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WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY IN ST. LOUIS

Department of Classics

“I’ll Be Your Mirror”

*The Appropriation of Ovid’s Metamorphoses
and the Philosophy of Self-Construction in Seneca’s Oedipus*

By Theodore Joseph MacDonald III

A thesis presented to the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Washington University in
partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree
of Master of Arts

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	iii
Opening Remarks	1
Chapter I <i>Nova Monstra</i> : Seneca's Ovidian Thebes	2
Chapter II <i>Natura in Uno Vertit</i> : Narcissus at Thebes	31
Chapter III <i>Movit Me Imago</i> : Self-Recognition and Self-Construction in Oedipus	45
Works Cited	63

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And to Ted and Joyce MacDonald.

Seneca's *Oedipus* is a man beset by fear and anxiety. Unlike Sophocles' *Oedipus*, he has psychological anxiety beyond the oracle concerning his parricide and incest: this *Oedipus* is aware of his own plight and that of his native Thebes as presented in the literary tradition. Seneca sets his play in a world where the mythological and tragic past are not simply present, but govern the very words and structures of the tale. Though Sophocles' *Oedipus* has a strong influence on the work, no text looms larger than the third book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Seneca's *Oedipus* does not simply allude to Ovid's Theban narrative; rather, Seneca restructures, recasts, and recontextualizes the *Metamorphoses*' themes, characters, and words. I will examine the effect of Seneca's use of Ovidian motifs and vocabulary on the dramatic space of *Oedipus*.

Ovid's presence within the Senecan tragic corpus is regularly noted. Indeed, Tarrant writes, "Seneca's originality as a poet and dramatist can only be grasped in an Ovidian context."¹ The influence of Ovid's Theban narrative on *Oedipus* has also been noted, although scholarship on the matter is generally limited to brief remarks on specific textual correspondences or a succinct analysis of thematic interplay. Jakobi's *Der Einfluss Ovids auf den Tragiker Seneca* offers a rather thorough list of instances of intertextuality, but does not attempt a sustained discussion of their overall effect or a thorough consideration of their significance for the interpretation of *Oedipus*.² I will rely upon both the passages cited by Jakobi and others that I have identified in order to provide a detailed examination of Ovidian loci in *Oedipus*.

¹ Tarrant 1978, p.263

² Jakobi 1988.

I. *Nova Monstra*: Seneca's Ovidian Thebes

The third choral ode, which occurs after the third act, offers the longest direct, sustained engagement with Ovid's Book III.³ At this point in the play, Creon has just reported the results of the necromancy of Laius, which reveal that Oedipus must be exiled from Thebes in order to end the pestilence derived from his parricide and incest (626-58). Oedipus, in response to these allegations, asserts that Polybus' wellbeing and Merope's union with Polybus testify to his innocence of the foretold crimes (659-70). The fact that Polybus and Merope are not his true parents is still unknown to Oedipus, and this ignorance leads him to imprison Creon for acting against his authority.

With Oedipus' tragic identity fully revealed yet his ignorance persisting, the Chorus sings its tale of Thebes (709-63). The choral ode, which draws from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the second stasimon of Sophocles' *Antigone*, and the first stasimon of Euripides' *Phoenissae*, tells of the *veteres deum irae* that hound the house of the Labdacids (711-2).⁴ The Chorus considers the plight of Cadmus, the fratricide of the Spartoi, and the metamorphosis of Actaeon- all of which, though derived in part from the themes and vocabulary of the *Metamorphoses*, are tailored to the present concerns within the tragedy of Oedipus. In this way, the wandering path of fate, the regeneration of tragic *monstra*, and self-recognition are prominent themes in the ode.

³ This division follows Boyle 2011.

⁴ Boyle 2011, p.276

The first part of the ode tells the story of Cadmus' arrival in Thebes after searching worldwide for Europa, whom Jupiter had taken. In the *Metamorphoses*, Europa's father, ignorant of Jupiter's role in the crime, orders Cadmus to search for the girl and threatens a punishment of exile if he does not find her (*si non invenerit, Met. 3.4*). Cadmus, after failing to find Europa and thus becoming an exile, seeks the oracle of Phoebus, who orders him to follow the path of a heifer that has never borne the burden of the plow (*nullum passa iugum curvique immunis aratri, Met. 3.11*). Right after he receives the oracle, Cadmus spots such a heifer and follows its footsteps until he draws near to the place that will become Thebes (*subsequitur pressoque legit vestigia gressu, Met. 3.17*). Upon arrival, Cadmus seeks to make sacrifice to Jupiter (*sacra Iovi facturum erat, Met. 3.26*) and sends out his companions to gather water for a libation. While his companions gather water in an idyllic grove, they are killed by a snake, which is then slain in turn by Cadmus. Pallas then helps Cadmus, who was just terrified (*pavidus, Met. 3.99*) by the mysterious voice of a god, to sow the field with the teeth of the dead snake in order to generate a new race of people.

Seneca retains Ovid's vocabulary and basic elements of the plot -- the Cadmian exile, the bovine leader, and serpent -- but structures the tale to accentuate the tragic destiny of Thebes, specifically as it pertains to Oedipus. The chorus, after noting the *veteres deum irae*, relates the story of Cadmus' arrival in Thebes:

*Castalium nemus
umbram Sidonio praebuit hospiti
lavitque Dirce Tyrios colonos,*

*ut primum magni natus Agenoris,
fessus per orbem furta sequi Iovis,
sub nostra pavidus constitit arbore
praedonem venerans suum...*

715

(712-8)

Here, a fearful Cadmus (*pavidus*, 717), after unsuccessfully searching for Europa and heeding the order of Phoebus to follow a heifer, stands ready to sacrifice to Jupiter. As Jakobi has noted, this passage is replete with Ovidian vocabulary.⁵ To provide structure for the analysis of these Ovidian loci, I will first focus on the corresponding descriptions of Cadmus and his search.

Ovid emphasizes the exiled status of Cadmus by characterizing him as the *Sidonius hospes* (*Met.* 3.129), which is parallel to *Sidonio...hospiti* at 713.⁶ He also names Cadmus through his father, referring to him as *Agenore natus* (*Met.* 3.51), which Seneca inverts to *natus Agenoris* (715).⁷ Seneca does not simply import the vocabulary of Ovid; rather, he relies upon Ovidian echoes to activate specific sequences and themes from *Metamorphoses* in order to further inform the dramatic context. These Ovidian echoes, now occupying a new space and a new text, then interact with the words and themes of *Oedipus* in such a way as to emphasize the tragic qualities of Oedipus by linking him to his mythological and literary predecessors.

Throughout *Oedipus*, Seneca repeatedly underscores the exiled status of the tragic hero. Indeed, in the opening lines of the play, Oedipus refers to himself as an exile (*exul*, 13), a runaway (*profugus*, 23), and an unfortunate guest (*infaustus*

⁵ Jakobi 1988, Section 3.6

⁶ Jakobi 1988,,Section 3.129f

⁷ Jakobi 1988,,Section 3.51

hospes, 80). In Act 3, just before the Theban Ode begins, Creon reports Laius' orders from the grave: *proinde pulsum finibus regem ocius/agite exulem* (647-8). In this way, Seneca's use of Ovid's designation for Cadmus -- *Sidonius hospes* -- locates Cadmus within the play's greater dialogue concerning exile and evokes the figure of Oedipus. Thus, Seneca activates Cadmus within the tragic space of *Oedipus* in order to color Oedipus as an analog to Cadmus.

The connection between the two characters is strengthened through Seneca's transference of the word *pavidus* from the end of Cadmus' tale to its beginning. Whereas Ovid describes Cadmus as fearful only after he has battled the serpent and hears the voice of the god, Seneca places this word at the beginning of Cadmus' tragedy. As a result, it casts a foreboding tone over the whole story of Cadmus and portrays him as a man beset by fear. In the context of *Oedipus*, such a retooling is quite poignant. After all, Seneca's Oedipus, in contrast to his Sophoclean predecessor, is depicted from the start of the play as a man racked with guilt and anxiety. This unease dominates Oedipus' opening speech, as he says, *cuncta expavesco meque non credo mihi* (27). Oedipus then proceeds to describe a plague-ridden Thebes, which he perceives to arise from his own guilt (36). Seneca, in appropriating exile vocabulary and emphasizing the heroes' anxiety, allows Cadmus to prefigure the plot of *Oedipus* and casts Oedipus as paradigmatic of the Theban condition. By connecting the two figures through the text of the *Metamorphoses*, he forces the reader to consider the fate of Oedipus within the greater Theban mythology. This Theban mythology, as presented in Book III of the *Metamorphoses* and activated within the Theban ode of *Oedipus*, involves the repeated tragic

generation and destruction of the Cadmians. In turn, this factors into the play's greater dialogue concerning fate and identity, a theme that will be developed later in this section.

The opening lines of the Theban ode, in their connection to the *Metamorphoses*, also engage the play's recurring motif of ignorance, especially as it manifests itself in tragic irony. Here, Cadmus, after his unsuccessful search for Europa and resultant exile, begins to make a sacrifice to the same god who was responsible for the rape of Europa and his own exile. The line *praedonem venerans suum* (718) recalls the moment in Ovid when Cadmus is about to sacrifice (*sacra Iovi facturum erat Met. 3.26*) and places it in a context that accentuates the ignorance and irony surrounding Cadmus' placation of Jove.⁸ Cadmus' ignorance in his religious act finds a natural complement in Oedipus' own ignorance as he calls upon Phoebus to bring about exile, parricide, and incest for the one who slew Laius (257-67). First, like Cadmus, Oedipus prays to the very god responsible for his current condition, Phoebus, whom Oedipus will later curse at the close of the play (1046). Second, Oedipus' curse that the killer of Laius perpetrate all that he himself fled (*quidquid ego fugi, 263*) exhibits a lack of awareness that he has already committed the dreaded crimes. This, when read in conjunction with Cadmus' initial fear and subsequent suffering in the Theban ode, serves as a meditation on the relationship of ignorance and fate. In effect, Cadmus, by virtue of his presence in Thebes, has indeed experienced his tragedy, whether or not the annihilation of his offspring has already occurred. Here, the boundaries of past, present, and future have effectively

⁸ Boyle 2011, p.280

collapsed, due to fate's governing role. Oedipus and Cadmus's ignorance of their plight at the hands of fate engenders tragic irony, a topic that will be developed later in this section.

The chorus, after singing of Cadmus' hunt for Europa and prayer to Jupiter, turns its attention to Cadmus' journey and to his naming of Boeotia:

*monituque Phoebi
iussus erranti comes ire vaccae,
quam non flexerat* 720
*vomer aut tardi iuga curva plaustris,
deseruit fugas nomenque genti
inauspicata de bove tradidit.* (718-23)

Cadmus, at the behest of Phoebus, follows a heifer, which has no signs of having been yoked, to the new land and founds Thebes. As has already been explained, Book III of the *Metamorphoses* tells a similar story with nearly identical vocabulary. Ovid's heifer that has never been yoked or pulled a plow (*nullum passa iugum curvique immunis aratri*, *Met.* 3.11) is described in analogous terms in the Theban ode. Though *aratri* has been altered to *plaustris*, there is a clear evocation of Ovid's heifer. The mere mention of a heifer, coupled with its descriptor *inauspicata* (723), would lead an audience to recall the heifer from the remarkably vivid account of the *extispicium* earlier in the play (353-83). After all, the cow that Tiresias orders Manto to lead to the altar for the *extispicium* is described in a similar fashion: *curvoque numquam colla depressam iugo* (300). Thus, the three pristine heifers -- the one that leads Cadmus in the *Metamorphoses*, the one that that leads Cadmus in the Theban Ode, and the one that is sacrificed during the *extispicium* -- are yoked together.

