

# BREAKING APART LIKE THE WORLD:

## SENECA AND PSYCHOANALYSIS<sup>1</sup>

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I am breaking apart like the world.

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—Sylvia Plath, *Three Women*

In a famous section of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud outlines his theories of the Oedipus complex and the unconscious through a reading of Sophocles' tragedy, followed by a lengthy footnote on the same motifs—repressed—in Shakespeare:

Another of the great creations of tragic poetry, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has its roots in the same soil as *Oedipus Rex*. But the changed treatment of the same material reveals the whole difference in the mental life of these two widely separated epochs of civilization. In the *Oedipus* the child's wishful phantasy that underlies it is brought into the open and realized as it would be in a dream. In *Hamlet* it remains repressed; and—just as in the case of neurosis—we only learn of its existence from its inhibiting consequences.... Hamlet is able to do anything—except take vengeance on the man who did away with his father and took that father's place with his mother, the man who shows him the repressed wishes of his own childhood realized. (*SE* 4:264-5)

If Freud presents Sophocles as a proto-Freudian, Seneca's Oedipus, at the beginning of his play already beleaguered by proleptic guilt for the plague infecting the city, seems almost to have read not just Sophocles' play but also Freud's reading of Sophocles (and Shakespeare):

I am ashamed to utter my fate. Phoebus threatens the son with his parent's bed....When you dread some great evil, you must fear even what you think impossible. I take fright at everything, and do not place my trust even in myself. At this very moment fate is preparing some device against me....What evil am I being saved for?...I have made the heavens baneful. (Sen., *Oedipus* 19-36, tr. Ahl)

But my neat assertion of a 'post-Freudian' Senecan Oedipus conceals a disjuncture. Psychoanalysis 'works' in reading Sophocles' and Shakespeare's plays because it was constituted by doing so, since it was in Freud's dual, intertextual, reading of these Greek and Renaissance tragedies that psychoanalysis' foundational theories are constructed and 'proved'. Although Seneca's Roman plays, not Attic drama, were Shakespeare's primary source for classical tragedy, the Senecan *Oedipus* and his painfully self-aware protagonist are scarcely to be found in psychoanalytic texts either by or after Freud. Freud was surely aware of Seneca's version, because he carefully annotated Constans' 1881 book on the Oedipus legend from antiquity to the middle ages (Bowlby, *Freudian* 29). But did he read Seneca's play? Either he did not or he considered it unimportant.<sup>2</sup>

72 In this essay, I take this absence as fundamental and trace from it an uneasy, paradoxical relationship between psychoanalysis and Senecan tragedy. My point of departure is a series of polarities and contradictions within Senecan criticism itself, especially the controversial relationship between the tragedies and philosophy. While an affinity of language and rhetoric is evident between Seneca's dramas and Stoic writings, its significance—for both—is hotly debated, since one discourse seems to contradict the other and Seneca is conspicuously silent about the tragedies in his prose. A similar contradiction has been detected in Freud who, as Bowlby ('Family' 112) has pointed out, was most concerned with producing scientific knowledge of the psyche, yet "sometimes uncomfortably, ...was to be a strikingly literary thinker", and argued his scientific case by drawing on an ancient Greek tragedy. Against the well-established view that Seneca's tormented tragic characters are negative moral exemplars, whose follies offer 'proof' of Stoic wisdom, an idea has emerged of the tragedies as the philosophy's repressed content, subverting its emphasis on *ratio* and self-control by presenting the aesthetic triumph of passions such as *ira* and *furor*.

I am not going to 'use' psychoanalysis to try to resolve these polarities within the Senecan oeuvre, which some assert are not inevitable but a failure of criticism. Instead I suggest that reading the tragedies alongside psychoanalysis as separate but intersecting, mutually-implicative, discourses offers ways of thinking 'otherwise' about the dialectical problems posed by both, including Senecan drama's reception in later tragedy and tragedy's reception within psychoanalytic discourse. To this end I touch upon aspects of Senecan tragedy that have seemed to some scholars to demand a psychoanalytically informed reading—aspects that echo Freudian theories of the unconscious—while also suggesting ways in which the plays resist straightforward 'proof' of psychoanalysis as an effective critical mechanism. With these dynamics in mind, this essay will posit Senecan drama as a repressed, Roman, term in psychoanalysis' much-discussed originary relationship with Greek drama.

## SENECA AND THE TRAGIC TRADITION

Like Seneca's seemingly irreconcilable historical *personae*—billionaire, advisor to a tyrant, moralizing sage, dissident suicide—his corpus has been seen for centuries as radically bifurcated, encouraging the Renaissance solution of 'two Senecas' (Ker 20-21). Much recent revaluation of Seneca has been preoccupied with how to think about the tragedies as Seneca's—whether by separating them entirely from the philosophy, seeing them as its perverse 'negation', or arguing for Stoic ethics, psychology or cosmology in the plays. However, despite this new trend towards 'seeing Seneca whole' (Volk et al.), the tragedies, largely undatable except by prosimetric analysis and unmentioned in Seneca's prose, float free of any proven attribution to Seneca at all (Kohn; Ahl 14-16). Pre-empting the anonymous author of the *Octavia*, Seneca *tragicus* is already a 'Pseudo-Seneca,' a pragmatic, post-classical supposition. Moreover, despite being the only complete Roman tragedies to survive, they mark a period of decline in the long tradition of tragic theatre at Rome, epitomized by the uncertainty over whether they were produced in theatres, recited, or just circulated privately. Unlike Greek and Renaissance tragedy, Senecan drama has no secure originary performance context for scholarly recuperation. These plays are therefore extra-belated: far removed from the ritual civic experience encoded in Attic tragedy, they exist rather in an intertextual, self-reflexive and secondary relation not only to Greek drama but also to other written, post-Hellenistic, already secondary texts such as Virgilian and Ovidian epic. Moreover, Senecan tragedy has become definitive of a 'Neronian' literary aesthetic even though it cannot be securely dated to the Neronian period; the plays persistently resist straightforward political and literary contextualisation, or 'proof,' as much as their excessive, violent tragic idiom demands it.

