarks: "It is Creon himself, puffed with Pelasgian power." (178)

Medea's words seem justified when Creon admits that he was preparing to get rid of her by means of the sword (183-184), and eventually orders her to leave his kingdom immediately (191). Again when Medea asks to be heard, Creon replies: "A king's commands, just and unjust, thou must obey." (196).

But Creon is not as wicked as his words might seem for he has spared Medea's life at the request of Jason. It should also be noted that it is his great fear of Medea which causes Creon to be harsh towards her. He is aware of Medea's magical powers and fears for his kingdom. He tells her:

"Purge my kingdom and take thy deadly herbs with thee; free the citizens from fear; abiding in some other land, harry the gods." (269-271)

Creon is firm in his decision that Medea should leave his realm but at her request he gives her a day's respite that she may bid her children farewell (294-295). It is this act of kindness which gives Medea her opportunity for accomplishing her plans. Both Creon and his daughter are poisoned by Medea. Therefore contrary to Cleasby's statement that Creon is "merely a replica of the typical tyrant, who appears as Lycus in the Hercules Furens, Eteocles in the Phoenissae, and Aegisthus in the Agamemnon,"<sup>6</sup> Creon is not entirely a tyrant. He is not a usurper as Lycus nor does he rule his people with an iron hand. His harshness towards Medea is unfortunate but understandable. Not only is Medea a foreigner (179); she is also a wicked sorceress.

One can conclude that no two tyrants are identical. As

members of a particular class they have some similar traits but each character is presented as an individual within a specific group.

### Messengers

The role of messenger appears in every Senecan play. Its importance is due to the necessity for extending the action in a play which preserves the unity of place and deals with incidents that cannot be very well presented on stage.

In plays as the Hercules Furens where no character is actually presented as a messenger another character assumes the role of messenger. For example, Theseus takes the role of messenger when he describes at length Hercules' journey to the Underworld.

In general, the messengers are anonymous and are presented with the minimum of characterization. Some of them are virtually no more than mouth-pieces or stage machinery. For example, the messenger in the Oedipus, comes on stage to report Oedipus' self-inflicted blindness. He gives a vivid description which is largely composed of Oedipus' own words in direct speech (914-979). Although the chorus introduces him as one who "stricken with woe, beats with his hand upon his head" (912-913), there is no evidence of personal sorrow or involvement in his speech. No conversation precedes or follows his report. Thus his role is brief, impersonal and uninteresting.

It should be noted, however, that in this play Creon also assumes the role of messenger when he reports the results of Tiresias' necromancy. He also fulfills the requirements of the typical messenger, more so than the actual messenger. He hesitates and seeks excuses not to speak. When he is finally persuaded to speak by Oedipus he gives a full and vivid description of how Tiresias summoned up the spirits of the dead and among them Laius (530-538).

Creon's role however was more specifically that of advisor and friend of the king.

The messenger in the Troades is not as dull as the one in the Oedipus. He enters with agitation commenting on the harshness of fate: "Oh cruel fate, harsh, pitiable, horrible! What crime so savage, so grievous, has Mars seen in ten years?" (1056-1058) He then proceeds to describe the deaths of Astyanax and Polyxena in chronological order. This messenger is not identified in any specific way but his tendency to pity and sympathize with Hecuba and Andromache (1058-1059) suggests that he might be a Trojan messenger. He also has a function of his own, that is, to lead the Trojan women to the ships.

In this same play Talthybius, the Greek herald, is also used as a messenger. He too, complains against cruel fate which keeps the Greek ships from sailing. However he shows more agitation and fear: "My spirit is afraid; shivering horror makes my limbs to quake. Portents transcending truth scarce

gain belief- but I saw it, with my own eyes I saw" (168-170)

In the fashion of a messenger he tells how the shade of Achilles appeared and demanded that Polyxena be sacrificed upon his tomb. (170-202)

In the Thyestes, Seneca uses variation in his presentation of the messenger's speech. Most of the report is in the form of dialogue between the messenger and the chorus. The latter prompts the messenger to relate his story by asking him questions. However, he avoids answering directly at first by giving a geographical digression. He asks "What place is this? Is it Argos? Is it Sparta, to which fate gave loving brothers?" (627-628) And he goes on to name other Greek places.