The effect of this coupling is threefold. First, Seneca, in his injection of the *extispicium* into the recurrent theme of the heifer, raises questions concerning divine beneficence as it pertains to oracular insight. During the *extispicium*, Manto says

*mutatus ordo est, sede nil propria iacet
sed acta retro cuncta....*

Natura versa est; nulla lex utero manet. (366-7, 371)

The *extispicium*, rather than elucidating the source of the plague, is merely another manifestation of the twistedness and backwardness inherent in the house of Cadmus. Just as this heifer fails to lead Tiresias and Manto to sure knowledge and salvation, the heifer foretold by Phoebus that leads Cadmus to Thebes hardly brings respite to the exile. After all, once he arrives in Boeotia, a series of misfortunes arise as a direct result of the land itself, most notably the fratricide of the Spartoi and Actaeon's intrusion upon Diana. Though on the surface the heifer appears to be a munificent Apollonian sign, it is merely another example of Thebes' plight at the hands of fate.

Second, the description of the heifer as *inauspicata* has implications for both the tragic space of Thebes in *Oedipus* and the *Metamorphoses*. As Boyle notes, the word *inauspicata* occurs only twice in the Senecan corpus: here to describe the heifer and then later as Oedipus curses his *genus* (*inauspicatum sanguinis pignus mei*, 1022).⁹ This word, which does not occur in Ovid, carries with it significant weight. It does more than simply recall the *extispicium*; the placement of *inauspicata*

⁹ Boyle 2011, p.281

at the very foundation of Thebes emphasizes the ill-fated destiny of the city and its royal line. Moreover, Oedipus' use of the word after he has discovered his true identity further develops the notion of a cursed line. Thus, this word adds to the theme of uniting past, present, and future at Thebes as a continually unfolding series of tragic episodes.

Thirdly, the final lines from this section, which tell of the origin of Boeotia's name, further the theme of inauspicious beginnings. It was Cadmus who *nomenque genti/inauspicata de bove tradidit* (722-3). This line recalls Phoebus' orders in the *Metamorphoses* to call the land "Boeotia" -- or "land of the heifer" (*Boeotiaque illa vocato, Met. 3.13*). The use of this motif within the Theban ode in the context of *Oedipus* garners further significance when read in conjunction with the following ode (882-910). In the fourth choral ode, the chorus sings of the flight of Daedalus and Icarus, a topic famously covered in the *Metamorphoses* (8.183-235). Seneca does not go into great detail, merely stating that Icarus required too much of his false wings (*falsis nimis / imperat pinnis, 896-7*) and thus snatched away the name from a sea (*nomen eripuit freto, 898*). In this way, the act of "naming" within the dramatic space of *Oedipus* carries with it a tragic quality. The Icarian ode, when read together with this story of the naming of Boeotia, furthers the foreboding tone of the ill-fated origin and identity of Thebes.

After the story of Cadmus, the Theban ode proceeds to tell the story of the serpent that would eventually prove to be the seed that would blossom into the Theban people (724-30) and the civil war amongst the earth-borne race (731-50) before arriving at the metamorphosis of Actaeon. Here, the chorus relates how

Actaeon, in punishment for looking at Diana while she was bathing, was transformed into a stag, fled from his own hunting snares, and then saw his reflection in the very pond where he had intruded upon Diana. Just as with the story of Cadmus, Seneca draws from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* while making critical changes to alter the story to the dramatic space of *Oedipus*. These changes do more than simply bring the Ovidian episode into *Oedipus*; they also project Seneca's emphasis on destruction occurring at the intersection of origin and identity into the Ovidian world.

In *Oedipus*, the story of Actaeon begins:

*Quid? **Cadmei** fata **nepotis**,
cum **vivacis** **cornua cervi**
frontem ramis texere novis
dominumque **canes** egere suum? (751-4)*

This can be compared with Ovid's description of Actaeon's transformation in the *Metamorphoses* (the specific correspondences are in bold face):

*Prima **nepos** inter tot res tibi, **Cadme**, secundas
causa fuit luctus, alienaque **cornua fronti**
addita, vosque, **canes** satiatae sanguine erili.
(Met. 3.138-40)*

*dat sparso capiti **vivacis** **cornua cervi**,
(Met. 3.194)*

There are a number of analogues, but none is more striking than the phrase *vivacis cornua cervi* -- a dactylic configuration that readily maps onto Seneca's anapaestic dimeter.¹⁰ As the chorus progresses, the parallels continue:

*...per saltus ac saxa **vagus**
metuit motas zephyris plumas
et quae posuit retia vitat—
donec placidi fontis **in unda**
cornua vidit vultusque feros,
ubi virgineos foverat **artus**
nimium saevi **diva** pudoris.* (755-63)

*cum iuvenis placido per devia lustra **vagantes**
participes operum conpellat* (Met. 3.146)

***hic dea** silvarum venatu fessa solebat
virgineos artus liquido perfundere rore.* (Met. 3.163-4)

*ut vero **vultus et cornua vidit in unda**,
'me miserum!' dicturus erat: vox nulla secuta est!*
(Met. 3.200-1)

Seneca's adaptation of the *Metamorphoses'* Actaeon episode maintains the Ovidian emphasis on vocabulary relating to wandering, chiefly words arising from the stem *vag-*. Indeed, Oedipus twice refers to himself with this vocabulary. First, in the opening, Oedipus describes how he wandered and stumbled upon a kingship (*vagans/(caelum deosque testor) in regnum incidi*, 13-4). Then, after his moment of self-recognition, Oedipus says that he wanders as the crime of the ages (*saeculi crimen vagor*, 875). Just as Oedipus' wandering began his journey of self-recognition

¹⁰ Hinds forthcoming, p.6. Hinds indicates that this phrase is itself "a verbatim, but non cross-metrical [i.e. the phrase occupies a different position in the meter], reproduction of Virg. *Ecl.* 7.30"

and subsequent annihilation, Actaeon's wandering leads him to a grove where he unwittingly catches Diana while she is bathing (*non certis passibus errans, Met.* 3.175).¹¹ Seneca relates the story of Actaeon in order to accentuate the manner in which Oedipus has "stumbled upon" his fate.

Seneca's retelling of Ovid's Actaeon episode does more than render the two figures correlative in terms of how they meet their fate. Whereas Ovid contrives that Actaeon's moment of self-recognition occur in a nearby pool almost immediately after his transformation, Seneca constructs the story in such a way as to delay the moment of self-recognition and shift its locus to the place where the metamorphosis occurred:¹² for what character's delayed dissolution is more intimately related to his origin than that of Oedipus? This shift in narrative strategy brings Actaeon into *Oedipus* in such a way that his presence functions to prefigure the plot. Likewise, Seneca is effectively inserting Oedipus into Ovid's Theban narrative in order to portray Oedipus as yet another example of a Theban meeting his tragic destiny at his origin.

The Theban ode is of central importance when considering the presence of Ovid's third book of the *Metamorphoses* within *Oedipus*. Although Seneca's motifs and vocabulary derive from Ovid's narrative, he tailors the *Metamorphoses* to his own narrative aims and dramatic context. In this way, the thematic and lexical appropriations activate Ovid's tale to accentuate the prevailing tensions and configurations of the play, while constructing Cadmus and Actaeon as points of

¹¹ This recurring motif in these works involving the relationship between wandering and fate will be explored later in this section.

¹² Hinds forthcoming, p.7

reference for Oedipus within a greater mytho-literary tradition. This in turn emphasizes certain elements of Seneca's Oedipus (such as the relationship between origin and identity, intent and ignorance) and thus provides for a fuller consideration of his tragic dimensions.

In the Theban ode, the Cadmian line repeatedly fulfills its tragic destiny in a manner that would seem to collapse past, present, and future. Seneca's portrayal of Cadmus and Actaeon as characters prefiguring the tragedy of Oedipus is not limited to this chorus; rather, he continually develops this notion throughout the play. Seneca relies on the story of Cadmus both to cast Oedipus as an actor in the greater play of Theban fate and to demonstrate the manner in which Oedipus is simply a new iteration of the heroic lineage meeting its tragic end. The Theban choral ode also activates the story of Cadmus at line 709-723 in order to establish dramatic context for Oedipus' final lines as he departs from the city of Thebes. These last words tie him to Cadmus, with both a forward-looking and retrospective gaze: the closing lines of Oedipus recall the opening lines of the episode of Cadmus in Book III of *Metamorphoses*, again calling into question notions of linearity in the tragic space of Thebes. If a destiny has been fulfilled once, it will be fulfilled again, as actions in the present recall those in the past while prefiguring those of the future. Thus, Oedipus is not simply a role in the present, but an actor in the past and future in the greater latticework of providence as played out in Thebes.

At the onset of Book III of *Metamorphoses*, Cadmus, after consulting Phoebus, catches sight of the heifer described in the prophecy:

Subsequitur pressoque legit *vestigia gressu*
Auctoremque viae Phoebum taciturnus adorat

*Iam **vada** Cephisi Panopesque evaserat arva*
(Met. 3.17-9)

Cadmus follows the *vestigia* with a *presso...gressu* until the heifer eventually leads him to the location where he is to found Thebes. Once he arrives in the proper area, the heifer indicates that he has reached the land indicated by Phoebus:

*Bos stetit et tollens speciosam cornibus altis
Ad caelum frontem mugitibus inpulit auras
Atque ita respiciens comites sua terga sequentis
Procubuit teneraque latus submitit in herba*
(Met. 3.20-3)

The *bos* numinously moves its horns skyward and looks back at Cadmus in such a way as to confirm that he has indeed reached the appropriate place. Soon after, of course, the tragedies -- many of which are inextricable from the very land of Thebes itself -- begin to unfold. The origin of Thebes has the appearance of divine dictate and favor, but proves to be ultimately disastrous.

Oedipus, after blinding himself in the wake of learning of his parricide and incest, delivers a speech as he departs from Thebes. Oedipus, who delivered the fear-ridden opening lines of the play, now closes the tragedy with all of his anxieties actualized:

*o **Phoebe** mendax, fata superavi impia.
Pavitante **gressu sequere** fallentes **vias**;
suspensa plantis efferens **vestigia**
caecam tremente dextera noctem rege.
ingredere praeceps, lubricos ponens gradus,
i profuge **vade** -- siste, ne in matrem incidas. (1046-50)*

Seneca uses the vocabulary in this passage, with emphasis on words relating to “footsteps”, “following”, and “roads”, to connect this passage with other such

appearances of vocabulary in the work thereby uniting some of the play's prominent themes. Oedipus, in self-address, commands himself to not "stumble on" his mother as he leaves, a word choice that recalls his speech from the very beginning of the play in which he "stumbled on" a kingdom (*in regnum incidi*, 14).¹³ The word "profuge" harkens back to Oedipus' self-referential use of the word in his opening speech (23, 80) as well as Laius' report of the oracle of Phoebus in which it is commanded that the "profugus" dwelling in the kingdom of Thebes be exiled. Even the use of *via* at 1047 recalls Oedipus' final lines in the opening act in which he prays that Phoebus might "show salvation's path" (*salutis Phoebus ostendit viam*, 109). Yet, the vocabulary and themes presented in Oedipus' final lines do not simply recall Oedipus' opening speech, these words also allude the very beginning of Cadmus' tale in *Metamorphoses* as well as the themes that defined the tragedy of Cadmus. Thus, it is important to examine the manner in which Seneca draws intertextual and programmatic parallels between the two figures.