I have outlined the plays' lack of secure author(ity), ungrounded in concrete performative or historical context, to point to Seneca's vital if embarrassing place in the history of Western tragedy (Braden; Crewe; Reinhardt et al. 68). Seneca mediates between ancient Greek and Renaissance theatre but is also what the tragic and critical tradition rejected as overly melodramatic and rhetorical, insufficiently 'classical'; a form of distorted pseudo-tragedy set against the supposed originary authenticity, in both mythic and psychological terms, of Attic drama. The absence of Seneca's Oedipus from Freud's Sophoclean/Shakespearean theory of the subject is thus part of the wider demotion of Roman poetry from the critical canon since the seventeenth century, as soulless imitations of Homeric or Sophoclean originality (Selden). Both classical and post-classical, too belated to prove the psychological universality of a primeval myth, too early (and melodramatically excessive) to provide evidence for the myth's civilized repression—too 'pseudo' to prove any truth about the subject at all: if Freud's search for a 'true' science of the mind by turning to Greek antiquity mirrored nineteenth-century Europe's search for authentic identity (Armstrong 1-4), why *would* he read Seneca? Constans' typically dismissive attitude to Seneca's 'distorted' Oedipus no doubt influenced Freud here (21-22): "On sait comment [Sénèque]

a dénaturé le plan si parfait de *l'Oedipe roi*, en faisant soupçonner dès le premier acte à Oedipe qu'il pourrait bien être meurtrier de Laius. Ces pièces, qui ne semblent pas avoir été destinées à la représentation, ne sont qu'un prétexte à déclamation emphatique ou à la description minutieuse et réaliste."<sup>3</sup>

Yet one of the still underexplored paradoxes emerging from the renewed interest in 'bad' or 'belated' literature in the European tradition, of which Seneca is model, is that "while Sophocles influenced Seneca, Seneca has himself influenced our understanding of Sophocles" (Ahl 22). He did so partly as oblique conduit for Attic tragedy's entry into European culture and partly through his subsequent negation by the nineteenth-century German Idealist tradition, which adopted Sophocles as the supreme paradigm of an abstract concept of 'the tragic', a tradition to which Freud, like Nietzsche, was both heir and modernist challenger (Goldhill 168; 225-26). Thus it is precisely those aspects of Seneca's version which pre-empt the Freudian interpretation of Oedipus as "destined by fate" and unable to escape the oracle's "decree"

74 (SE 1966: 330; Ahl 22)—the Senecan Oedipus' self-doubt and the Stoic emphasis on a relentless, deterministic *fatum* (e.g. 980-96)—that have no real equivalents in Sophocles' play, in which, as Silk and Stern (309) note, it is "not external fate, but rather his own determination to seek the truth, that brings his defeat." Whether or not he actually read Seneca, Freud was reading Sophocles' character through a distorted Senecan frame, in which guilt-ridden characters engage in painful self-analysis and family history, 'fate,' 'nature,' and 'destiny' claustrophobically overlap. Seneca's Oedipus thus occupies a bizarrely double position in both his own mythic plot and in the wider Oedipal tradition: like all Oedipuses, he is both victim and perpetrator, father and brother, husband and son; yet like so many of Seneca's tragic *monstra*, he also functions as both character and commentator on his own role in past, present and future literary tradition—an Oedipus who already, consciously or unconsciously, 'knows himself.'

## PSYCHOANALYTIC SENECA

I will return to Seneca's absent or unconscious presence in Freud's Oedipus at the end of this essay, in order to theorize his uncanny position both inside and outside of psychoanalytic-tragic discourse. From a different perspective, however, it is a little odd that Seneca has not been invoked more frequently in psychoanalysis' dialogue with antiquity. For example, Oksenburg Rorty has shown striking affinities between Stoic psychology and Freud's theory of mind. Like the Stoics' 'cradle argument,' Freud turned to the experiences and psychic conflicts of childhood as the basis for cognitive development; like the Stoics, Freud viewed the affects or emotions as a consequence of blocked or misdirected desires or drives; like the Stoics, Freud based the efficacy of his theory on the idea that "psychopathology is rigorously, though defectively, logical" (354). But Freud radically distorts and transforms his Stoic legacy

by adding a subversive supplement to Stoicism's optimistic conception of the overarching coherence of the rational mind: the prelinguistic, prerational traumas of the unconscious, formed in infancy, but which the 'Freudian sage' continues to experience in the form of ambivalence and contradiction: "He differs from the Stoic sage in recognizing the inevitability—the necessity—of his own psychological conflicts, all the more troubling because they occur within a unified, cryptologically rational mind" (Oksenburg Rorty 355).