Sympathy for Thyestes and the horror of the crimes of Atreus give the messenger an opportunity for philosophizing. He says "Thyestes this only good remains that thou knowest not thy woes. But even this will perish" (783-784). For, "there is no sin but it shall be revealed" (788). All of Seneca's messengers use descriptions of a rhetorical nature but the messenger in the Thyestes seems to surpass them all.

The role of the messenger in the Medea is very short. He gives a report on the death of King Creon and his daughter in exactly two lines (789-790), and goes on to describe the fire at the palace at the instigation of the chorus. However he does not speak more than ten lines in all, a unique occurrence in the tragedies of Seneca.

The brevity of the messenger's role may be due to the fact that the murder of Medea's children which is the catastrophe of the play takes place before the eyes of the audience and therefore does not require a character to report on it.

Lichas in the Hercules Oetaeus has a unique role. He is a silent messenger. He is the servant of Hercules sent to announce his master's return to Deianira at Trachis but before he says anything he is given a robe dipped in Nessus' poison to take to Hercules.

The nurse describes him as "the zealous Lichas" (567), and Deianira speaks of his loyalty to his master: "fidele semper regibus nomen Licha" (570). We also learn of his fright before he is slain by Hercules (810-811). Therefore, although his role is short it is not unimportant. Moreover, he is characterized with more individuality than most of the other messengers. It should be noted that Seneca only uses the indirect method to describe Lichas.

Philoctetes, the friend of Hercules in the same play, also acts as a messenger. He gives a full and vivid description of the death and apotheosis of Hercules. His report is not without the emotional involvement of a friend of Hercules. His original role is not that of a messenger. He is a prince of Thessaly and the faithful friend of Hercules. The latter addresses him as "tu, genus Poeantium" (1485).

Presented with some degree of individuality is the messenger in the Hippolytus. He is anonymous but before he

comes on stage we get a glimpse of his character from the chorus' speech: " But why does yon messenger haste hither w with rapid pace, his sad countenance wet with grieving tear" (989-990). Proof of his sadness is revealed by his own speech in which he complains about his cruel fate which calls upon him to bear "unutterable tidings" (991-992).

He describes the death of Hippolytus in the usual lengthy manner but not without betraying his sincere sympathy for Hippolytus whose companion and admirer he had been. He seems to rebuke Theseus when the latter laments his son's death. He tells Theseus : "not righteously may any weep what he has willed" (1118). These words of reproach reveal a trait in the messenger's role which is not found in any other play. The messenger's speech is used to throw light on the character of Theseus.

Another messenger who is named is the one in the Agamemnon. Eurybates enters "with signs of joyful tidings clearly visible" (409), to announce the arrival of his master, Agamemnon. When Clytemnestra asks him to describe the storm which destroyed the ships (414-416), his task becomes a little more difficult. He says "my sick mind shrink from speech and shudders at the thought of such disasters." (418) However, he soon describes the storm in a manner which according to Herrmann "est bien trop long et trop fleuri"<sup>7</sup> (is too long and flowery).

He leaves at the end of his speech and thus terminates his role. Apart from announcing Agamemnon's arrival this

messenger contributes nothing to the action of the play. His description of the storm unlike Theseus' description of the Underworld, has no significance. The latter helps us to understand Hercules but the messenger's speech is only an example of Seneca's use of rhetorical description.

In conclusion, the role of the messenger is basically the same in every play, that is, to report on action which occurs off stage. The length of the reports and the emotional involvement of the messenger vary from play to play. In general then, it is clear that Seneca uses the messenger more as a piece of stage machinery than as an individual.

### Nurses

The nurses are Seneca's most interesting minor characters. They are not presented with any great degree of characterization but they are important in that they give psychological depth to the portrayal of the mistresses by acting as foils to them.