It is not surprising that, in a work that so heavily meditates on the nexus of prophecy and fate, "Phoebus" is named a total of twenty times in *Oedipus*. Nonetheless, his presence in a passage that so clearly recalls the *Metamorphoses* is still significant. In Book III, it is Phoebus' decree that sends Cadmus on the "pathway of fate" that will subsequently lead to his companions' slaughter by the serpent. Later, it is the sister of Phoebus who commands Cadmus to sow the teeth of the slain snake into the soil to produce the citizenry of Thebes. But, it is again creatures from the very land promised by Apollo -- this time, earth-born men -- who bring about

¹³ This, incidentally, is the only other use of this word in the play.

tragedy for Cadmus. The Spartoi, the earth-born Thebans sowed by Cadmus, upon birth, slay one another in battle, an internecine destruction that serves as a prefiguration of the civil conflict between the sons of Oedipus, Eteocles and Polynices, that ultimately results in the brothers' deaths at the hands of one another.

Oedipus' relation to Phoebus, like that of Cadmus, could hardly be considered divinely beneficent. After all, it is the portent received from Phoebus that compels Oedipus to begin to journey down the road that will eventually lead him to carry out the destiny that he had been trying to avoid all along. Whereas the relationship between Cadmus and Phoebus seems to begin at the oracle in *Metamorphoses*, in *Oedipus*, Phoebus, as reported by Laius, refers to Oedipus as "known to him from birth" (*Phoebo iam notus et infans*, 235). Though neither tale offers an explanation for the connection between Phoebus and the two heroes, Oedipus and Cadmus are linked through a relationship with Phoebus that appears at first to be positive, but is later seen to be wholly destructive.

The intertextualities concerning vocabulary of following and footsteps between the above passages continue to develop the link between the characters of Cadmus and Oedipus and to provide for a greater thematic interplay between the two works. The passage at *Oedipus* 1047-48 (*Pavitante gressu sequere fallentes vias; / suspensa plantis efferens vestigia*) is certainly modeled after *Metamorphoses* 3.17-8: *Subsequitur pressoque legit vestigia gressu / Auctoremque viae Phoebum taciturnus adorat*. The use of this Ovidian allusion at the close of *Oedipus* is a rather interesting choice for Seneca, in that he transfers to the end of his story what was at the beginning of Ovid's tale. And yet, this is hardly out of the ordinary for Seneca.

After all, on page 12 it was noted how Seneca delayed Actaeon's self-recognition until the end of his tragedy and, more importantly, contrived that that recognition occur at the very spot where Actaeon's transformation took place, thereby allowing Actaeon to prefigure Oedipus. Seneca, just as he did with the story of Actaeon, relies on the placement of the Ovidian lexical correspondences at the end of -- rather than the beginning of -- the tragedy in order to go beyond simply forging a link between Cadmus and Oedipus. The postponement of the interplay has the effect of furthering Seneca's thematic meditation on the collapse of past, present, and future within a royal line whose tragedy is repeatedly actualized.

The vocabulary and themes found at *Metamorphoses* 3.17-8 and *Oedipus* 1047-8 are featured prominently in both works. Words like *gressus*, *sequere*, and *via* are repeatedly used in the greater dialogue concerning the nexus of fate and pathways, a metaphorical pairing that Ovid literalizes in Book III. In addition to the weight of these words in the story of Cadmus, they also play a memorable role in the tales of the chases between both Actaeon and his hounds and Narcissus and Echo. In the story of Actaeon, the Cadmian regent, after being metamorphosed into a stag, finds himself transformed from hunter to hunted. Feldherr notes this similarity to Cadmus, in that the two Thebans are suddenly "thrust from the role of audience or spectator into that of participant."¹⁴ It is after the dogs give chase to Actaeon that the roads suddenly disappear:

*quaque est difficilis quaque est via nulla, sequuntur.
Ille fugit per quae fuerat loca saepe secutus
Heu! Famulos fugit ipse suos* (Met. 3.227)

¹⁴ Feldherr 1997, p.27.

As Actaeon attempts to flee, a few of the dogs intercept him by taking a different passage:

*Tardius exierant, sed per compendia montis
Anticipata via est* (Met. 3.234-5)

It is the *anticipata via* that allows the dogs to corral Actaeon the stag and subsequently devour their own master. In the Actaeon episode, the road ultimately serves as a conduit for his downfall at the hands of his own -- a type of reflexive destruction that harkens back to the Spartoi and prefigures Oedipus' annihilation at his own hands. Indeed, Jocasta's explanation of the exact location of Laius' murder echoes *Met. 3.234*:

*Plures fefellit error **ancipitis viae**,
paucos fidelis curribus iunxit labor.* (778-9)

Though *ancipitis viae* (778) is not a denotational correspondence with *anticipata via* (*Met. 3.235*), it is certainly an echo of the Ovidian line. It was at the *anceps via* that Oedipus killed his own father, thereby quite literally placing himself on a pathway that held his fate. Seneca again takes an event occurring at specific point in an Ovidian narrative and shifts its position on the timeline when incorporating it into the story of Oedipus. Just as Seneca transferred the sequence involving Cadmus and the heifer (*Met. 3.17-8*) to the close of the Oedipus tale (1047-8), the road that ultimately proved to be a "dead end" for Actaeon is located at the very moment when Oedipus begins to fulfill his foretold fate.

Oedipus' connection to the characters in Book III in the context of the theme regarding footsteps and destiny is not limited to the Cadmian royal line. The story of Echo and Narcissus starts:

*ergo ubi Narcissum per devia rura vagantem
vidit et incaluit, sequitur vestigia furtim, (Met. 3.370-1)*

These lines, which evoke the earlier tales of Cadmus and Actaeon, show the beginning of the end for Echo. For as soon as she sees Narcissus “wandering through the pathless fields”, she embarks on a pathway that will lead to her own destruction. It is the one who is “wandering” that stands in as the new heifer of Cadmus in leading the protagonist to her ultimate destruction. Lines 3.370-1, which recall the description of Actaeon’s companions,¹⁵ continue the Ovidian motif concerning the nexus of pathways and fate, while also serving as another reference point in examining Seneca’s retooling of *Metamorphoses III*. Though these lines also inform Oedipus’ final speech (*Pavitante gressu sequere fallentes vias; suspensa plantis efferens vestigia*, 1047-8), the analysis offered here will focus on the notion of “wandering” (*Met. 3.370*) as it concerns the dialogue of pathways and fate.

As aimlessness and pathways (or lack thereof) factored prominently in Echo’s corporal dissolution and metamorphosis, it is this same vocabulary that guides Oedipus’ journey to his fate. In the opening monologue of *Oedipus*, the king says:

*curis solutus exul, intrepidus vagans
(caelum deosque testor) in regnum incidi; (13-4)*

Oedipus emphasizes his exile status before noting how in the course of his “wandering” he “stumbled upon” a kingdom.¹⁶ This speech meanders from topic to topic as it describes the prophecy of Apollo, the anxiety of Oedipus, and the plague

¹⁵ *cum iuvenis placido per devia lustra vagantes / participes operum conpellat Hyantius ore (Met. 3.146-7)*

¹⁶ As noted on page 15, this phrase is echoed in the closing lines of the play

of Thebes. After an exchange with Jocasta, the opening dialogue ends with Oedipus praying:

*Vna iam superest salus,
si quam salutis Phoebus ostendat viam. (108-9)*

This prayer, that Apollo point out the path of salvation, is certainly a loaded line in the context of *Oedipus* itself and becomes even more laden when read in conjunction with the *Metamorphoses*. Yet the apparent contrast of the “wandering” of Oedipus at 13 with the “path” of salvation at 109 is a false antithesis. Oedipus has indeed already taken the pathway of Phoebus, but he is wholly unaware of it. The spurious nature of such a contrast is best understood when read with the episode in *Metamorphoses* in which Actaeon wanders into the grove of Diana:

*Per nemus ignotum non certis passibus errans
Pervenit in lucum: sic illum fata ferebant (Met. 3.174-5)*

Here, Ovid elucidates the distinction between an individual’s lack of awareness of the fact that he is travelling on destiny’s path and fate’s certainty regarding the fact that he indeed is on that path. At the opening of *Oedipus*, the king is no more aware of the reality that he is already journeying to his destruction than Actaeon is when he walks into the grove. The two characters operate under the mistaken assumption that, because they have not deliberately chosen a path, they are somehow not enjoining themselves to a greater destiny -- much less one that holds destruction.

Eventually Oedipus, after his recognition, seems to hint at an awareness of this distinction between deliberate and unintentional within the greater dialogue concerning pathways and fate. As Oedipus deliberates on how he might best atone for his parricide and incest, he says:

*mors eligatur longa. quaeratur via
qua nec sepultis mixtus et vivis tamen
exemptus erres: morere, sed citra patrem. (949-51)*

Here, Oedipus elects to seek a path that will allow him to mix with neither the living nor the dead, while at the same time wandering on that road. The plight of Thebes as described in *Metamorphoses* and retooled in *Oedipus* serves to emphasize the theme of fate and footsteps in Seneca. It is thus in this tragic context that the chorus can effectively distil one "lesson" of the play:

*multis ipsum metuisse nocet;
multi ad fatum venere suum
dum fata timent* (992-4)

The correspondences in vocabulary concerning "stepping", "following", and "footsteps" at *Metamorphoses* 3.17-8 and *Oedipus* 1047-8 are also important from a generic perspective. A distinguishing element of Senecan tragedy is the manner in which characters tend to exhibit an awareness of their own mythical history as presented in the literary tradition. For instance, in Seneca's *Medea*, the heroine vows to "become Medea" (*Medea. . . Fiam*, 171), an act of self-naming that is later complemented in the play when Medea claims that she is now "Medea" (*Medea nunc sum*, 910), which only occurs after she has fulfilled her tragic destiny by murdering her children. Indeed, Star notes how "Senecan characters call on themselves to live up to their own traditional reputation"¹⁷ -- a phenomenon that is present in *Oedipus*.

In this work, three of the four uses of the hero's name are acts of self-naming. After Creon explains to the king that the oracle at Delphi delivered a difficult response, Oedipus replies:

¹⁷ Star 2006, p.223

*Fare, sit dubium licet:
ambigua soli noscere Oedipodae datur. (215-6)*

Oedipus locates his ability to resolve the complicated oracular response within his mythological identity. This identity is defined in the literary tradition in part by his conquering of the Sphinx, who is evoked throughout the play with similar twisting language. Later, Oedipus, upon learning of his parricide and incest, says:

*solvendo non es: illa quae leges ratas
Natura in uno vertit Oedipoda (942-3)*

And then, after he blinds himself:

vultus Oedipodam hic decet. (1004)

Oedipus then would appear to have a knowledge of what suits his identity -- blindness -- based on his poetic mythos. It has been noted how self-referentiality to one's role in the literary canon is a staple of the drama, but this phenomenon is rendered more complex when the characters allude to existing texts, as Oedipus does at 1047-8 when he appropriates vocabulary concerning the relationship of footsteps and fate from *Metamorphoses* 3.17-8. Whereas the narrator of *Metamorphoses* delivers the lines about Cadmus' following of the heifer, it is Oedipus himself who retools the lines. Therefore, it would seem that Oedipus is self-consciously paralleling his tragic story to that of Cadmus by casting himself as paradigmatic of Theban tragic destiny. This of course only adds to the notion that *Oedipus* repeatedly folds the past, present, and future of the Cadmian line in on itself, like a massive star collapsing under its own gravity.