This particular notion of the (irrationally-rational) unconscious, supplement to 'pure' Stoic reason, has made psychoanalysis attractive to scholars of the tragedies in recent years (Segal; Schiesaro; Staley; Rimell). Again and again, Seneca's dramas elaborate the notion of an 'other' within that ruptures the unity of the self, be it uncontrollable desires that cannot be harmonized with one's social role—so Phaedra laments "I want what I do not want" (604-5); emotions that rise up seemingly without referent—as in the proleptic guilt of Oedipus; or an all-consuming *dolor* or *furor* that characters speak of as external to them—so Medea asks "where are you driving, my anger...? The spirit within me has determined some brutality, but dare not yet acknowledge it to itself" (916-19). Even more than Greek tragedy, Senecan drama can be seen as a 'dream world' or heterotopia; unconstrained by temporal and physical reality, repressed fantasies and anxieties are acted out on flesh and blood bodies, and inside and outside are suffocatingly conflated (Rimell). In *Thyestes*, Atreus dismembers his brother's two sons and feeds them to their unwitting father, in revenge for Thyestes' seduction of his wife. He then exults: "Now I believe that my children are my own, now I can trust once more that my marriage bed is pure" (1098-99). Schiesaro (2003: 211) has observed that Atreus' bizarre reasoning corresponds with Freud's account of the peculiar logic of the unconscious, in its wish-fulfilment, atemporality and symbolic association of incorporation and pregnancy. Citing Freud's discussion in the Rat Man case of *Ungeschehenmachen* or the "retroactive annulment of event," Schiesaro (2009: 231) sees Atreus as expressing "quite literally a dream come true...which is of course perfectly possible in the unconstrained realm of symmetrical logic and 'negative magic'." The power of the psychoanalytic interpretation here lies in its ability to render intelligible complex narratological and expressive aspects of Senecan tragedy (aspects that often seemed, to critics operating under the shadow of Victorian classicism, undermotivated, excessive or simply 'bad') without having to be accountable from the outset to the question of its reinforcement/subversion of Stoic norms. Schiesaro's approach illuminates, on one level, the complex ironies and contradictions in Senecan characters' forms of expression and motivation, on another the compulsive, regressive symbolic structures of Senecan revenge narrative as a whole, which presents a victory over the constraints of 'adult' logic, linear causality and temporal reality—in Aristotelian terms, the interaction of tragic *ethos* and *muthos*.

This psychologizing reading of Seneca's plays as the triumphant eruption of dark truths which the optimistic philosophy suppresses (in Lacanian terms the abyssal

Real to the philosophy's Symbolic) has garnered criticism for overlooking a Stoic tradition of using tragedy didactically to clarify theories about self-conflict and over-valuation of externals. Christopher Gill (421-34) has shown how Medea and Phaedra's surrender to their passion, leading to internal division and madness, reflects distinctively Stoic ideas about the collapse of character. David Wray turns to declamation and forensic oratory, whose processes of contest and adjudication, arguing both sides as powerfully as possible, were for Romans crucial to ethical deliberation. For Stoic philosophy to truly persuade, human passion must also "have its day in court" in the vivid language and images of tragedy. Both philosophical critiques are nuanced dissections of method in the tragedies' madness, disabling simplistic modern dismissals of Stoicism as "phobic flight from life into delusory reason" (Wray 238). Yet in setting themselves up as negations of Schiesaro's approach, they not only ignore the complex legacy of Stoicism within Freudian thought, but also continue to privilege the philosophy's epistemological and ethical certainties as hermeneutic 'key' to the tragedies, despite claiming to see the two genres as mutually-defining. Paradoxically this hierarchy fortifies rather than softens the impression of a body of work irresolvably divided from itself, as if the self-torment of Seneca's insane characters had come to 'infect' the corpus as a whole. I will not succumb to the argument that resistance to psychoanalysis, like Oedipus' resistance to the fulfillment of the oracle, is fundamental 'proof' of its truth (the groundwork is laid for this in Freud's essay 'On Negation' (SE 19: 235-239) and critiqued by Deleuze et al. 88: "Oedipus is like the labyrinth, you can only get out by re-entering it—or by making someone else enter it"). Rather I suggest that the schism between these two productive modes of theorizing 'Seneca' leaves a costly detritus, a gap or excess in our understanding of the plays' complex relations to politics, intertextuality and classical and post-classical literary traditions.

Gregory Staley, in a recent book on Seneca's Stoic 'idea' of tragedy, juxtaposes Freud and Seneca differently to Schiesaro, suggesting the plays are not "the mad poet's dreams" but "the analyst's interpretations" (8-9). Here, tragedy is more epistemological than didactic, giving a "naked" image of the angry soul, following Seneca's *De Ira*: "Let us picture (*figuremus*) anger...like the hellish monsters poets create" (*Ira* 2.35.5, tr. Staley). The evil triumphs of Atreus and Medea do not so much compel our identification 'despite ourselves' (Schiesaro) as they conjure a vivid image of passion's consequences, encouraging us to reflect on our own toxic over-investments. Comparing Seneca's and Freud's shared allusions to Virgil's Underworld *monstra*, Staley argues that, just as Freud uses Juno as both an image of the ego (its instinctual impulses personified in *Allecto*) and a model for the psychoanalyst, 'stirring up' the hidden secrets below, so too Senecan tragedy builds upon the *Aeneid's* invocation of infernal deities to give concrete representations of the irrational soul and thus render it explicable. Staley's figuration of Seneca as proto-Freudian analyst, conducting *exstipicium* on buried layers of the human psyche, suggests psychoanalysis' potential to reveal other perspectives on the relationship between the two Senecan genres. Although he still sees the philosophy as the key to 'unfolding' the tragedies,

his connection of Freud and Seneca's Virgil touches on something generally occluded in the debate I have outlined: the complexity of textual and intertextual negotiations over time, how textual meaning survives amid shifting contexts and evolves between symbolic networks.

