

The Anapaests of the *Octavia*

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The *Octavia* is the only drama in the corpus preserved under Seneca's name which uses exclusively anapaests in choral odes and solo parts. All the other plays, except the *Phoenissae* which has no songs at all, display, besides anapaests, a variety of metres. In the *Thyestes*, for example, the anapaests appear relatively late; they are preceded by other metres, for instance by Asclepiadeans of the type *Maecenas atavis edite regibus* (122–75). Thus, anapaests seem to be a characteristic feature of Roman drama during the early Empire, but their exclusive use in the *Octavia* may be yet another argument against Senecan authorship.

The nature of the anapaestic passages in the *Octavia* has not been understood so far, it seems to me. The manuscripts (the "Etruscus" does not have the play) are inconsistent, and there seems to be little agreement among editors. Lucian Müller's decision to divide all anapaestic passages in the tragedies into *monometra* was at least consistent, but it was based on a wrong interpretation of an ancient grammarian (Diomedes, *Ars gramm.* III 511, 23; 29 GLK), as I hope to show below. Müller's proposal to atomize the choral odes of *Oedipus* and *Agamemnon*¹ has not made much of an impression. In the more recent editions of the *Octavia*, series of *dimetra* are occasionally interrupted by a *monometron*, but without any apparent principle. The editors seem to shift these short lines around, more or less at random, to avoid metrical difficulties in any given case.

Two simple rules—this is the point of my paper—will help establish, I hope, the way in which anapaestic passages should be arranged:

- (1) a *monometron* always ends a period;
- (2) within a period, the basic metrical pattern of the *dimetron* is varied as much as possible. In his desire for variety, the author of the *Octavia* carefully distinguishes between "naturally long" and "closed" syllables.

The first rule has been recognized in the past, I believe. F. Vollmer, in his chapter on Latin metre in Gercke–Norden² seems to refer to it, and

¹ *De Re Metrica*² (Leipzig 1894) 104 f.

² *Einleitung in die Altertumswissenschaft*³ (Leipzig 1927) 16.

Halporn–Ostwald–Rosenmeyer³ say: “Seneca is fond of concluding a series of anapaestic dimeters with an anapaestic monometer as a clausula.” But even if this principle was recognized, the editors have applied it in a haphazard way.

The second rule has not been formulated so far, I think.

Let me first say something about the problem of the *monometra*. To establish only *monometra*, as Lucian Müller postulated, is awkward. How was it possible to speak or sing these extremely short units? For Diomedes (*loc. cit.*) *Med.* 301

audax nimium qui freta primus

is an *anapaestus choricus*, i. e. a metrical unit. It is possible that at one point of the textual tradition all anapaestic passages were divided into *monometra*, and it is this phase that Müller has reconstructed, but this is hardly what the archetype had. In the absence of the “Etruscus” none of the other MSS. has more authority than the rest.

What does the first rule mean? Let us look at the beginning of the *Octavia* (vv. 1–4):

Iam vaga caelo sidera fulgens
Aurora fugat.
surgit Titan radiante coma
mundoque diem reddit clarum.

The modern editions place a comma after *fugat*; but it seems to me that a new period begins with *surgit*. This allows us to take *Aurora fugat* as a *monometron*. The punctuation of all editions has to be revised; this is no small matter.⁴

To illustrate how the second rule works I would like to quote vv. 973–78:

lenes aurae zephyrique leves,
tectam quondam nube aethera
qui vexistis raptam saevae
virginis aris Iphigeniam,

³ *The Metres of Greek and Latin Poetry* (London 1963) 83.