Seneca's intertextual allusions and retooling of Book III do not function solely to inject the Cadmian line into *Oedipus* and Oedipus into the Cadmian line. At times,

Seneca creates an intertextual relationship with *Metamorphoses* in order to “play” on Ovid’s own intertextual relationships. For instance, Ovid, after presenting the story of Tiresias arbitrating the debate between Juno and Jupiter concerning which gender derives more pleasure from sex, describes Tiresias’ punishment at the hands of Saturn:

*Suique
Iudicis **aeterna** damnavit **lumina nocte** (Met. 3.334-5)*

This passage provides the explanation for Tiresias’ blindness but also has an intertextual relationship with Virgil’s *Aeneid* at 10.746 and 12.310:

*olli dura quies oculos et ferreus urget
somnia, in **aeternam** clauduntur **lumina noctem**.
(10.745-6)*

*olli dura quies oculos et ferreus urget
somnia, in **aeternam** conduntur **lumina noctem**.
(12.309-10)*

Virgil’s description of death, which was written in reference to those that had died in battle, is here literalized from its metaphorical usage in *Aeneid* and applied to the quintessential blind figure from classical myth, Tiresias. Seneca partakes in this tradition at 393, when, after the *extispicium* has failed, Tiresias determines to perform the necromancy of Laius:

*Ipsae evocandae **noctis aeternae** plagis,
Emissus Erebo ut caedis auctorem indicet (393-4)*

Seneca contrives that the one who was punished with “eternal night” now serve as the conduit through which Laius might return from the Virgilian conception of the “eternal night”. Thus, through this allusion, Seneca maintains the original sense of

the phrase in *Aeneid* while also showcasing its subsequent retooling in *Metamorphoses* through Tiresias' delivery of the line. Such reworkings function to seamlessly link two individuals, thereby emphasizing the quality held in common between the characters-- in this case, the shared oracular insight of Laius and Tiresias.

Though Book III is present throughout Seneca's play, the most jarring reworking of *Metamorphoses* in *Oedipus* occurs as the king, having just recognized his fulfillment of the oracle of Phoebus, steels himself to remove his eyes as punishment for the crimes. As Oedipus goads himself into a frenzy, he temporarily rages (915-79). Seneca portrays Oedipus with vocabulary that recalls the Sphinx that threatened Thebes and the snake that slayed Cadmus' companions in Book III of *Metamorphoses*. It is through descriptions involving menacing eyes, twisting language, and the depiction of fury that Oedipus, the Sphinx, and the snake are linked together.

Before I compare the Sphinx or Oedipus with the serpent, it is best to first examine the relationship between the Sphinx and Oedipus. Mastronarde notes how the recurrence of the word *viscera* connects the Sphinx not only to the plague (191-92), the *extispicium* (352, 370, 380), and Oedipus' command for self-punishment (929-30), but also to the blinding of the hero (966, 968). Seneca, in situating the Sphinx within such an aberrant context, thus portrays the creature "as another projection into nature of the abnormality of the Oedipus-situation."¹⁸

¹⁸ Mastronarde 1970, p. 304

At the beginning of *Oedipus*, after Jocasta exhorts the king to stand strong, Oedipus relates the tale of his conquest of the Sphinx with an amount of detail absent from Sophocles' play. He says that he did not flee from the Sphinx, but held his ground as the Sphinx

*Caudae movens
Saevi leonis more concuteret minas* (96-7)

Oedipus describes the threats of the Sphinx through a simile involving a "savage lion" (97). The only other character in the play portrayed in such a way is Oedipus:

Qualis per arva Libycus insanit leo (919)

Here, the messenger describes the king as a lion as Oedipus spews and rolls forth threats (*spumat et voluit minas*, 923). The word *mina* is used elsewhere by Creon who explains how the *tristes minae* (246) of the Sphinx prevented the citizens from being able to search for the killer of Laius at the time the murder was committed.

In addition to the lion imagery and threats, the two are linked through vocabulary emphasizing their savage nature and foul lineage. Oedipus describes the Sphinx as *infanda* (*infandae*, 93), *fera* (102), and emitting a *dirus* dust (106) that attacks the city of Thebes. While *fera* can be understood as further developing the Sphinx's ferocity, the words *infanda* and *dirus* carry significant weight within the lexicon of the play. *Infanda* is used by Oedipus to describe the oracle concerning his parricide (*infanda timeo*, 15), to refer to his *caput* after he has realized that he has in fact committed the foretold crimes (*infandum caput*, 871) and finally at the point at which he rages (*infandum genus / deprendit*, 915-6). *Dirus* is also used sparingly¹⁹

¹⁹ Boyle 2011,p.140.

and, like *infanda*, is employed to unite the Sphinx (*dirus cinis*, 106), the symptoms of the Theban plague (*o dira novi facies leti*, 180), Oedipus' tragic crimes (*diros toros*, 21), and Oedipus' fury (*dirum fremens*, 961).

While Seneca uses *dirus* and *infanda* to link the Sphinx with Oedipus, Laius makes the relationship between the two quite clear during the necromancy. Creon reports that Laius says:

*Fratres sibi ipse genuit -- implicitum malum
Magisque monstrum Sphinge perplexum sua* (640-1)

Laius characterizes Oedipus as a monster more entangled than his own Sphinx. The designation of the Sphinx as "monster" is hardly incidental given the fact that Oedipus refers to the Sphinx as such when telling of his encounter with the beast (106). It should also be noted that Laius' description emphasizes Oedipus' familial situation through his use of the word *perplexum*, an image that evokes the tangled web of his kinship. In this way, Seneca connects the two entities through vocabulary as well as an explicit assertion by Creon.

Like the Sphinx and Oedipus, the snake is noted for its fury. Ovid describes the snake as fierce (*ferox*, *Met.* 3.68) and raging (*furit*, *Met.* 3.83). Special emphasis is placed on the eyes, which are described as flashing with fire (*igne micant oculi*, *Met.* 3. 33). The messenger, reporting on Oedipus' appearance as he drove himself into a frenzy, says:

*Dixit atque ira furit
Ardent minaces igne truculento genae
Oculique se sedibus retinent suis* (957-9)

Seneca compresses Ovid's description of the snake's fury and face into three lines, with *minaces igne* providing a particularly noticeable resonance. Also, the image of the snake as it lifts its head from the cavern (*longo caput extulit antro*, *Met.* 3.37) seems to be on Seneca's mind as he describes Oedipus once his eyes have been removed:

*attollit caput
cavisque lustrans orbibus cali plagas
noctem experitur.* (971-3)

Whereas the head of the serpent emerged from darkness, this passage marks Oedipus' descent into darkness.

Though the ferocity of the snake and Oedipus are developed with similar vocabulary (and the two figures' descent into or ascent from their respective caves can be read together), the two are most closely related through "knotty" language. Words related to twisting dominate the story of the snake in *Metamorphoses*: *volubilibus* (3.41), *nexibus* (3.41), *torquet* (3.42), *sinuatur* (3.42), *complexibus* (3.48), *curvamine* (3.66), and *retorsit* (3.68) among others. While serpentine words do indeed appear in Oedipus' fury scene -- *torsit* (962), *orbes* (967, 973), *evoluit* (967), and *revulsis* (979)-- the image of Oedipus as defined by his "knottiness" was most clearly developed in Laius' statement concerning the fact that he is "more entangled than his Sphinx" (641). This is particularly interesting given the fact that the Sphinx is described thus:

*saxaque impatiens morae
revulsit unguis viscera expectans mea;
nodosa sortis verba et implexos dolos
ac triste carmen alitis solui ferae.* (99-103)

While Oedipus claims here that he untied the knotty words and tangled trap of the Sphinx, it would appear that he has merely perpetuated the involution of Thebes. Oedipus is then in some respects nothing more than a continuation of the twisted foes that have plagued Thebes since its inception, be they serpents or Sphinxes. Oedipus is merely the most recent *monstrum* to be generated by the Theban land (*tempore ex illo nova monstra semper/protulit Tellus, 724*).

One peculiar issue to note when considering the textual correspondences is the way in which the three figures are portrayed as victors. The Sphinx, before Oedipus resolves the riddle, preens over her prey (*praedae imminens, 95*). This picture harkens back to the depiction of the snake in Ovid, when Cadmus first catches sight of the monster:

*ut nemus intravit letataque corpora vedit
victoremque supra spatiosi tergoris hostem
tristia sanguinea lambentem vulnera lingua*
(*Met. 3.55-7*)

Cadmus sees the serpent as a victor looming over his slain companions. The serpent's victory is soon reversed as Cadmus slays the monster and then stands over the defeated snake:

Dum spatium victor victi considerat hostis (*Met. 3.95*)

The sequence involving the fury of Oedipus (915-979) features a similar shift in conqueror, but Seneca inverts the order. The messenger, in reference to Oedipus -- who has just realized that he has committed his crimes but has yet to atone for them, reports:

*...se scelere convictum Oedipus
Damnabit ipse* (916-7)

Oedipus' defeat, expressed in the language of law, is what then drives him to carry out his own punishment. After he tears out his own eyes, the messenger says:

...et victor deos
Conclamat omnis (974-5)

Oedipus, through his self-punishment, has attained the status of victor. Seneca's contrivance that Oedipus' reversal from conquered to conqueror coincide with his Aristotelian reversal is underscored through Seneca's retooling of the story involving Cadmus' battle with the serpent.

I have argued that Oedipus can be understood as a parallel to Cadmus, an assertion that must be explained in light of the above argument concerning the connection between Oedipus and the serpent slain by Cadmus. Though it may seem strange that these two readings might coexist, it certainly fits within the world of *Oedipus*. After all, the object of Oedipus' hunt throughout the work turns out to be none other than himself. Thus, reflexivity is certainly the idiom of the play as the relations of hunter and hunted, judge and defendant, parent and child, and other such pairs collapse in onto one another. It is in Thebes that subject and object are one in the same, past and future wholly inextricable. In this frame of reference, it is quite compelling that Seneca would contrive to map Oedipus onto both Cadmus and the serpent.

In this chapter, I have noted several intertextual relationships between Book III of *Metamorphoses* and Seneca's *Oedipus*. I have also explicated shared themes and vocabulary with an eye towards the way in which these correspondences provide greater dramatic force, forge connections between the characters in their respective

texts, and overall provide for a more refined approach to analyzing the structures of the work. The readings offered in this chapter are designed to demonstrate the many ways in which Seneca employs the *Metamorphoses* for a variety of literary purposes. The next chapter, which will show how the literary interacts with the philosophical, will use the thematic interplay established between Book III of the *Metamorphoses* and *Oedipus* as the basis for an examination of how Seneca links Oedipus and Ovid's Narcissus in order to develop the Stoic notion of the "exemplary mirror" of self-monitoring as explicated in Seneca's philosophical writings.

II. *Natura in Uno Vertit*: Narcissus at Thebes

In the first chapter, I examined the literary significance of the intertextualities and thematic interplays between Seneca's *Oedipus* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* Book III. I demonstrated how Seneca links Oedipus to multiple figures in Book III -- chiefly Cadmus and Actaeon -- to present him as paradigmatic of the plight of Theban leaders. Each of these tragedies presented in Ovid and reworked in Seneca develops a theme in which the character's reversal is a direct result of the "victims seeing something."²⁰ While Cadmus' seeing the heifer and Actaeon's impingement upon Diana are memorable for the primacy of vision within their respective narratives, no story in Book III connects sight and tragedy like the tale of Narcissus. This chapter will first focus on the thematic and lexical parallels between the story of Seneca's Oedipus and Ovid's Narcissus before considering the philosophical significance of this relationship.