I want to think further about Seneca's secondary relation to his Augustan precursors with regard to psychoanalytic formulations, particularly the suggestion that his tragedies render explicit what is implicit or repressed in the *Aeneid*, though I am less interested in stirring up the destructive powers of the underworld in the search for hidden knowledge than in remembering the casualties of that quest, those whom it leaves behind. As my guide to the labyrinth of literary influence I turn to engagements with Seneca and psychoanalysis in Renaissance scholarship, largely ignored by classicists: Crewe's intriguing article on *Phaedra* and *After Oedipus*, Reinhardt et al.'s interweaving of psychoanalytic theory and Shakespeare. In considering Seneca's reception in the later tradition, both focus on the recursive presence in his tragedies of violent, or violently mourning, mothers (Medea, Phaedra, Hecuba or Clytemnestra) and the mournful, punishing and guilty paternal figures who shadow them (Oedipus, Agamemnon, Jason, Theseus, Laius and Tantalus). In *Phaedra* and *Medea*, for example, by showing the 'mother's part' as she struggles with her tragic dilemma, Seneca's plays suggest a form of crisis in paternal authority. Medea, the rejected wife, is granted an exhilarating victory after she has 'castrated' the father, depriving him of his immortality through children, while in *Phaedra* the father, representative of justice, commits an act of unspeakable injustice (and self-destruction) by annihilating his innocent son. The play pointedly does *not* reproduce a normative patriarchal model—as adumbrated by the Oedipal models of Freud and Girard—of mimetic desire between rival males, with the mother merely its vessel. Rather violence against the son is engendered by the mother's desire and enacted through and by the father. Moreover, in both plays there is a textually marked absence of ordering divinities (as noted by a traumatized Jason in the final line of *Medea*, after she has killed his children onstage, in front of him: “know that where you go, there are no gods” [1027]). Again and again, Seneca's idiom of perpetual excess deprives the audience of any Euripidean-style suggestion of the future restoration of order through redemptive social ritual (McAuley 2011).

Crewe views Seneca's treatment as radically anti- or post-Oedipal, external to the Oedipal pattern altogether: “Senecanism is thus excessive with reference to psychoanalysis as well as deconstruction...in refusing to concede any normative or culturally formative authority to the Oedipal scenario” (115). Reinhardt and Lupton see these mothers not as its excess, but its internal aberrations, exemplifying the dissolution of the Oedipal stage into a narrative of mourning. They note how Freud's formulations of the Oedipal complex move from an image of the lost, beloved mother in his early letters to Fliess to prioritize the hostility of the father in the *Interpretation of Dreams* (as cited above) and beyond, constructing “a narrative founded on the elision of projected maternal absence in the act of internalizing her loss in and as

the name of the father” (93). Invoking the concepts of introjection and projection in Freud’s work on mourning and melancholia, they construct the intertextual relation between Seneca and Sophocles not as an agonistic, Oedipal rivalry, but melancholic identification: “Through its plots and figures of Oedipal dissolution, Senecan tragedy presents itself as the mourning for classical tragedy, a mourning whose narcissistic identification is both elegiac and sadistic, commemorative and imperialistic” (74). Gordon Braden has noted the ambivalence towards the ‘Senecan’ in *Hamlet*, as both the epitome of bombast and excess and the most authoritative source of classical tragedy (*Renaissance Tragedy* 75-76). The Senecan in *Hamlet*, however, is also marked by the figure of the mother, with and against whom Hamlet identifies himself, whether the exorbitant grief of Hecuba in the Player’s hyper-Senecan performance or the excessive appetites of Gertrude. Invoking Lacan’s conception of ‘demand’ as a term between fulfillable need and insatiable desire, Reinhard and Lupton argue (40-41):

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[t]he mother in *Hamlet* functions primarily not as Oedipal object, but as the Other of demand whose excessive enjoyment impedes the classical (masculine) dialectic of desire. This impasse, moreover, extends beyond the staging of desire in the play to the scene of *Hamlet*’s generic and intertextual relations: Senecan drama functions as the Other of demand, which rather than either complementing or opposing Shakespearean discourse, fundamentally alienates it, locating *Hamlet* in the field of a tradition that is not its own.<sup>4</sup>

If Senecan drama is the guilty, mourning mother to Shakespearean tragedy’s *Hamlet* (and Hamlet), it is worth recalling T.S. Eliot’s famous identification of Gertrude as what is aesthetically problematic about Shakespeare’s play: her minimally drawn character is an inadequate “objective correlative” to justify, for the audience, the excessive revulsion of her son:

The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an “objective correlative”; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked....The artistic “inevitability” lies in this complete adequacy of the external to the emotion; and this is precisely what is deficient in *Hamlet*. Hamlet (the man) is dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in *excess* of the facts as they appear....Hamlet is up against the difficulty that his disgust is occasioned by his mother, but that his mother is not an adequate equivalent for it; his disgust envelops and exceeds her....[I]t is just *because* her character is so negative and insignificant that she arouses in Hamlet the feeling which she is incapable of representing. (“Shakespeare” 48-49)

As Jacqueline Rose (127) brilliantly argued, the fact that a woman is, for Eliot, source of the play’s famous inconsistency and image of its artistic failure repeats Freud’s description of femininity as deficient, lacking or threatening. Eliot thus “ties the enigma of femininity to the problem of interpretation itself...the sexuality of the woman seems to become the scapegoat and cause of the dearth or breakdown of the Oedipal resolution which the play ceaselessly enacts, not only at the level of its theme, but also in the disjunctions and difficulties of its aesthetic form” (127, 130).