There are four nurses in the tragedies that of Deianira, Medea, Clytemnestra and Phaedra. Although they often refer to their mistresses as alumna they do not perform the usual duties of a nurse. They are rather confidantes or friends of their mistresses. In spite of the similarity of their dramatic function, each has individual traits which differentiates her from the others.

In the Hercules Oetaeus, when the nurse of Deianira

first comes on stage she assumes the role of a messenger. She comments on the fury of an outraged wife (233-236), and then gives a detailed description of the violent rage and actions of her mistress (237-253). Her real task however, is to calm her mistress. She tries to restrain Deianira by pointing out the danger and folly of attacking Hercules:

"Even death itself, which thou deemest a place of safety, fear; for there the uncle of thine Alcides reigns. Turn where thou wilt, poor woman, there wilt thou see his kindred gods. " (327-330)

When the nurse realizes that her protests are useless but that Deianira still loves Hercules, she urges her mistress to try to win back her husband's love by the use of magic charms. At this point there is a touch of individuality in the portrayal of the nurse. She has magical powers of which she boasts in an effort to convince Deianira to resort to magic (452-464). She assures her mistress of success in a most optimistic tone: "Bend him we will, my charms will find a way" (463). Her suggestions are important in the light of plot development. They remind Deianira of the love potion which Nessus had given her. She decides to use this love potion and binds the nurse to faithful silence.

The nurse's loyalty to her mistress is evident in her anxiety to obey orders: "With speed will I do thy bidding, dearest child"(538) she tells Deianira, and goes to fetch the robe and the charm. She brings them and expresses her desire

to increase the power of the charm by her incantations (566).

When the nurse appears later in the play it is to comfort Deianira and to dissuade her from committing suicide. She displays great concern and speaks with motherly tenderness:

"Lo, by these aged locks and by these breasts which were almost as a mother's to thee, I humbly pray, put by the wild threatenings of thy wounded heart, banish thy dread resolve of cruel death." (925-928)

Not only does the nurse help us to understand Deianira better she also throws light on the character of Hercules. She tells us that he is fickle (363-367), and suggests that he can be overcome by magical powers. She speaks with a sort of proverbial wisdom, a common trait of the nurses, but not without affection and devotion to her mistress.

The role of the nurse in the Agamemnon is short and simple. She recognizes in her mistress' look that she is planning some mad deed and tries to dissuade her from committing another crime. She asks Clytemnestra, "dost repent the old crime, yet plan the new?" (149)

While urging Clytemnestra to be calm the nurse seems to justify Agamemnon's murder of Iphigeneia (160-161). In her only long speech she points out the wickedness and danger of violence in a most erudite manner, revealing her knowledge of Greek mythology. Her role ends with this speech but it seems that her words of wisdom have been heeded by Clytemnestra, at least for a short while.

When Aegisthus tries to persuade Clytemnestra to slay Agamemnon she replies: "The remnant of my old time chastity revives; why dost thou cry against it?" (288-289)

The nurse's exit at this point of the play frees her from any association with the crime of Clytemnestra.

On the contrary, Medea's nurse is an accomplice. Perhaps more through her loyalty to her mistress than because of inherent wickedness. In the beginning her role is not different from that of the other nurses. She tries to calm her mistress with words of wisdom: "Stay this frenzied outburst, my child; even silent calm can scarce defend thee" (157-158). She also urges her to flee and avoid offending the king for:

"Quam multa sint timenda, si perstas,  
vide nemo potentes aggredi tutus potest" (429-430).

Although the nurse realizes that Medea is planning some crime, and is fearful of the outcome, her sense of duty compels her to go and fetch the robe which is to be poisoned and sent as a gift to Creon and his daughter.

When the nurse returns she assumes the role of a messenger. She describes the incantations of Medea (670-739) which have aroused great fear in her. She begins "My spirit quakes with horror; some great disaster is at hand." (670) However, when the real messenger reports the death of Creon and his daughter, the nurse fearing for the safety of Medea urges her to escape: "Quickly begone, Medea, from the land of Pelops; seek headlong any land thou wilt!" (891-892) Thus the

nurse stays loyal to her mistress even in her crime.