Ovid's narrative of Narcissus in *Metamorphoses* is distinct for two reasons. First, as Bartsch notes, Ovid's telling of the story is an innovation within the Hellenistic-Roman tradition.²¹ The original myth of Narcissus, as related by Pausanias (IX, 31, 7-8), either centered around a young boy who fell in love with his reflection without ever realizing that the longed-for image was indeed that of himself or told of a love between a sister and a brother. Regardless of what the "original" version may be, Bartsch asserts that Ovid's narrative is original as it has been transformed into a "story of *coming to know* the self, of moving from the naïve

²⁰ Spencer 2007, p. 40

²¹ Bartsch 2006, p.86

Narcissus to the knowing Narcissus... and the emphasis on the moment of self-recognition seem[s] to be uniquely Ovidian.”²² In Ovid, sight, image, and recognition coalesce to generate the tragic destruction of Narcissus.

The second notable aspect of the story of Narcissus is Ovid’s rather peculiar placement of the tale within the greater Theban narrative. Gildenhard and Zissos, following Loewenstein and Hardie, note how the episode of Narcissus occurs “at the very juncture when the sequence of Theban legends calls for the appearance of an Oedipal figure.”²³ Though *Metamorphoses* offers no direct intertextual allusions to Sophocles’ *Oedipus* (the most memorable iteration of the myth), the parallel themes -- most notably a recognition and reversal derived from sight -- and structural correspondences work to unite the two texts. Gildenhard and Zissos assert that Ovid, in mapping Narcissus onto the "thematic complex" of Sophocles’ *Oedipus*, leads the two figures to emerge as “thematic mirror reflections of each other.”²⁴ Ovid’s innovation in the treatment of sight and recognition as well as his possible use of Sophocles’ *Oedipus* demonstrate the degree to which the story of Narcissus is steeped in tragic elements.

If the reading of Ovid’s *Narcissus* offered by Gildenhard and Zissos is valid, it would seem that Seneca, in activating *Narcissus* within *Oedipus*, must implicitly develop Sophocles’ *Oedipus* as refracted through *Metamorphoses*. Though it is indeed tempting to examine the possibility that Seneca himself exhibits an

²² Bartsch 2006, p. 86

²³ Gildenhard and Zissos 2000, p.130

²⁴ Gildenhard and Zissos 2000, p.141

awareness of Narcissus as Oedipal, I will focus primarily on the thematic reflections and verbal resonances between Ovid's Narcissus and Seneca's Oedipus.

The story of Narcissus begins with Tiresias' oracular statement that Narcissus will have a long life *si se non noverit* (*Met.* 3.348). The tale then turns to Echo's fruitless pursuit of Narcissus, a sequence that ends with Echo losing her body but retaining her voice (*Met.* 3.399). Ovid, in contriving that Narcissus fail to recognize that Echo is merely repeating his own words, prefigures Narcissus' subsequent journey to recognition as his image is "echoed back" to him. This episode, in which Narcissus eventually does recognize the reflexivity of his projections, is dominated by vocabulary pertaining to seeking (*petere* 3.426, 3.433) and vision (*videre* 3.430, *oculos* 3.431) before culminating in a literal and tragic recognition (*iste ego sum! sensi; nec me mea fallit imago* *Met.* 3.463). The self-recognition and self-annihilation that brings about Narcissus' reversal is characterized by "newness" (3.350) and reflexivity (3.460-501).

Seneca's *Oedipus* operates with similar vocabulary and themes as the story is framed and, in fact, generated by an oracle (12). As Oedipus searches for the individual that he unwittingly constructs as "Other", primacy is granted to seeking (*petere* prominently at 880, 917, and 927 among others) and sight (most poignantly at 954-7, 999-1003). The work culminates in the tragic recognition (868) and subsequent self-blinding of Oedipus (958-979), which is notable for its "newness" (62, 724-5, 943-7 among others) and reflexivity (915-7).

An oracular edict features prominently in both works. In *Metamorphoses*, Juno blinds Tiresias, after he rules in favor of Jupiter in a question concerning which

gender takes greater pleasure in intercourse. Jupiter, in order to "lighten the penalty" of blindness (*Met.* 3.338), grants Tiresias the power to know the future (*Met.* 3.338). Then Liriope, a river-nymph, consults Tiresias so that she might learn if her child Narcissus will enjoy a long life. The following line holds the answer:

Fatidicus vates "si se non noverit" inquit. (Met. 3.348)

This cryptic response, an Ovidian twist on the ancient edict "know thyself", eventually finds its complement in Narcissus' recognition -- *Iste ego sum* (*Met.* 3.461). It is only after the recognition and destruction -- notable for the novelty of his passion and manner of death (*Met.* 3.350) -- that the true meaning and tragic quality of this oracle is made clear.

Gildenhard and Zissos contend that Tiresias' role in the episode places Narcissus within a Sophoclean context, thereby "delimiting from the outset the textual boundaries of the static epyllion through a dynamic, intertextual 'frame'."²⁵ Ovid, in placing Narcissus within such a structure, "signals from the very outset that a typically Oedipean dialectic of blindness and insight is inscribed into the life of Ovid's protagonist as well."²⁶ I have cited the contentions of Gildenhard and Zissos here not to suggest that Seneca necessarily read Ovid in a similar fashion but to highlight the degree to which the Tiresias sequence works to introduce the tale of Narcissus as one that holds sight and knowledge at its very center. After all, it is a blind man that foresees the destruction precipitated by the attainment of self-knowledge.

²⁵ Gildenhard and Zissos 2000, p.133

²⁶ Gildenhard and Zissos 2000, p.132

An oracle, which prophesies parricide and incest, provides the impetus for Oedipus to abandon the kingdom of his father Polybus and journey to Thebes (12-21). After Creon reports that the oracle of Phoebus guarantees that the plague will be lifted if the murderer of Laius is exiled, Oedipus swears an oath condemning the slayer of Laius -- an oath unwittingly aimed at himself. He prays that the one who killed Laius commit all the crimes that Oedipus had fled (263) and addresses Apollo:

fatidica vatis ora Cirrhaeae movens (269)

The use of the word *fatidica* is rather important as it is used only three other times in the Senecan tragic corpus: here, then at 302 with regard to the *extispicium*, and again at 1042 to describe Apollo. It is worth noting also that the placement of *fatidica vatis* at the beginning of the line can be seen to echo Ovid's *fatidicus vates* (*Met.* 3.348). The dramatic irony of Oedipus' oath -- that the killer of Laius perpetrate his own crimes -- is readily apparent and the pathos engendered by such irony is heightened when read with the Narcissus episode. After all, it is Oedipus who clearly does not "know himself" as he utters these words. Once he does "know himself" -- that is to say becomes fully aware of who he is and what he has done -- his destruction immediately occurs.

Narcissus sets himself on the path of fate as revealed by Tiresias when he first spots his image in the pond. After Ovid describes how Narcissus is mesmerized at the sight of what he perceives to be someone else, he begins to tell of how Narcissus becomes enthralled by the beauty of his own image. While he gazes, Narcissus

se cupit inprudens et, qui probat, ipse probatur,

dumque petit, petitur, pariterque accendit et ardet.
(*Met.* 3.425-6)

As Narcissus stares into the pond, the process of uniting himself to this Other begins. It is through these pairings of active and passive verbs that Ovid colors Narcissus' loss of separation between subject and object, Self and Other. Hardie notes how, in Lacanian terms, Narcissus' delusion centers on this hope "of a total merging of his own self in the self of the Other, and of the unmediated recognition of his self by the Other."²⁷ Ovid relies upon this play of active and passive to demonstrate the extent to which Narcissus exemplifies a disintegration of the distinction between the one seeking and the one sought.

Indeed, vocabulary concerning "seeking" colors important sequences elsewhere in the episode. After Narcissus has become infatuated with his image, the narrator, in a striking apostrophe, cries:

*credula, quid frustra simulacra fugacia captas?
quod petis, est nusquam; quod amas, avertere, perdes!*
(*Met.* 3.432-3)

Later, as Narcissus begins to grow concerned regarding the ontological reality of the image (but before his moment of specular recognition), he asks the image, *quove petitus abis?* (*Met.* 3.455). Thus, the word *petere* occupies an important position at the instant Narcissus falls in love with his reflection, at the moment the narrator pulls the reader back from the pond to underscore the fact that this is indeed merely a *simulacrum*, and at the point before Narcissus' literal and figurative self-recognition.

²⁷ Hardie 1990, p.145

“Seeking” plays a prominent role in the tragedy both thematically and lexically as this motif characterizes Oedipus’ search for the killer of Laius and, incidentally, his true Self. At crucial junctures in the tragedy, Seneca uses the word *petere* to drive forward the action. After the report on the oracle of Phoebus, Oedipus commands Tiresias:

fare, quem poenae petant (292)

Tiresias’ uncertainty in the face of this exhortation is what ultimately compels him to perform the *extispicium*, which reveals the fact that Oedipus’ parricide and incest are directly responsible for the plague. Oedipus, just after refusing to accept this revelation, says:

Curas revoluit animus et repetit metus (764)

Here, Oedipus “reexamines” the fears that he vocalized at the beginning of the play in his opening monologue (1-81). Of course, it is shortly after this statement when Oedipus, after “seeking again” these fears as manifested in questions about his birth and arrival in Thebes, discovers the truth of his identity. In the speech immediately following Phorbas’ disclosure concerning Oedipus’ true birth mother, the king addresses himself:

*i, perge, propero regiam gressu pete:
gratare matri liberis auctam domum.* (880-1)

The use of the word *petere* at important plot points in *Oedipus* recalls how Ovid employed the word at key moments to structure his tale around the idea of “seeking”. The prevalence of this word in both narratives constructs a framework that places special emphasis on one seeking outside of himself and finds its irony in the fact that the sought-after Other is indeed the Self.

Vision is of the utmost importance when considering these two texts. It is little surprise then, that the conduit for vision -- *oculi* -- is prominent in both works. As Narcissus gazes into the pool, an error deceives his eyes:

*quid videat, nescit; sed quod videt, uritur illo,
atque oculos idem qui decipit incitat error. (Met. 3.430-1)*

In spite of the fact that Narcissus is able to look upon his reflection, the image that he sees fails to lead to the proper insight. Ovid constructs this moment in such a way as to emphasize the gap between sight and sure knowledge. For Narcissus, the *simulacrum* of the illusory Other does not immediately lead to understanding but instead deceives him in such a way as to begin to generate his own destruction. As the episode progresses, Narcissus cannot draw himself away from the pool:

perque oculos perit ipse suos. (Met. 3.440)

Sight does not offer Narcissus certain knowledge; rather, it offers destruction. The eyes work to ensnare Narcissus in the specular as he slowly wastes away by the pond.