In *Hamlet*, the mother's character is, Eliot argues, "negative and insignificant"—not so much morally deficient as drawn too thinly, given too little subjectivity. Yet she is asked to bear, in Eliot's reading, the play's aesthetic inconsistency and failure, and in Reinhard and Lupton's theorization of this intertextual and critical dynamic, the burden of the play's warping of the Oedipal drama, its ambivalence and alienation in relation to the Senecan tradition. I want to take up the psychoanalytic terms of this critique, but refocus it from Seneca-in-Shakespeare onto Senecan drama's processing of its own classical inheritance and in doing so I want to restore to the mother some of her own subjectivity. As a supplement to the vengeful, 'demanding' mothers like Hecuba and Medea who dominate his reception in Shakespeare, I evoke Seneca's figure of Andromache in *Trojan Women*, one of the most complexly drawn figures in the tragedies. Here, the paradigm of the mourning, desiring mother and the ghostly father, as the mark of the 'Senecan,' is turned inside out and broken apart.

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## THINKING WITH ANDROMACHE

Like its Euripidean precursor, Seneca's *Troades* is a play of the aftermath, set in a burnt-out Troy as bereft widows, Hecuba and Andromache, await their allocation to the Greek victors as slaves. My concern, however, is the intense third act of Seneca's play, which has no parallel in Euripides' version, described as a "tragedy within a tragedy" and by Dryden as "the nearest resemblance of anything in the tragedies of the ancients to the excellent scenes of passion in Shakespeare or Fletcher" (Boyle, *Tragic Seneca* 33-34). The scene stages a battle of wits between Andromache and Ulysses over her child Astyanax, whom the Greek prophet Calchas has announced must be thrown off the ramparts to placate the fates, so that the victors can sail home. Andromache hides the boy in his father's tomb, pretending to grieve and swearing he "lies among the dead" (603). She nearly fools Ulysses, but he calls her bluff by threatening to destroy the tomb and her beloved Hector's remains (641-2), forcing Andromache to surrender Astyanax and, with him, her hopes for a resurgent Troy.

Interpretations of Andromache have pivoted on the scene's tensest speech, as she stands torn between saving her living child or the dead Hector's remains:

What can I do? My mind is torn apart by twin fears: on the one side is my son, on the other the ashes of my dear husband. Which one will win out?...Hector, I love nothing else in my son but you. Let him live, to bring your face back to life. But shall the ashes be flung from the tomb and sunk?...Better to let my son die. Will you be able, as mother, to see him surrendered to a monstrous murder?...I will bear it, as long as Hector is not tossed about after death by the victor's hand. But this one can feel his punishment, while death has placed the other in safety. Why do you vacillate? Decide whom you will save from punishment. Ungrateful woman, how can you hesitate? Your Hector is on one side—no, Hector is on both sides! This one still has consciousness, perhaps will be an avenger for his dead father—it is impossible to spare both. Then what are you to do? Of these two, my heart, save the one the Greeks fear. (642-62)

Andromache's 'choice' here embodies an obvious logical inconsistency—Astyanax will die whether she gives him to Ulysses or leaves him in the tomb to be razed along with his father's ashes. In narrative terms, it is no choice at all. For critics, this oddity is compounded by the 'unnatural' emotional dilemma contrived for her: the idea that a mother would consider pitting dead husband against living son is "psychologically absurd by any canon of maternal instinct" (Owen 119). Critics have been particularly disturbed by the scene's conclusion, where, handing Astyanax over, she speaks to him only as her messenger to Hector and takes his cloak to kiss its traces of Hector's ashes, transfer from the tomb. Fantham (278) asks, "Is there no thought for the child? It is difficult to forgive Seneca for his final touch," suggesting (275) that it verges on "abnormal pathology," while Volk (199) concludes that Andromache only loves her son for his resemblance to Hector, not "in his own right".

80 *Troades* is seen as one of Seneca's most problematic plays, riddled with contradictions in plot, character, structure and theme, not least in its inconsistent representation of death and the afterlife. Yet Andromache and her emotional choice—"in excess of the facts" as Eliot would say—have become emblematic of the play's failings, its 'Gertrude.' For critics, she must be *either* a 'good' mother trying to save her son *or* a 'bad' mother selfishly projecting her own obsession with her husband onto the child—yet she cannot be assimilated to either position without difficulty. Thus the absurdity of her choice simply reflects the 'failure' of the dramatist; here, as in Eliot's reading of *Hamlet*, plot, character and passion simply do not match up. A recent theatrical production of *Troades* resolved this by simply effacing Andromache's too-problematic divided subjectivity: the director radically altered the end of the scene so that, instead of an Andromache 'unforgivably' fixated by Hector as her son being led away to die, it showed a mother more in keeping with modern-day "concerns with motherhood and peace politics," an Andromache who "lets go of Hector, lets go of being Trojan, and just loves the boy" (Raby 181, 191). It is telling that *Troades'* plot of double infanticide is supposedly within a modern audience's limits of tolerance, but a mother ambivalent towards her child is far too 'other' for contemporary sensibilities.