⁴ In his *Vorlesungen über lateinische Sprachwissenschaft*, edited by F. Haase (Leipzig 1839) 838–39, Karl Reisig said something which deserves to be recalled: “Die Interpunction der Alten scheint gar keine gewesen zu sein, nach den Inschriften zu schliessen; auch liegt sie gar nicht in ihrem Geiste, da die mündliche Rede bei ihnen die Hauptsache war und ihre Schriften mehr laut vorgelesen wurden, als im Stillen studirt. . . Das Grundprincip aller Interpunction kann nur darin bestehen, die beim mündlichen Vortrage zu machenden Sinnabschnitte wahrnehmbar zu machen. . . Wir haben gewisse Interpunctionszeichen in die alten Sprachen eingeführt, die auch zu entbehren sind, das Semikolon, das Ausrufungszeichen, das Fragezeichen; das letztere ist vielleicht das zweckmässigste, weil es das Verständnis hebt. Aber wenigstens das Ausrufungszeichen, auf dessen Einführung sich Wolf . . . Etwas zu Gute that, was er nicht nöthig hatte, ist gänzlich zu entbehren. . . Für das Semikolon reicht das Kolon hin. Das Fragezeichen scheint wirklich das nöthigste zu sein, das bucklige Ding.”

hanc quoque tristi procul a poena
portate, precor, templa ad Triviae.

In this period which extends over six *dimetra* the basic pattern is varied six times. None of the lines is built in exactly the same way as the others. It does happen that within one line, the sequence of long and short syllables seems to repeat itself, but even then the distribution of syllables that are "long by nature" and "long by position" is different.⁵ The vv. 335–38 may serve as an example:

hac sum, fateor, digna carina
quae te genui, quae tibi lucem
atque imperium nomenque dedi
Caesaris amens.

Apparently, for the ears of the audience the lines

-- ◡ ◡ -- ◡ ◡ --

and

-- ◡ ◡ -- ◡ ◡ -- ◡

sounded slightly different. But the three "naturally long" syllables in v. 336 also seem to be significant.

I have already mentioned the first aria of the play (vv. 1–33). It begins with a *dimetron*, followed by a *monometron*. The parallelism of vv. 7 f.,

atque aequoreas vince Alcyonas,
vince et volucres Pandionias

seems to be reflected in the parallelism of the metrical structure.

If one analyses the metre of vv. 14 f.,

mea rupisset stamina Clotho
tua quam maerens vulnera vidi,

one notices a certain parallelism in the sequence of long and short syllables, but two syllables which are "long by position" in v. 14 are replaced by two syllables which are "long by nature" in the following verse.

In the following period, the text is uncertain, hence we cannot be sure about the metrical structure. In v. 20, the MSS. vary between *lux* and *nox*; if one reads *lux*, one should probably change *est* to *es* (Bothe):

o lux semper funesta mihi,

⁵ Other observations can be made. It appears, for instance, that a dactyl in the first half of an anapaestic *dimetron* is very often followed by a dactyl in the second half. This may be considered a sort of inversion of the "law," discovered by Peter Elmsley, concerning the anapaests of Greek tragedy. There are a few exceptions to this in the *Octavia*, more apparent than real, I think.

tempore ab illo lux es tenebris
invisa magis.

An attractive solution was suggested by a former student of mine, Jerome Leary: *noctis tenebris for lux e. t.* (cf. Lucan 1. 228).

The long period, vv. 23–30, has been the object of several critical discussions. Some editors accept Bücheler's transposition

cuique Britanni
ultra Oceanum terga dedere

for

ultra Oceanum
cuique Britanni terga dedere,

but in this case it would be wrong to consider *ultra Oceanum* as a *monometron*. But it seems to me that the monologue of the Nutrix (vv. 34 ff.) gives us a clue that in the aria of Octavia the traditional order is correct.⁶ Therefore I would propose a new solution: half a line may have dropped out after *Oceanum*. The whole period would then look as follows:

illa illa meis tristis Erinys
thalamis Stygios praetulit ignes
teque extinxit, miserande pater,
modo cui totus paruit orbis
ultra Oceanum < >
cuique Britanni terga dedere,
ducibus nostris ante ignoti
iurisque sui.

Now it can be seen that every line varies the basic pattern in a slightly different way.

Following the monologue of the Nutrix, Octavia sings another aria (vv. 57–71) which is followed by alternate singing (vv. 72–99). The first period ends with a *monometron*:

o mea nullis aequanda malis
fortuna, licet repetam luctus,
Electra, tuos.