The nurse of Phaedra is the most complex of Seneca's nurses. In the beginning of the play she urges her mistress to resist a criminal and dangerous love in moralizing terms:

"Why heap fresh infamy upon the house and outsin thy mother? Impious sin is worse than monstrous passion; for monstrous love thou mayst impute to fate, but crime, to character." (142-144)

She also moralizes on the struggle against passion (195-217) and bids Phaedra "fear and respect the sceptre of thy returning lord" (217). She is convinced that Theseus will return and may perhaps accept Phaedra's love for Hippolytus but she is not sure that the latter could be persuaded (236-239).

Phaedra yields to these arguments and entreaties of the nurse and says that now death is her only refuge (253-254). At this point the nurse begs her not to take this course of action and decides that she will "bend the cruel man's relentless will" (273). By taking this initiative, the nurse is more than an accomplice, she is an instigator.

For a short while, the nurse assumes the role of messenger when, in reply to the chorus' request, she describes the frantic state of her mistress (360-383).

After a prayer to Diana for the success of her undertaking with Hippolytus the nurse in a long debate (406-423) chides Hippolytus for his austere life and argues that the pleasures of life were meant to be enjoyed.

When Phaedra fails to win over Hippolytus, the nurse, loyal to her mistress, rouses her soul to action: "O Soul dost stand inactive and aghast" (719). It might be noted that self\* exhortation to the committal of a crime is common among Seneca's villains.

The nurse then calls for help and accuses Hippolytus attempting an assault on Phaedra. She also reports to Theseus Phaedra's resolve to commit suicide, and urges him to hurry to his wife's help. In this way she advances the plot of the play.

The role of Phaedra's nurse is not simply that of the traditional confidante. She also acts as a villain who exhorts herself to action and is important in the development of the plot. It should be noted, however, that it is her loyalty to Phaedra which motivates her to incriminate Hippolytus and so save her mistress from shame. The boldness with which she proceeds to carry out her plan and the authority with which she speaks are not consistent with her role as a nurse. These aspects of her character, however give her a degree of originality which make her distinct from the other nurses.

In general the nurses are faithful and loyal, and speak words of proverbial wisdom. These traits reveal a tendency in Seneca to develop a stock type, but careful examination shows that there is some degree of originality in his portrayal

of the nurses. Phaedra's nurse is not as dull as Clytemnestra's.

### Conclusion

The use of types, or characters who conform to fixed patterns, forces limitations on the dramatist's portrayal of character. However, Seneca's minor characters who fall largely into types largely because of their dramatic function are portrayed with as much skill and interest as the plots demand.

Seneca's tragedies are dramas of character and so greater emphasis is placed on the characterization of the major characters than on the minor ones. Nevertheless, because of his **rhetorical** training, Seneca makes no distinction in the speeches of the major characters and the minor characters.

Variation in his treatment of minor roles depends largely on the function of the group. For example, the nurses whose function is to act as foils for their mistresses are presented with more colour than the messengers. The tyrants, on the other hand, are portrayed in such a way that there is evidence of Seneca's hatred of tyranny. None of the minor tyrants are really portrayed in full but casual references to the tyrant occur frequently throughout the plays.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis has been to discuss Seneca's method of characterization. The following questions now arise: whether Seneca depicted his characters as types, that is, followed a fixed pattern, whether the characters are portrayed as individuals, whether he used variations within a type and finally whether he used a combination of the first three. First of all, however, the opinion of others may be indicated.

Many critics, particularly those who consider the rhetorical aspect of the plays as the main interest, tend to argue that Seneca's characters are types. Howard Canter<sup>1</sup> says, "Seneca's heroes and heroines do not appear either in action or in their speeches as individual characters, but as those typical of the rhetorical schools." The same view is held by Dimsdale.<sup>2</sup> According to Godley,<sup>3</sup> "Each (character) is a type of passion and talks accordingly. There is not a real human character in all the tragedies." T.S. Eliot<sup>4</sup> sees the characters as "members of a minstrel troupe sitting in a semicircle, rising in turn each to do his 'number,' or varying their recitations by a song or little back-chat."