As Narcissus attempts to embrace his image, he notices that the words mouthed by the mirrored Other do not reach his ears (*Met. 3.462*). He then immediately recognizes himself:

*Iste ego sum: sensi, nec me mea fallit imago
Uror amore mei. (Met. 3.463-4)*

The moment of recognition creates a network of connections between sight, self-recognition, deceit, and self-knowledge. Shadi Bartsch best captures the irony at play here as she refers to the line *nec me mea fallit imago* as the “supreme insider’s joke”: after all, it is only after Narcissus realizes that the *imago* is indeed an *imago*

that he deems it such.²⁸ True to the prophet's words, this self-knowledge only brings about dissolution as Narcissus, consciously enraptured by his own image, cries:

Nec mihi mors gravis est (Met. 3.471)

Oedipus regularly refers to his power to observe and untangle the obscure. He takes pride -- almost to the point of arrogance -- in his ability to seek the proper *viam* and follow the *vestigia* that might lead him to truth. Yet, as the play progresses, the king, who once claimed that *ambigua soli noscere Oedipodae datur* (216), fails to understand his own identity and his relation to the pestilence that plagues Thebes. Finally, after the mystery is unraveled for him by Phorbas, Oedipus rages and “destroys the instrument and symbol of his reason” -- his *oculos*.²⁹ The messenger reports Oedipus' words:

*mors eligatur longa. quaeratur via
qua nec sepultis mixtus et vivis tamen
exemptus erres: morere, sed citra patrem.* (949-51)

The long death that Oedipus chooses is an eternal night, blindness. Earlier in the play, Tiresias spoke of having to “dig out fate” (*fata eruantur*, 297); now, it is Oedipus who digs (961) as he screams and rips out his eyes (961-70). Oedipus works to eliminate “the possibility of further superficial vision” with his blinding.³⁰ As with Ovid's Narcissus, the surface has deceived Oedipus as he mistook Polybus for his true father and Thebes for his foreign home. Like Narcissus, Oedipus became convinced of the reality of an Other that was not Self; upon his recognition of the fact that this putative Other was indeed Self, not-knowing Oedipus is slain by the

²⁸ Bartsch 2006, p.91

²⁹ Schiesaro 2003, p.12

³⁰ Busch 2007, p.261

knowing Oedipus. Or, as C. J. Littlewood puts it, "Oedipus becomes the blind object of his own search."³¹

Oedipus and Narcissus are not simply linked through the recognition and destruction generated by a tragic relationship of sight and self-knowledge, their plight is remarkable for its "newness". Indeed, Ovid emphasizes the unprecedented nature of Narcissus' demise as he bookends the story by stressing the singularity of the episode. After describing Tiresias' prophecy, the text reads:

*vana diu visa est vox auguris: exitus illam
resque probat letique genus novitasque furoris (Met. 3.349-50)*

The peculiar quality of Narcissus' destruction testifies to the truth of what appears to be a rather puzzling oracular response -- that he will be long lived, *si se non noverit (Met. 3.348)*. As the prophecy is shown to be true and Narcissus begins to waste away by the pool in auto-espial entrancement, he prays:

*votum in amante novum, vellem, quod amamus, abesset.
(Met. 3.468)*

This new passion (*Met. 3.350*) inspires a new kind of prayer as Narcissus is unable to draw himself away from his own reflection. There, by the pool, he wilts away before blooming into a flower.

The uniqueness of Oedipus' situation -- with his parricide, incest, and recognition -- is noted repeatedly in the tragedy. Oedipus even exhibits an awareness of his own distinctiveness, although he locates this in the fact that he alone is spared by the plague (28-36) and he alone can confront the coiled situation

³¹ Littlewood 2004, p.175

(87-102) and untangle it (216). The Theban ode (724-54) casts Oedipus as a paradigm of tragic destiny (see Chapter I) as it colors Boeotia as follows:

*Tempore ex illo nova monstra semper
protulit Tellus.* (724-5)

The ode presents Thebes as a land defined by the regeneration and reoccurrence of *monstra*, with Oedipus as the latest example. This language finds its resolution in the closing sequence as the messenger reports Oedipus' words:

*Natura in uno vertit Oedipoda, novos
commenta partus, supplicis eadem meis
novetur. iterum vivere atque iterum mori
liceat, renasci semper ut totiens nova
supplicia pendas—utere ingenio, miser.* (943-7)

Oedipus prays for repeated regeneration, that each birth might bring about a new punishment. The emphasis on "newness" within Oedipus' speech is preceded by the chorus' telling the messenger *ede quid portes novi* (914) -- a line that brims with irony.

In the preceding pages I have established a link between Seneca's Oedipus and Ovid's Narcissus. I now turn from how Narcissus informs the literary qualities of the work to his effect on the philosophical features of *Oedipus*. For Seneca, Narcissus is a literary figure defined by his self-reflexivity- his gaze, seeking, and target are all self-directed. The Stoic philosophical tradition, as developed by Seneca (particularly in works like *Epistles* and *De Ira*), emphasizes a cultivation of the Self through reflexive strategies such as self-command and self-monitoring. Characters in Senecan tragedy regularly rely on the appropriation of these Stoic tools to compel themselves to action and thus "become" their tragic identity. I will first survey self-fashioning in *Oedipus* before examining how these techniques

interact with the Narcissus-inspired reflexivity in this tragedy to refine Seneca's teachings on the exemplary mirror as a tool for self-improvement.

In "Commanding Constantia in Senecan Tragedy", Christopher Star demonstrates how self-monitoring and self-shaping in Seneca's revenge tragedies (*Agamemnon*, *Thyestes*, and *Medea*) work to enable Seneca's characters to achieve their tragic potential.³² Star shows how Seneca presents consistency in character in his tragic and philosophical corpus as a product of the language of self-command. The successful attainment of consistency is of the utmost importance to Seneca as he urges his readers "to play one role" (Ep. 120.22). The characters in Senecan tragedy rely on self-naming, an awareness of mythical precedent, and the consideration of what is *digna* of themselves in order to achieve this consistency.

In *Oedipus*, the only character that engages in self-naming is Oedipus. He refers to himself a total of three times (216, 943, 1003). Each time, this self-directed action is intimately connected to his perception of his tragic identity. After Creon bemoans the fact that the oracle of Phoebus concerning the origin of the plague is cryptic, Oedipus responds:

*Fare sit dubium licet.
Ambigua soli noscere Oedipodae datur. (215-6)*

Here, Oedipus perceives his defining characteristic to consist of his ability to resolve riddles. At this juncture in the plot, he has good reason to believe this, since the self-defining action (that he is aware of) is the victory over the Sphinx (87-102). Still, Oedipus' use of his own name, as opposed to simply a first person pronoun, is rather striking. After all, in Senecan tragedy, characters "are intensely aware of their

³² Star 2006

previous existence in the domain of literature.”³³ In this way, figures like Medea actively work “to live up to their own tragic reputation.”³⁴ But, what if a character fails to recognize his true identity, his pre-existing reputation? How can he fashion himself, live up to literary precedent, and consistently play this role?

This issue -- self-recognition -- lies at the heart of Oedipus and further develops the king’s relationship to Narcissus. Oedipus’ other two uses of self-naming (943, 1003) occur after he learns of his true identity and demonstrate his shift from misapprehension to knowledge. The messenger reports that Oedipus, plotting his punishment for parricide and incest, says:

*illa quae leges ratas
Natura in uno vertit Oedipoda. (942-3)*

These lines, in addition to developing the singularity of Oedipus’ plight (as discussed above), demonstrate that Oedipus has begun to apprehend his role within both nature and literary tradition. The self-referential language, when read with line 216 (*Ambigua soli noscere Oedipodae datur*), shows how Oedipus has shifted from assuming that his character is defined by "riddle-solving" to realizing a much more wretched characteristic. This journey from ignorance to knowledge, as charted by his use of self-naming, reaches its terminus when Oedipus, after his self-blinding, says:

Vultus Oedipodam hic decet. (1003)

³³ Schiesaro 2003, p.224

³⁴ Star 2006, p.223.

Oedipus' mutilation does indeed articulate his "final acceptance of the horrific Delphic identity"³⁵, while the use of self-naming confirms Oedipus' awareness of what defines him. Yet it would seem that even though Oedipus "became" himself with the blinding, it is not until he *recognizes* his true identity -- the blind Oedipus -- that this episode is complete. And so, the arc of Oedipus' self-knowledge may be graphed through his use of self-naming. The nexus of knowledge, sight, and recognition, which was so integral to *Oedipus*, finds further development in Seneca's teachings for the Stoic *proficiens*. Thus, I will now shift my focus to the role of these concepts in Seneca's philosophical writings before returning again to *Oedipus*.

³⁵ Mader 1995, p.306

III. *Movit Me Imago*: Self-Recognition and Self-Construction in Oedipus

Consistency is at the core of Seneca's philosophical writings, most notably in the *Epistulae*. In Letter 35, he urges his epistolary interlocutor, Lucilius, *ut constes tibi* (Ep. 35.4). This "consistency with self," rooted in self-reflexive language, is essential for the Stoic *proficiens*. Seneca writes:

*hoc ergo a te exige, ut qualem institueris praestare te,
talem usque ad exitum serves; effice ut possis laudari, si
minus, ut adgnosci.* (Ep. 120.22)

In this letter, Seneca emphasizes that, no matter the *fortuna* or *accidentia* encountered by the individual (120.12), he must remain constant in respect to his *animus*. This consistency is in direct opposition to the *mentis fluctuatio* and *adsidua iactatio* that marks a *mala mens* (120.20). In this way, it is the wise man who is able "to play one role" (*unum hominem agere*) from beginning to end and, if he cannot be praised, at the very least he must be recognized (*adgnosci*) (Ep. 120.22). For Seneca, constancy is itself situated in the nexus of *fortuna*, recognition, and *mens*.

This consistency of self is central to what Michel Foucault deems "techniques of the self", that is, the processes focused on achieving a transformation of the individual.³⁶ The dialogical underpinnings of this "technique", which Foucault understands as being fully developed in Senecan philosophy,³⁷ is also found in Greek Epic and Tragedy.³⁸ The defining difference with Seneca is the fact that this dialogue

³⁶ Foucault 1985

³⁷ Foucault 1986

³⁸ Gill 1996

is not intrapersonal but “interpersonal.”³⁹ The Stoic does not rely on the values of the community or an external interlocutor; rather, he constructs values and an interlocutor internally.

Star emphasizes the extent to which the construction and maintenance of the Stoic self is “intensely rhetorical” and grounded in “repetition of the figure of self-apostrophe and command.”⁴⁰ Part of what enables the Stoic to engage in this exchange with himself is his ability to perform what psychologists today refer to as executive function, a cognitive process that enables one to govern other cognitive processes. In Senecan Stoicism, this would involve an internalized ideal self that monitors the thought and action of the “self-in-progress.”⁴¹ Once this “ideal” is established, the judgments of the “ideal” generate an improvement and growth in the consistency of the “self-in-progress” that ultimately proves to be the “major impetus toward self-improvement.”⁴²

The process by which the internalized self is established and cultivated is explained quite clearly in Seneca’s *Epistles*. Seneca quotes Epicurus:

"aliquis vir bonus nobis diligendus est ac semper ante oculos habendus, ut sic tamquam illo spectante vivamus et omnia tamquam illo vidente faciamus" (Ep. 11.8)

Seneca suggests that it is important to select a *vir bonus*, a Cato or Laelius (*Ep.* 11.10), who is able to keep a watchful eye over the *proficiens*. The *vir bonus*, preferably an exemplary Stoic, ought to possess life, speech, and face that would appeal to the self-in-progress (*Ep.* 11.10). Seneca explains that the *proficiens* must

³⁹ Star 2006, p. 209

⁴⁰ Star 2006, p. 208

⁴¹ Bartsch 2006, p.231

⁴² Bartsch 2006, p.192

then internalize the judging eye of the *vir bonus*, thereby exhibiting the *vir bonus* to himself (*illum tibi semper ostende*, Ep. 11.10). It must be noted that Seneca here does not suggest that there is an ideal judge or set a values relating to the *vir bonus*. The explicit requirement seems to be that this individual is viewed by the *proficiens* to be of a certain ilk, while, based on the examples, the implicit assumption is that this person is a Stoic sage. The self-selection and self-construction of this internal Other as well as the language of statements like *illum tibi semper ostende*, demonstrate the degree to which Seneca privileges self-reflexivity.