The editors are rather inconsistent. The older MSS. set off as *monosticha* the following half-lines: 58 *fortuna licet*; 61 *flere parentem*; 64 *textique fides*; *excipe nostras*; 76b *fida doloris*. As far as the first three cases are concerned, the editors follow the older MSS., but not in the last two. The basis for their decision is not clear. The rule formulated above gives us a criterion; all that is needed is a slight transposition (vv. 61 f. *vindice fratre scelus ulcisci* for *scelus ulcisci vindice fratre*):

⁶ There is a similar correspondence between a passage in a song and one in a dialogue in vv. 273 ff. and 593 ff.

ubi maerenti caesum licuit
 flere parentem, vindice fratre
 scelus ulcisci, tua quem pietas
 hosti rapuit textitque fides.

Octavia and the Nutrix sing alternately in vv. 73–85. There is a great wealth of metrical forms in this passage, but the text and the division of the lines present a few problems. At the beginning (vv. 72 ff.) read:

vox, heu, nostras perculit aures
 tristis alumnae.
 cesset thalamis inferre gradus
 tarda senectus.

Heu in v. 72 is Schröder's conjecture; the MSS. have *en*. Other *monometra* in this passage are: 78 *miseranda dies* (correct in the editions); 82 *sed fata regunt* (this is also correct); 84 *tempora mittis*; 85b *placata virum*.

The beginning of Octavia's song (vv. 86 ff.) should be edited as follows:

vincam saevas ante leones
 tigresque truces fera quam saevi
 corda tyranni.

There is a problem in v. 93. The editors end a period after *infanda parens*, but they cannot make a *monometron* out of these two words, because of *matris / hoc* in vv. 94 f. The period continues, in fact:

quam dedit illi per scelus ingens
 infanda parens, licet ingratum
 dirae pudeat munere matris
 hoc imperium cepisse, licet
 tantum munus morte rependat,
 feret hunc titulum post fata tamen
 femina longo semper in aevo.

The older MSS. then have 101 iambic *senarii*, while the "recentiores" mark a lacuna of 25 or 30 lines after v. 173. This section is followed by a song of the Nutrix (vv. 201–21) which can be divided into 19 *dimetra* and 2 *monometra*, but not in the way that Peiper–Richter and others have attempted it. The *monometron* they postulate in v. 202 is against the rule we have recognized. Read:

passa est similes ipsa dolores
 regina deum, cum se in formas
 vertit in omnes dominus caeli
 divumque pater.

There should be no objection against beginning a period with *et modo* (cf. Prop. 2. 24B. 11):

et modo pennas sumpsit oloris,
modo Sidonii cornua tauri.

In vv. 209–16 the second half of the line is barely varied; the characteristic double short is always found at the same place; the variations mainly appear in the first half.

The first choral ode of the drama offers several problems. The older MSS. establish *dimetra* throughout. The modern editors seem to adhere to no particular system. In my opinion the whole passage (vv. 273–376) represents 93 *dimetra* and 12 *monometra*.

Let us look first at vv. 297–301. Richter and Leo wanted to delete them, while Bachrens suggested a transposition: 301, 297–300, 304. No matter what decision one makes,

298 . . . grave et
improba

is impossible; there seems to be no other example of *et* at the end of line in the anapaests of the Senecan corpus. Furthermore, the elision at this place is very unusual; *Oct. 9 namque his* would only be a parallel if one were to arrange all anapaestic verse in *monometra*, as Lucian Müller suggested. Keeping in mind our two rules, we ought to arrange the period as follows:

294 illi reges hac expulerunt
urbe superbos ultique tuos
bene sunt manes, virgo, dextra
caesa parentis, ne servitium
paterere grave fet̄ improba ferret
praemia victrix dira libido.

The next period (vv. 301–03) would have to be arranged in the following manner:

te quoque bellum triste secutum est,
mactata tua miseranda manu,
nata Lucreti, stuprum saevi
passa tyranni.

Then we have a series of *dimetra* until v. 330 *fletibus ora*. The next period ends with v. 345b *aequoris undis*, and vv. 346–48 are one period, ending with the clausula *pressa resurgit* (v. 348b). A new period begins with v. 355; it should be divided into verse as follows:

355 bracchia quamvis lenta trahentem
356b, 357a voce hortantur manibusque levant.
357b quid tibi saevi fugisse maris
 profuit undas?

Following Leo, the editors print v. 362 *vivere matrem* as a *monometron*, because the following word, *impius*, begins with a vowel.