From both a classicist and feminist perspective, it seems important that Andromache's complicated maternal passions are not reduced to the moralizing poles of the late twentieth century's 'mommy wars.' Instead, a gender-sensitive historicist reading, which sees motherhood as historically and culturally constructed, could argue that Andromache's ambivalence acutely reflects the dynastic and reproductive pressures marriage placed upon Roman women, and on motherhood's enmeshment in the reproduction of the *patria*, as guarantee of its stability, fecundity and continuity. Her torment is a stark demonstration of what happens to the patriarchal and patriotic ideology of motherhood when neither *pater* nor *patria* exist any more. Indeed, her dilemma (642-62) is as much about politics as about love, something most critics have missed. She tries to resolve her ambivalence in her monologue by privileging masculine paradigms of political enmity and her Trojan identity over

all others, concluding, ambiguously, that she must “save the one the Greeks fear.” On this reading, Seneca’s representation of Andromache’s subjectivity is powerfully sympathetic: her desperate struggles with Ulysses and herself expose the multiple social and political factors that work against mothers, the degree to which the game is rigged—by men, by institutions, by “fate.” Yet on the other hand, we cannot historicise away the fact that Seneca presents a vision of maternal love as unstable, vulnerable to appropriation by ideological agendas, faltering in its duty to protect. Andromache herself, briefly, moralizes about her ambivalence. She asks herself, shocked, “can you, *a mother*, see your child thrown off the battlements?” So reading Andromache’s maternal crisis as a comment on a maternal ideology in crisis in imperial Rome glosses over certain unsettling elements in the scene, especially her erotic longing for her dead husband, which leads her to see the son as reincarnation of his father: “Nothing in my son, Hector, pleases me but you”. This uncomfortable insertion of father-in-son seems to call for another way of conceptualising Andromache’s self-conflict, another conception of her desire.

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Stoic theory is well-equipped to address the notion of a shattering of the self. Gill (421-34) has analysed similar speeches of self-division by Seneca’s Medea or Phaedra and argued that they illustrate Stoic theories that overinvestment in external objects can result in extreme self-division, psychic disintegration and madness. Andromache’s painfully distorted logic, conveying the internal conflict between her maternal and spousal passions and obligations, would therefore be the expression of a self inconsistent with itself, perilously close to psychic fragmentation. Like Medea, Andromache’s solution to the dissolution of her world and identity involves a renegotiation of her maternal status. Whereas Medea decides that if she is not wife, then she won’t be mother either, for Andromache, to mould the son as a duplicate of his father is an attempt at her own reintegration, at *refinding* her “natural” self which she sees as entrenched in her Trojanness and passion for Hector. Yet, while Gill’s analysis of Medea and Phaedra is subtle, the question of gender is glaringly absent; indeed it is striking that in his reading of Seneca’s tragedy-as-philosophy, these two terrifying mother-figures are chosen as perfect exemplars of a Roman Stoic view of the subject as potentially divided and doubled by passion. The resonances between Andromache and the Senecan Phaedra and Medea’s self-division (and crazed obsessions) suggests that maternity itself, with its inbuilt potential for duality and division, poses a particular threat to the consistent, coherent self exhorted in Senecan philosophy.

Like *Hamlet*, this most ‘Shakespearean’ of scenes in *Troades* is structured by proto-psychoanalytic patterns of Oedipal replication and substitution. Early on, Andromache confesses that she has seen a ghost—not the ghost of Achilles, recounted in the previous scene as calling for the sacrifice of Polyxena—but this time of Hector, in a dream: “It was not that face, directing its fiery radiant gaze, but a face tired and downcast and heavy with weeping, and like mine, masked by filthy hair” (449-50). Yet Andromache’s Hector is not a typically vengeful Senecan stalker-ghost like Laius, Tantalus or Old Hamlet—instead he warns her about the threat to their son.

His appearance is a direct allusion to *Aeneid* 2.270-97, where an equally unkempt ghost of Hector alerts his cousin Aeneas to Troy's imminent destruction. Yet Seneca is more concerned with drawing attention to the differences between his Hector and Virgil's. It is ominous that Andromache's Hector also looks like her—a woman impotent in grief.

82 Virgil's Hector ensures Aeneas escapes the city's sacking and thus ultimately aids Troy's resurgence in the form of the future foundation of Rome by Aeneas' descendants, as celebrated in the *Aeneid*. But in Seneca the ghost's similarity to his wretched wife implies he is doomed to fail. This impression is enhanced by Andromache's description of the 'deceitful' (*fallax*, 460) shade eluding her embrace, which directly recalls another Virgilian ghost from *Aeneid* 2, Aeneas' wife Creusa. Having left her behind accidentally to die in the flames of Troy, he rushes back to find her, but she appears as an evanescent ghost, bids him farewell, then slips from his embrace, "like a light breeze or most of all like a winged dream" (2.794). Seneca's Hector is thus marked out precisely as what he is not: not the Virgilian-Homeric hero *redivivus*, returning to save his line from extinction; but rather a ghost of ghosts. Haunted rather than substantiated by these Virgilian allusions, he is not so much revenant as literary residue, an intertextual leftover from the *Aeneid*'s triumphant Roman teleology (as we shall see, in this too he is like Andromache herself). The Senecan Hector's dreamy ineffectuality also recalls, just before this scene, the chorus's philosophical dismissal of the very notion of the afterlife itself, as merely "a fiction like a troubled dream" (405-406). When Andromache again calls on Hector's chthonic potency as the tomb is about to be razed, this time to "break away the barriers, force away the earth!" (681-82), he seems to appear: "Do you see Hector, Greeks? Or do I alone perceive him?" (684-85) she asks, recalling Hamlet's words to his mother when he sees old Hamlet in her closet: "Do you see nothing there?" Again, the Father proves *fallax*—uncertain, immaterial, a supposition.