Once the *proficiens* has internally constructed the exemplary Stoic, he must work to do everything as if being carefully monitored by that individual. In Epistle 25, Seneca highlights the centrality of vision within this belief system as he instructs Lucilius to act as if he were living under the gaze of the *vir bonus* (*praesentis oculis*) - or, at the very least, as if *anyone* were watching (*spectet aliquis*) (Ep. 25.5). With the watchful eye ever-present, the *proficiens* then works to fashion himself as one who would not dare to sin in the company of such a man (*dum te efficit eum cum quo peccare non audeas*, Ep. 25.6). Such a strategy finds sight and reflexivity at its core as the individual can eventually progress to the point that he might consider himself as possessing sufficient *dignationem* as to no longer necessitate this Other but only the Self (*cum hoc effeceris et aliqua coeperit apud te tui esse dignatio*, Ep. 25.6).

Implicit in Seneca's system for personal development is a tension between the undeveloped *proficiens* and the internalized Ideal. The *proficiens* possesses the impulse to transgress (*peccare*), but the presence of the Ideal leads him to not dare to sin. Thus, even though he does not act upon this impulse, the impulse is

nevertheless present; it is simply regulated by the gaze of the *vir bonus*. Such a conception, to follow Bartsch⁴³ in borrowing from Harry Frankfurt,⁴⁴ would imply that the agent is marked by his “ability to make rational judgments about his or her desires, and, as result, to form second-order desires (desires about which desires to have).”⁴⁵ In this way, the *vir bonus* functions as a generator of second-order judgments as his gaze drives the fledgling individual to act in a manner befitting *dignatio*.

The relationship between sight, reflexivity, and moral action is rather well developed within the Senecan corpus, especially as it relates to mirrors -- the conduits for recursive gaze. In *De Ira*, Seneca examines how, for the angry, the sight of their own image (*imago*) in a mirror (*speculum*) can lead to a change in their disposition. The presence of a mirror works to reveal a simple fact to the angry: they don't know themselves (*non agnoverunt se, De Ira 2.36.1*). This word, whose significance within the Senecan philosophical corpus was alluded to on page 43 and whose significance within the Senecan Tragic corpus will be discussed later, works to underscore how the mind controlled by *fluctuatio* is unable to even literally recognize itself. The metaphorical recognition engendered by a *speculum* is expounded upon in *Naturales Quaestiones*, where Seneca writes that mirrors were invented so that a man might know himself and thereby enjoy knowledge of himself (*ut homo ipse se nosset...sui notitiam, NQ 1.17.4*). In *De Clementia*, Seneca develops the notion of a mirror as a vehicle for improvement as he writes in the opening lines

⁴³ Bartsch 2006

⁴⁴ Frankfurt 1971

⁴⁵ Bartsch 2006, p.10

that he aims to function as a mirror for the young emperor Nero (*modo speculi, De Clem. 1.1*). In fact, Seneca believes in the power of a mirror to such an extent that he contends that anyone who comes to a mirror to change himself has already changed (*qui ad speculum venerat ut se mutaret, iam mutaverat, De Ira 2.36.3*).

The prevalence of mirror imagery within the philosophical work is itself symptomatic of the degree to which reflexivity is involved in the process of self-construction and self-identification. Even in the absence of an element that works to literalize the idea of self-reflection, Seneca urges the *proficiens* to carry out an examination of himself at the close of each day, much in the way of a judge reviewing a defendant. In *De Ira*, Seneca explains how, each night, he scrutinizes his whole day -- both actions and words -- before himself as he seeks to hide nothing from himself (*nihil mihi ipse abscondo, De Ira 3.36.3*). It is this self-scrutiny that functions as an “instrument to carry forward psycho-ethical development” in the aspiring Stoic.⁴⁶

The above brief outline of Stoic principles concerning the construction of an ethical self through a process of internalizing a "second-order" self (be it a mirror or judge) is intended to provide a background for an examination of some of the seemingly peculiar motifs and characteristics of Seneca's *Oedipus* as it relates to both his own philosophy as well as Ovid's Narcissus. The exact nature of the relationship between Seneca's philosophy and tragedy is hotly contested, with some like Nussbaum asserting that Seneca aims to instill a sense of “critical

⁴⁶ Gill 2009, p.78

spectatorship⁴⁷ and that certain Senecan tragedies work to develop Stoic teachings concerning passion.⁴⁸ Conversely, scholars like Dingel argue for a total separation of the two genres.⁴⁹ Others, like Schiesaro, are ostensibly uncertain regarding their own position, which may “evolve” over time to endorse the possibility of a philosophically-informed reading of tragedy.⁵⁰ The approach most suitable to the aims of this paper is one correlative to the most recent publications of Bartsch and Star, who both seek to identify and explicate the Stoic tendencies prevalent in Senecan tragedies. Star argues rather compellingly for a “dialogical relationship and engagement between Seneca’s philosophy and tragedy” as he asserts that “Seneca is neither negating, inverting, nor denying his philosophical ideals; rather, he is expanding them.”⁵¹

The notion of a philosopher mobilizing *poesis* to advance a specific teaching is far from a modern assertion as Stoic sages from Chrysippus to Quintus Sextius frequently spoke to the utility of such a strategy. Throughout his *Epistles*, Seneca writes in support of the effectiveness of metaphor and simile in elucidating themes or promoting deeper comprehension in the *proficiens*. For Seneca, metaphor has the capacity to prop up the weaknesses (*imbellicitas*) in understanding so that sage and student might be drawn together to the point of examination (*Ep.* 59.6). To testify to the effect of a well-constructed simile on an individual, Seneca describes the manner in which Sextius’ parallel of the soldier and Stoic sage works to foster an

⁴⁷ Nussbaum 1993

⁴⁸ Nussbaum 1994, pp. 448-453

⁴⁹ Dingel 1974

⁵⁰ For an argument against such a reading see Schiesaro 1994 and for an argument sympathetic to such an interpretation see Schiesaro 2003

⁵¹ Star 2006, pp. 211, 241

understanding of how an individual might fortify himself against fear in order to stand firm in his resolve (*Ep.* 59.8). Seneca, in reflecting on the force of the simile, writes, *Movit me imago* (*Ep.* 59.7).

As it might prove difficult to explicate *Oedipus* qua *imago* divorced from any greater scholarly context or without proper consideration of how others have sought to understand Stoic motifs in Senecan tragedy, an examination of similar approaches is necessary. The play that has been most often explicated in terms of its appropriation of Stoic techniques is *Medea*. Moreover, as a consideration of Stoicism in *Medea* also constructs a reference point with which *Oedipus* will be contrasted, it is essential to consider scholarship as it pertains to this work.

At the beginning of *Medea*, the tragic heroine pledges that she “will become Medea” (*Medea*. . . *Fiam*, 171). First, this act of self-naming, which has been demonstrated to be a key feature of Senecan drama, links Medea to her tragic predecessors in a form of literary determinism. Second, it functions to situate Medea within a strictly Stoic paradigm in that Medea is also conceiving of a person after whom to model herself. This, in turn, leads one to recall the role of the *vir bonus*, the individual that the *proficiens* internalizes to bring about growth. After all, as Seneca writes in *De Beata Vita*, one must emulate the man who endeavors great things (*magna conantis*) so that one always places in his mind greater things (*mente maiora concipere*) than that which is even possible (*De Beata Vita*. 20.2). In this way, at the onset of *Medea*, the heroine works to internally construct a form greater than her current self. However, this internalized Other is no Laelius; rather it is her

literary predecessor, the Medea that has already accomplished all that first-order Medea hopes to execute.

As the play progresses, Medea continues the processes of self-monitoring and self-naming -- along with addresses to her *animus* -- as she works to construct herself in line with her ideal "Medea". As Star notes in his explication of the Stoic techniques of self-fashioning in Seneca's revenge tragedies, the "use of Stoicism to achieve unstoic goals places the tragic characters squarely within the Stoic paradigm" due to the fact that the characters "cannot step outside of this linguistic system of Stoic self-creation."⁵²

Bartsch's reading of the work reaches similar conclusions as she argues that Medea's progress in the tragedy works to construct a second-order framework. Medea, unlike the proper *proficiens*, vacillates between a second-order framework that would censure such a course of action and one that would endorse her decision to kill her children. In effect, there is a battle between whether she might act in accordance with "the values of her community" or the values "unique to her alone" -- a value system predicated on vengeance.⁵³ The second-order framework that Medea eventually constructs is one that is founded in her mythical tradition, that is, the Medea that enjoys revenge through slaughter. Consequently, Medea then works to appropriate Stoic tools of self-construction to transform herself into "Medea" as the figure exists in mytho-literary consciousness. Yet, her ability to "become Medea" (*Medea nunc sum*, 910), though wholly reliant on Stoic tools, would not be possible were it not for a complete understanding of who this "literary" Medea actually is.

⁵² Star 2006, pp. 210, 241

⁵³ Bartsch 2006, p.269

As Schiesaro has noted, Senecan tragedy is a "highly metadramatic form of theater" in which characters assume a certain "authorial role."⁵⁴ There are some characters -- especially those in revenge tragedies -- who are able to "control the dramatic action" in the play. These characters "display a superior knowledge" that allows them to actively construct a tragedy for themselves, rather than the tragedy being generated from the elements of the plot itself. Whereas Schiesaro's central thesis examines the effect that this phenomenon has on the "poetics of the play," it is more within the scope of this paper to examine how this "authorial role" is understood and mobilized by Medea, a figure Schiesaro marks as enjoying the position of "omniscient narrator" in that she is effectively constructing the plot.

Medea's "authorial role" and status as "omniscient narrator" are predicated upon the fact that she indeed knows the "Medea" of literary tradition. She is able to appropriate Stoic devices such as self-naming and self-addresses to the *animus* in order to bring about her desired Self by virtue of the fact that she is intimately aware of what it indeed means to "become Medea." Thus, her privileging of a second-order framework that is congruent with the Medea of, say, Euripides affords her a certain command over the textual space. As Bartsch contends, however, this second-order framework is one that is constructed in order to lead to the "fulfillment of first-order desires."⁵⁵ For Bartsch, this phenomenon underscores a certain fact that is problematic in Stoicism: the independence of the dialogic self,

⁵⁴ Schiesaro 2003, pp. 13-16

⁵⁵ Bartsch 2006, p.272

which is not grounded in the community, creates incurable issues. In effect, “Medea becomes Medea by rejecting the values of her community.”⁵⁶

Although Medea has fulfilled the goal of the Stoic *proficiens* by achieving unity between the first- and second-order agents, this is not enough for her: she must also be recognized (*agnosci*). Just as Thyestes, upon recognition of the true nature of Atreus’ terrible feast, cries, “I recognize my brother” (*agnosco fratrem* 1006), so too does Medea seek this same recognition as she, after murdering her children, asks, “Do you recognize your wife?” (*coniugem agnoscis*, 1021). Star, remarking upon the manner in which Medea and Atreus were able to develop themselves, writes, “This final recognition is the result of their successful ability to demand consistency of psyche and action from themselves.”⁵⁷ For Medea, this consistency was of course possible through her self-knowledge and reliance on the tools of self-construction; this act of recognition is also remarkable for the manner in which “personal self-recognition and literary recognition necessarily coalesce here.”⁵⁸ In effect, this drive toward recognition on the part of Medea is the perverse fulfillment of Seneca’s edict that one must seek to be recognized (*agnosci*) (*Ep.* 120.22).