According to our rule, we cannot admit a *monometron* within a period. A simple transposition solves the problem:

361 furit ereptam pelagoque dolet
vivere matrem geminatque nefas
impious ingens.

The next period ends with v. 370b *condat ut ensem*, as Leo recognized; Peiper–Richter are wrong to print v. 369 *rogat infelix* as a *monometron*.

The end of this choral ode is almost certainly corrupt. The way in which it is divided in the editions seems unsatisfactory. Vv. 373 and 375 should not be printed as *monometra*. Leo's ingenious suggestion to transpose the two halves of v. 374 has not been accepted by other editors, as far as I can see. It is possible, I think, to emend this passage by using the parallel passage vv. 593 ff. where Agrippina's ghost gives an account of her death. There she speaks of the *foeda vulnera* which caused her death, and this adjective I would like to substitute for *fera* in v. 374. When *foeda* had become *fera* through scribal error, a transposition became necessary *metri causa*. Read:

374 post hanc vocem cum supremo
mixtam gemitu per foeda animam
tandem tristem vulnera reddit.

The following passage in anapaests (vv. 646–89) consists of an aria of Octavia (vv. 646–68) and a choral ode (vv. 669–89). The first period of the aria ends with v. 650a *causa malorum*, the third with v. 653b *vel morte dies*; v. 655 cannot be a *monometron*, if our rule is valid. In the choral ode a period ends with v. 672a *pulsa Neronis* (the older MSS. seem to indicate this) and with 682b *carcere clausit*; also with 685 *iuncta Neroni* (correct in the more recent editions).

In the short choral ode which praises the astonishing beauty of Poppaea (vv. 762–79) we have only *dimetra*. They display many variations of the basic pattern.

The next choral ode (vv. 806–19) is even shorter: it consists of 12 *dimetra* and 4 *monometra*: v. 812 *sanguine vestro* (correct in the MSS.); 813b *facilisque regi* (correct in Leo's edition); v. 815 *pulsare lyram* (correct in Richter–Peiper); 817b *diruit urbes*.

The longest passage in anapaests comes at the end of the drama (vv. 877–983). It is divided into three choral odes (vv. 877–98; 924–57; 973–83) and two arias of Octavia framed by them (vv. 899–923; 958–72).

Let us have a look at the first choral ode. If I am right, there are only two *monometra* in it: v. 891 *exempla dolor*;⁷ v. 896b *contenta latet*. The

⁷ If we read *plura referre prohibet praesens / exempla dolor*, we acknowledge that "muta cum liquida" lengthens the last syllable of *referre*. This is possible in the *Octavia*, but not a rule; cf. v. 8 *vince et volucres Pandionias*; v. 10 *semper genetrix deflenda mihi*, etc.

first two periods fill 5 *dimetra* each; a period of 3 *dimetra* follows, then a *dimetron* and a *monometron*. We have a transition here: after the examples of the dangerous effects of the *favor populi* in the history of Rome, the chorus deals with the fate of Octavia, without mention of her name. This part ends with a *sententia*:

896 bene paupertas humili tecto
contenta latet.
quatiunt altas saepe procellas
aut evertit Fortuna domos.

The same *sententia* occurs in Lucan, *Phars.* 5. 526–31.

The first of the two final arias of Octavia can be divided into 23 *dimetra* and 3 *monometra* (v. 912 *nec sunt superi*; 916a *reddere aedon*; 917b *mihi fata darent*). It ends with an "Entrückungswunsch"⁸ (vv. 916b–23) which is taken up by the chorus later on (vv. 973 ff.), but in a slightly different form. Octavia wishes she could, as a nightingale in a distant grove, lament her fate:⁹

fugerem luctus ablata meos
penna volucris procul et coetus
hominum tristes caedemque feram.
sola in vacuo nemore et tenui
ramo pendens querulo possem
guttire maestum fundere murmur.

The belcanto of these melodious lines is quite beautiful.

The first lines of the second choral ode present a problem. Some editors assume a lacuna after v. 926a *firmum et stabile*, others follow the "recentiores" and read

regitur fatis mortale genus
nec sibi quicquam (quisquam A) spondere potest
firmum et stabile.