As in *Hamlet*, the ghost of the absent, impotent father provides the background for the incestuous doubling of maternal desire. For Andromache, Astyanax is his father's replica: "these were Hector's features, this was his walk" (418-23). So much his father's "sure offspring" (*certus*, 461), he is "too much like his father" (463)—thus arousing the Greeks' fear of a *futurus* Hector—but also not enough like, since as a mere child, he is both "too late" and "too soon" (469) to avenge Troy. The paradoxical language persists in Andromache's odd use of *furtum*, a term connoting adultery in erotic discourse. Appealing to Hector to safeguard his son, she refers to Astyanax as "secret love of your loyal wife" (*coniugis furtum piae*, 501), erotically conflating son and father yet also aligning them against each other as rivals for her love.

Alongside these Oedipal connotations, it is hard not to read the scene's dynamics—its conflation of reality and illusion, *fallax* and *certus*—as an anticipatory gloss on the Freudian *unheimliche* and its sister concepts, the fetish and the repetition compulsion, all of which lead back, in his thought, to the maternal body as *locus* of birth and death. Ambivalence is crucial to Freud's definition of the rhetorical category of the

uncanny, which hinges on a blurring of semantic categories of ‘familiar’ and ‘strange’ to the point where one collapses into the other, and his discussion moves to encompass confusion of animate and inanimate, dead and alive, original and repetition. Read alongside his essay, Andromache’s ambivalence also raises a question about the distinction Freud establishes between what strikes us as uncanny in real life and in fictional contexts. The ghosts of old Hamlet and Hector and Achilles in *Troades* are not ‘uncanny’ to us, because, like magic in fairy tales, they ‘make sense’ within the play’s fictional reality (however uncanny they seem to its characters). Rather it is Astyanax who becomes locus of the reader’s unease. For both Greeks and Trojans, he is—and is not quite—the living incarnation of his father. Neither just image nor body, living nor dead, original nor copy, who is the real ghost here—Hector or his son?

Astyanax is uncanny precisely because he is *neither* ghost *nor* real person ‘in his own right’. Through her fetishizing words and gaze, Andromache constructs the boy as more than mere likeness: she makes him into the material *representation* of his father, disavowing the original loss through an attempt to realize the fantasy of refinding the (imaginary) lost object. The supreme, Hoffmann-esque moment of uncanniness is therefore when Astyanax is buried alive in his father’s tomb, fulfilling, literally, the metaphorical description of his genealogical plight earlier: “like a huge weight his noble birth crushes him” (491). Seneca’s punning on birth and burial calls to mind Freud’s remarks on this scenario in his essay:

To some people the idea of being buried alive by mistake is the most uncanny thing of all. And yet psycho-analysis has taught us that this terrifying phantasy is only a transformation of another phantasy which had originally nothing terrifying about it at all, but was qualified by a certain lasciviousness—the phantasy, I mean, of intra-uterine existence. (*SE* xvii: 244)

And yet, much of the ominous charge of this moment is the disconcerting equivalence, not just between son and father, and between the mother’s engulfing desire and the son’s enclosure in a maternal earth, but also between *child* and *tomb*, since Astyanax has already been made, by his mother’s compulsion to repeat (461-74), into his father’s living monument. The excruciating substitutions of son/father/womb/tomb are dramatised at a linguistic level too. Andromache swears to Ulysses that boy is dead, in an ambiguous oath: “So may his paternal earth press lightly on Hector, the boy has lost the light; he lies among the dead and entrusted to the tomb he has received the dues of the departed” (602-604). Her word-games backfire violently later though when Ulysses threatens to raze the tomb and everything in it. Andromache is horrified at the prospect that—now *literally* and *materially*—“father will overwhelm son and son will crush father” (690-91) in a kind of inverted parturition. That this horrifyingly material blurring of boundaries between father and son is configured by Seneca in terms of an inability to escape the maternal body anticipates not just Freud, but Kristeva’s elaboration of his uncanny in her theory of the abject. For Kristeva, abjection is an unconscious means of separating self from non-self or non-human, creating the illusion of a fully-integrated subject, masking the lack or absence at

its core. The abject is “what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (4). The original object of abjection is the maternal body, on whom we existed in a necessary, but potentially overwhelming dependence: “The abject confronts us...with our earliest attempts to release the hold of maternal entity even before existing outside of her ...It is a violent, clumsy breaking away, with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of power as securing as it is stifling” (13).