But according to Charles Garton:<sup>5</sup> "Types, however, are not the stuff of which tragedy is really made." Characterization of stock types implies limitations on the dramatist's portrayal of character.

Leon Herrmann<sup>6</sup> presents a different argument. He does not deny that Seneca used stock characters but these he attributes to the tradition in which the author was writing. However, he believes that Seneca's characters are not mere types but are presented for the most part with variations.

There is no doubt that rhetoric influenced in Seneca in his portrayal of character. This accounts for the similarity of the speeches of the characters both in content and tone. But the form of literature which he is employing has also influenced him.

Tragic drama is concerned with various forms of evil as they affect human beings. Therefore, a dramatist's concept of evil largely determines his treatment of characters. In Seneca's tragedies there is the distinct influence of Stoicism on his conception of evil and of character. In Stoic philosophy, error and evil are said to result when passion overcomes reasons. Therefore it is not surprising that most of Seneca's characters, at least his heroes and heroines, display intense emotion; love, hate, fear, envy and rage. The last, which the author likens to temporary insanity,<sup>7</sup> is the most common and is the cause of much of the destruction which pervades the tragedies. Thus, Stoicism can be seen as a limiting factor on Seneca's portrayal of character, that is, it compels the author to create two types of characters, the rational and the irrational.

Since evil can only come from character, Seneca places greater emphasis on his portrayal of the irrational characters who are the source of evil in the tragedies.

According to Ronald Tobin: "A comprehension of the tragic in Seneca illuminates the reason for the 'monocentricity' of Seneca's dramas: that is, the peculiar structure in which everything and everyone capable of detracting interest from the main figure is ruthlessly subordinated so that the protagonist stands alone at the center of attention."<sup>8</sup>

Seneca by describing the conflict between reason and passion presents psychological dramas. As a result, introspection is a key feature in the plays. Seneca also "elaborates a kind of emotional decorum of inward conflict for use not only in Medea, but in Andromache, Clytemnestra, Phaedra and others."<sup>9</sup>

The personages are characterized not only by their own speeches but also by the speeches of others, particularly in the form of dialogue. While description of personal appearance is not too common it is used to describe a character's emotional state. Charles Garton<sup>10</sup> has noted that the texture of Senecan characterization is ambivalent. It is simultaneously positive and negative, attractive and repellent. This he thinks may account for the conflicting pronouncements of Seneca's characterization.

After indicating the diverse opinions of others on Seneca's characterization, the conclusion of this thesis would be that although rhetoric, Stoicism, and tragedy per se have limited the author in his portrayal of character and have compelled him to resort to the use of certain stock characters, nevertheless in general, as has been shown in previous chapters, characters

such as nurses, messengers and tyrants are presented as differentiations of a type and the heroes and heroines are portrayed as individuals. In the case of the latter, situations may be similar while the characters differ in significant aspects.

FOOTNOTES

## CHAPTER I

1. H. M. Kingery, Three Tragedies of Seneca, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press 1908), preface, p.v.
2. Léon Herrmann, Le Théâtre de Sénèque, (Paris: Société D'Édition Les Belles Lettres 1924), pp392-470.
3. Moses Hadas, A History of Latin Literature, ( New York: Columbia University Press 1952),p.19.
4. Ibid., p.25
5. H.E. Butler, Post-Augustan Poetry--From Seneca to Juvenal, (Oxford: at the Clarendon Press 1909),p.43.
6. Ibid., p.73
7. Ibid., p.72
8. Herrmann, op. cit., p.230
9. Hadas, op. cit., pp 248-49
10. H. V. Canter,"Rhetorical Elements in the Tragedies of Seneca," University of Illinois Studies VolX number 1. (February, 1925), p.18
11. Justus Miller (ed.and trans.), Seneca's Tragedies Vol. 1, Loeb Classical Library, (London: Heinemann, (1917),Introd., p.x.
12. Berte Marti, "Seneca's Tragedies- A New Interpretation", Transactions of the American Philological Association, 76 (1945), pp 216-245.
13. Miller, op. cit., Vols I&II, appendices.
14. Kingery, op. cit., p. 5.
15. Norman Pratt Jr., "The Stoic Base of Senecan Drama," Transactions of the American Philological Association, Vol 79,(1948), p.11
16. Charles Garton, "Background to Character Portrayal in Seneca", Classical Philology Vol LIV no 1 (January 1959) p.8