But in that case one should probably continue with *perquam* (*per quae* A) in v. 927.

One also wonders how editors have understood vv. 932–41. Could this really be one very long period? It seems to me that we have here two periods, each consisting of 4 *dimetra* and 1 *monometron*:

tu mihi primum tot natorum
memoranda parens (sc. es), nata Agrippae,
nurus Augusti, Caesaris uxor,
cuius nomen clarum toto

⁸ This is a typical Euripidean feature; cf. *Hipp.* 732 ff.; *Andr.* 861 ff.; *Hel.* 1478 ff., etc. See Schmid-Stählin, *Griechische Literaturgeschichte*, vol. 2 (Munich 1933) 160, n. 3; vol. 3 (Munich 1940) 710, n. 3; 869.

⁹ Cf. Homer, *Od.* 19. 518 ff.

fulsit in orbe.
 utero totiens enixa gravi
 pignora pacis, mox exilium,
 verbera, saevas passa catenas,
 funera (*Gronovius: vulnera codd.*) luctus, tandem letum
 cruciata diu.

The fate of the elder Agrippina, the mother of nine children, is dealt with antithetically and symmetrically. First, in 2 *dimetra* and 1 *monometron*, we hear about her glory, then, again in 4 *dimetra* and 1 *monometron*, we hear about her tragic fall.

The following period (vv. 941–43) should be arranged in this way:

felix thalamis Livia Drusi
 natisque ferum ruit in facinus
 poenamque suam.

In the last period of this choral ode the editors are forced to assume a *monometron* where none should be allowed, v. 955 *remigis ante*. The transposition of two half-lines restores once more, I believe, the original text:

non funesta remigis ante	954a, 955
violata manu mox et ferro	954b, 956a
lacerata diu saevi iacuit	956a, 957a
victima nati?	957b (correct in A)

Octavia's last aria corresponds, as far as its theme and mood are concerned, to the preceding choral ode. The first two words (v. 958 *me quoque*) show that she considers herself the last victim in the series of women of the Julio–Claudian dynasty who all had a tragic end: Agrippina Maior, Livilla, Julia, Messalina.

The third period ends with the *monometron*

962 Fortuna dedit.

The next period should be arranged as follows:

testor superos – quid agis, demens?
 parce precari quis invisa es
 numina deum: Tartara testor
 Erebiq̄ue deas scelerum ultrices
 et te, genitor, dignum tali
 morte et poena: non invisa est
 mors ista mihi.

The last choral ode (vv. 973–83) repeats in a different form the “Entrückungswunsch” of Octavia (vv. 916–23, see above). It consists of four periods: (a) 6 *dimetra*; (b) 2 *dimetra*; (c) 1 *dimetron* and 1 *monometron*; (d) 1 *dimetron*. The concluding lines of the drama are dominated by spondees.

I hope to have shown that it is possible to arrange the anapaestic passages of the *Octavia* according to two simple principles and to achieve the consistency which is lacking in the editions. In doing this we have respected the "law" formulated by Lucian Müller (p. 104): "post binos oportere orationem finire pedes nec licere posteriorem solvi arsin." A few transpositions of half-lines became necessary, some of them suggested by earlier critics. Half-lines could easily be transposed by mechanical error in a manuscript in which all anapaestic passages were arranged in *monometra*. Needless to say that this was not the arrangement of the archetype.¹⁰

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¹⁰ It would be useful to investigate whether the same principles are applied in the other tragedies of the Senecan corpus. Miroslav Marcovich kindly refers me to John G. Fitch, *Seneca's Anapaests*, American Classical Studies 17 (Atlanta 1987) 92-96 who states (p. 94) that, in sharp contrast to the *Hercules Oetaeus* the relative frequency of monometers in the *Octavia* is very similar to that in the genuine plays. This may well be true, even if there is disagreement, as I have shown above, concerning the exact location of the *monometra*. Miroslav Marcovich also refers me to Otto Zwierlein, *Abh. Mainz* 1983, 3 (Wiesbaden 1984) 182-202. The edition I have been using is that of Gustav Richter (Teubner 1902), though I disagree with his colometry here and there, as I have pointed out.