It is in the tragedy of *Medea* that Bartsch finds a “sobering counter-example” to Seneca’s philosophy regarding the exemplary mirror.⁵⁹ Medea, in her misapplication of the tools for self-improvement, constructs an environment void of “controls on second-order volition” while at the same time achieving the ideal *telos*

⁵⁶ Bartsch 2006, p.272

⁵⁷ Star 2006, p.240

⁵⁸ Bartsch 2006, p.261

⁵⁹ Bartsch 2006, p.281

for the Stoic: “the congruence of first- and second-order desires.”⁶⁰ The lesson to be derived from the tragedy -- the “*imago*” that can move the individual (*movit me imago, Ep. 59.7*) -- is that destruction can indeed occur through the isolation inherent in the internalization of a mirror. That is, a host of problems can lurk for the one who looks into his self-constructed mirror and admires the corrupted self she sees.

And yet, just as much trouble exists for anyone who looks into the mirror and neglects to see himself. Like Medea, Oedipus acts to erect a second-order framework that will enable the achievement of a first-order desire. But, whereas Medea’s framework is constructed to slake her thirst for revenge, Oedipus’ second-order self is constructed with the purpose of assuaging his fears through identification with a self that is a riddle-solver, not an incestuous parricide. This is possible due to the fact that, like Narcissus, he has not attained the requisite self-knowledge. Whereas Medea is able to first identify and then construct herself in accordance with her mytho-literary tradition, Oedipus possesses no such capability. Instead, Oedipus gazes into the mirror, and, like Narcissus, fails to recognize his reflection. This failure then enables him to internalize a *vir bonus* who is known for saving Thebes through his superior cunning.

Throughout the tragedy, a sequence is repeated: a conflicted Oedipus experiences fear and then attempts to resolve such emotions through reassuring himself that his mytho-literary corollary is the Oedipus who heroically conquers the enigmatic. In the opening monologue, Oedipus reflects upon his past as he highlights

⁶⁰ Bartsch 2006, p.281

his status as an exile and his “wandering” (*exul, vagans*, 13) before “happening upon” (*incidi*, 13) a kingdom, a characterization that, when read with Ovid’s Cadmus, certainly heightens the tragic pathos of these lines. This self-reflection then leads Oedipus to be consumed with perturbation as he fears the unspeakable (*infanda timeo*, 15): patricide and incest. And so, Oedipus is unable to follow the apothegm of Seneca to entrust himself to himself (*te tibi credere*, *Ep.* 10.1) as he confesses, *Cuncta expavesco meque non credo mihi* (27). And yet, guilt-ridden as Oedipus is, he responds to Jokasta’s advice to stand with “certain step” (*certo...gradu*, 85) by recounting the story of his victory over the Sphinx. Indeed, Oedipus endeavors to counteract his own claims of fear leading to fleeing (*Quam bene parentis scepra Polybi fugeram*, 12) as he underscores the fact that he did not flee from the Sphinx (*nec Sphinga caecis verba nectentem modis/fugi*, 92-3). Thus, Oedipus establishes a system in which each time he finds himself confronting an identity that is counter to the one he wishes for himself (one that holds him as the individual who fulfilled Apollo’s oracle), he instead self-identifies through his battle with the Sphinx. At the onset of the play, Oedipus gazes into the mirror and sees a prominent figure in the mytho-literary tradition: the Oedipus who conquered the riddling sphinx (87-109). It is this character, Oedipus of the Sphinx, that Oedipus internalizes as his *vir bonus*.

As Creon approaches from Delphi with instructions for how to save Thebes, Oedipus quivers in terror (*horrore quator*, 206). Though consumed with fear due to the fact that the situation lies in ambiguity (*in ambiguo*, 208), Oedipus is able to focus on a subject in which he is repeatedly able to find consolation: confronting

"mysteries wrapped in bended ambiguity" (*ambage flexa...arcana* 214-5). This description of the oracle, which is characterized in language similar to the *extispicium*, sphinx, and Cadmus' serpent, provides Oedipus with a fitting opportunity to further his identification with Oedipus of the Sphinx. And so, he fashions himself in accordance with the second-order self generated from his first-order desire to avoid the knowing fulfillment of parricide and incest as he articulates himself as an individual whose superior cunning has the capacity to once again resolve a plague of Thebes. Thus, Oedipus, attempting to quell Creon's fears in relation to the dubious nature of the oracle, says:

*Fare sit dubium licet.
Ambigua soli noscere Oedipodae datur.* (215-6)

Here, Oedipus attempts to achieve consistency between the first- and second-order self through the figure of self-naming. This strategy leads him to total ignorance as Creon relates the oracle (233-238), which, in its imagery and use of *profugus* and *hospes* at line 234, strongly recalls Oedipus' opening monologue. Yet, in spite of this, Oedipus is again unable to recognize himself. Instead, he responds to the oracular statement with his heavily ironic edict (247-75). This pronouncement, whose intertextual qualities were explicated above on page 35, is rather remarkable for the manner in which Oedipus, mere moments after Creon's speech, reprises the themes of flight and exile. Oedipus appropriates the oracle's description of the murderer of Laius -- *hospes* -- for himself. Oedipus prays that the killer of Laius might do whatever he fled (*quiquid ego fugi*, 263) before then describing in detail all the crimes he himself fled and perpetrated. Thus, in this episode, Oedipus overcomes

his anxiety through his identification with a false self, an individual who is defined by his ability "to recognize ambiguities" (*ambigua...noscere*, 216). This identification, in turn, delays his ability to recognize himself as ambiguity reified and, consequently, to resolve the plague of Thebes.

Oedipus repeats the pattern of fear, followed by reaffirmation of the second-order self, and then ultimately further denial of recognition as he confronts the news of the necromancy. Creon's report of Laius' speech mobilizes the lexical elements that encode the thematic structures of the play: the use of *monstrum* (641), vocabulary concerning "stepping" (648, 654, 655), words pertaining to exile (647, 655), and the employment of the word *dignus* in relation to what is appropriate for Oedipus (653). In spite of the grim pronouncement, which essentially restructures the exact lexis of Oedipus, the king's initial reaction is terror followed by his signature denial pattern. As Oedipus worries as to whether he committed "whatever he feared" (*quidquid timebam*, 660), he yet again cedes to the "riddle-solver" as he accuses Creon of engaging in a complex plot with Tiresias to overthrow his reign. And then, just as soon as Oedipus channels this false identity, the literary and philosophical coalesce as the chorus begins to sing the Theban ode -- the ode that emphasizes the proper, tragic identity of Oedipus through its appropriations of Ovid's Book III.

After this, Oedipus engages in self-reflection as he relates how his *animus* spins in doubt and denies that he could have murdered Laius (764-5). Oedipus even claims that his mind knows itself better than the gods do (*animus...sibique melius quam deis notus*, 766-7), thereby ironically predicating a claim to self-knowledge on

the grounds that he did not commit an act that he did indeed perpetrate. The ensuing dialogue centers around the subject of recognition, with the word *noscere* and its variants encoding the sequence (767, 819, 820, 838, 841, 847). As Oedipus questions the Corinthian and Phorbas, he rather passively engages the two in a far less prosecutorial fashion than his Sophoclean counterpart as the Corinthian must twice intervene to question Phorbas.

Then Oedipus, as Phorbas reveals his true identity, reacts to the news with a speech that mobilizes many of the themes in this tragedy recontextualized from *Metamorphoses* Book III. While Oedipus's speech (867-881) recalls his opening monologues in the manner in which he reprises the motif of exile (875) and "stepping" (880), the passage also incorporates vocabulary pertaining to Stoic self-construction as Oedipus displays concern for his *animus* and ponders what is *dignus* for him (877-879). It is at this point that Oedipus no longer seeks to ignore the true nature of his identity in favor of reaffirming himself as the individual who conquered the Sphinx. Here, Oedipus' *anagnorsis* is not a terminal event in which he realizes who he actually is; rather, it is the moment at which he identifies the proper individual after whom he must model himself: the blind parricidal, incestuous Oedipus.

At this point in the tragedy, *Oedipus* operates in a dimension that is inextricable from Senecan philosophy of self-construction. Like Medea, who repeatedly ordered her *animus* to seize its waivering and delay, Oedipus engages his own *animus* (933, 952) as he seeks to not delay (926, 952) the merger of his self-in-

progress with the second-order, mytho-literary Oedipus. It is at this point that he engages in self-naming as he says,

Natura in uno vertit Oedipoda (943).

Whereas before Oedipus' self-naming alluded to his conquering the Sphinx, now this act represents his comprehension of his true identity. Oedipus realizes that, like Narcissus, he is singular in his tragedy.

And yet, in Seneca this recognition of true identity is not enough. While, as Aristotle notes, Sophocles devises that the *peripeteia* occur at the same time as the *anagnorsis*, Seneca contrives that Oedipus must recognize and then construct his own reversal, thereby underscoring the dynamic quality of the *proficiens* and reflexive nature of self-becoming. Just as Medea pledges to "become Medea" (*Medea. . . Fiam*, 171), Oedipus must work to engineer himself as the blinded individual who possesses full knowledge of his perpetrations. Thus, Oedipus, in a manner paralleling Medea, addresses his *animus* and goads himself into a rage (957) as he is described in terms quite similar to those of the Sphinx and Cadmus' serpent in Ovid.⁶¹ It is in this state that Oedipus blinds himself (957-974) and achieves an appearance worthy (*digna*, 977) of his identity.

Oedipus sought a Self couched as an Other and, upon recognizing this Other, began a process to achieve a union between the two entities that fosters the destruction of Oedipus of the Sphinx and the metamorphosis of the character into the Oedipus of mytho-literary tradition. Oedipus, after a brief choral interlude, recognizes his true self and articulates this union between first- and second-order

⁶¹ See page 27.

self as he says, *vultus Oedipodam hic decet* (1003). This statement does not simply represent an acceptance of his identity, but Oedipus' conviction that he has indeed achieved an end to the process of "becoming".

Just as Medea completed the transition from *fiam* to *sum* (*Medea*. . . *Fiam*, 171; *Medea nunc sum*, 910), Oedipus has accomplished what is *dignus* for himself. While Medea knew her exact mytho-literary identity and thus was able to mold herself in accordance with such a model, Oedipus, like Narcissus, initially lacks self-recognition. Oedipus' complete inability to self-identify thus problematizes the notion of Seneca's philosophical mirror as a means to self-construction and consistency. Moreover, Oedipus' blinded construction of a second-order framework for the purpose of achieving his first-order desire of avoiding the act and knowledge of parricide and incest irrespective of his true identity not only prolongs the Theban plague but also extends his ignorance of himself. Thus, the tragedy of *Oedipus* provides an *imago* of Senecan philosophy that underscores the critical importance of precisely constructing an internalized *vir bonus*, due to the fact that an inability to possess insight into one's true identity militates against the construction of a proper internal mirror. Although reflexivity is the paradigm of the entire endeavor, *Oedipus* demonstrates that the "care of the self" is not as intrapersonal and hermetic as one might suppose; it can be destructive not only to the Stoic *proficiens* but also the world outside of him -- a sobering realization when considered with *De Clementia*, the text Seneca wrote to function as a mirror for a young emperor before he became the infamous Nero.

Seneca's *Oedipus* cannot be neatly characterized as "philosophy" or "literature". As a literary piece, it offers a sustained engagement with Book III of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, an engagement not simply limited to the performance of erudition in the mode of Alexandrians but for the purpose of coloring the tragic quality of Oedipus and thereby heightening the pathos of the tragedy. More still, the intertextualities achieve more than to demonstrate Seneca's virtuosity as reader and writer of literature. Seneca repeatedly mobilizes Ovidian vocabulary and themes in order to further explore his philosophical discourses concerning self-construction – especially as it relates to self-identification.

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