13. R. Tobin, op. cit., p.64
14. Nessus is the centaur which Hercules killed when he attempted to violate Deianira. He gave her some of the blood from his wound mixed with the poison from the Hydra's poisoned arrow of Hercules. H.O. 507-722. This version of the myth also appears in Sophocles' Trachinian Women I-40, 555-61.
15. Text according to Richter.
16. cf. H.O. 6-10.
17. Pratt, "The Stoic Base of Senecan Drama", p.3.
18. Pelops was slain by his father Tantalus, and served as a banquet to the gods. Thyestes 144-148
19. Pratt, Dramatic Suspense in Seneca and in his Greek Precursors, pp.50-51.
20. G.E. Evans, "Shakespeare, Seneca and the Kingdom of Violence" in Dudley (ed) Roman Drama: Studies in Latin Literature (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), p.42.
21. N.T. Pratt Jr., "From Oedipus to Lear" Classical Journal, Vol. 61 No.2. (Nov., 1965), p.55.
22. Seneca, De Providentia 2.2-3, T.E. Page et al., Loeb Classical Library, (London: Heinemann 1928), p.6.
23. C.J. Herington, "Senecan Tragedy", Arion, Vol V No.4 (Winter 1966), p.458.

## CHAPTER III

1. Hercules Oetaeus 718, following Richter who reads "timuit. an fraudem struit?" The Mss read "Timuit et fraudem struit?" Leo conjectures a lacuna after "timuit" and suggests, " an moriens viro/ poenas parat Centaurus". Using Richter's version, Nessus is taken as subject of "struit".
2. Pratt, Dramatic Suspense in Seneca and in His Greek Precursors, op. cit., p. 67.
3. H.L.Cleasby, in "The Medea of Seneca", Harvard Studies in Classical Philology, XVII 1907, pp.45-46, suggests that Medea in the prologue is meditating revenge through the murder of her children.
4. Pratt, op. cit., p.68.
5. Tobin, op. cit., p. 66.
6. Medea has killed her brother Absyrtus, and had tricked Pelias' daughters into killing their father.
7. See page 59 of thesis.
8. Seneca, Moral Essays. John Basore, (trans) Loeb Classical Library, London: Heinemann 1927, p.107.
9. Pratt, op. cit., p. 70.
10. Herrmann, op. cit., p. 431.
11. Homer, Iliad, VI, XXII.
12. See page 68 of thesis.
13. P. Harsh, An Anthology of Roman Drama, New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1960, p.494.

## CHAPTER IV

1. Dimsdale, A History of Latin Literature. p. 402. cited in Canter, op. cit., p.22.
2. See chapter II,pp. 34-48.
3. Herrmann, op. cit., p. 403.
4. Mendell, Our Seneca, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1914, p.185.
5. Herrmann, op. cit.,p.409.
6. Cleasby, op. cit., p.68.
7. Herrmann, op.cit., p.456

## CHAPTER V

1. Canter, op. cit., p.14.
2. Dimsdale, op. cit., p.402.
3. A.D.Godley, "Senecan Tragedy", (in English Literature and the Classics) Oxford, 1912, p.241.
4. T.S.Eliot, Selected Essays, (London: Faber and Faber, 1932), p.69.
5. Charles Garton, op. cit., p.2.
6. Herrmann, op. cit., p.460.
7. Seneca, De Ira, Book I, 15ff.
8. Tobin, op. cit., p. 70
9. Garton, op. cit., p. 7.
10. Ibid., p.4.

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