I could continue, productively, to ‘explain’ *Troades*’ symbolism through a Freudian and post-Freudian idiom of doubling, melancholic projection and enclosure in an abjected maternal womb/tomb. Yet the relative ease with which one can align these ideas with Seneca’s drama partly functions as a lure or screen for a more troubling uncanniness of the resemblance between the two discourses—their *difference* in repetition, which problematizes rather than affirms the universalizing Freudian paradigm. As in *Phaedra*, Seneca presents us with an oedipally-inflected triad of mother, son and father, only to depict its radical failure to resolve itself. Rather than being the agent of separation and socialization, or even of a call to death-in-revenge, the ghostly Father proves both false and destructive to the son, who is left to the mercy of an all-engulfing and horrifying maternity. Whether this narrative should be seen as a refusal of the Oedipal as cultural norm (Crewe), or its mournful supplement (Reinhard and Lupton) is up for debate. However, unaccounted for within the terms of this debate is the supposedly absurd, inexplicable dilemma of Andromache in the middle of the scene. Moreover, looking closer at Andromache’s speech, our comparison to Eliot’s Gertrude is a little misleading: whereas Hamlet’s mother was aporetic for her very lack of subjectivity, Andromache’s ‘problem’ is that she has too much. She is *both* ‘Gertrude’—the Senecan mother of demand—and the indecisive, interiorized subject that is Hamlet.

The unassimilable excess of Seneca’s character points to a great absence at the heart of psychoanalytic theory: the (torn) subjectivity of the mother.<sup>5</sup> Like feminine sexuality, the blind-spot of maternal ambivalence has been integral to the development of psychoanalysis through its very repression, from the paternally-focused Freud and Lacan to object relations theory’s preoccupation with infantile ambivalence towards the mother. Despite his commitment to perceiving ambivalence in most human attachments, Freud declared: “A mother is only brought unlimited satisfaction by her relation to a son; this is altogether the most perfect, the most free from ambivalence of all human relationships”. Articulating his now infamous assumption of female potential as undeveloped or thwarted, both psychically and socially, Freud saw mothering a son as a woman’s one avenue of happiness, once she has given up hope of having a penis: “A mother can transfer to her son the ambition which she has been obliged to suppress in herself, and she can expect from him the satisfaction of all that has been left over in her of her masculinity complex” (*SE* xii. 133; Bowlby, *Freudian* 166-7; Sprengnether). In the 1940s, Winnicott caused a scandal when he listed eighteen reasons why a mother might hate her child and related this to the ther-

apeutic context, for which the nurturing, ‘holding’ mother was an ideal (Winnicott; Raphael-Leff). It was only with the work of Rozsika Parker in the 1990s that maternal ambivalence entered the psychoanalytic lexicon not as perverse pathology but as an integral part of maternal psychic experience, even potentially creative in that it can stimulate in mothers an “increased capacity to think” (7; 120-130).

Andromache is challenging precisely because she speaks and thinks, not as idealized or abjected mother, but as a resisting, desiring mother, a melancholy sexual subject who, far from being completed by her son’s love, is alienated by him, as shown by the tortured paradoxes she uses to describe their dependency:

I would have escaped the Danaans and followed my husband by now, if this one did not hold me: he tames my spirit and prevents my death; he compels me still to ask something of the gods, and prolongs my ordeal. He has robbed me of the best fruit of suffering: to fear nothing. (418-23)

Moreover, much of the power of Seneca’s scene lies precisely in how it splits *our* sympathetic identification, between Astyanax as helpless victim of political and parental projections and Andromache’s grief-addled repetition compulsion. After Hector’s ghost fails to materialize, she *seems* to resolve her ambivalence—and ours—by abandoning her fantasy of Astyanax as Hector *redivivus* and appealing to a kind of reality principle, the familial identities which threaten to implode on each other:

What are you doing? Can you, as mother, destroy both son and husband in one ruin? (*mater et natum et virum*)...The huge weight of the tomb will crush at once the one hidden there. (686-91)

Yet much as we might wish it, her ambivalence does not resolve itself into the culturally-sanctioned, naturalized voice of tragedy’s mourning mother. In her final farewell to Astyanax, Andromache again rejects her maternal mode for a regressive necro-eroticism:

Take these kisses and tears, boy... and filled with me run to meet your father. But deliver too from your mother a few words of complaint: “if the shades hold their previous affections and love does not perish in the flames, how can you allow Andromache to serve a Greek master, cruel Hector? Do you lie inert and unresponsive? Achilles returned!” (799-806)

Andromache’s radically unresolved ambivalence is a synecdoche for the larger tensions that animate the play’s narrative of fallen empire: longing for the past versus the necessities of the future, the claims of the dead over the living. Such tensions are replicated at an intertextual as well as narrative level: Seneca’s play dramatizes for us the critical commonplace that *imitatio* is “one of the inescapable elements of Latin literature” (Russell 1). If Astyanax’s enclosure in his father’s tomb is a figure for the inescapably “huge weight” of a patrilineal poetic tradition (a tradition mournfully introjected and incorporated by the play itself), Seneca focuses on Andromache as a repeatedly marginalized figure in that tradition, one intimately associated with ambivalence and an obsession with replicating the past. Seneca enfolds into his

representation Virgil's Andromache in *Aeneid* 3, a survivor whose world is populated by replicas and stand-ins—for Troy, for Hector, for Astyanax. In her perpetual confusion of past and present, Virgil's Andromache is the ultimate "anachronistic survivor," a tragic figure whose perspective must be left behind for the epic and hero to progress, but who also excites an "ambivalent sympathy," a regret emblemized by Aeneas' tears as he turns his back upon her and departs for Italy (Bettini 14). But when the Virgilian Andromache's post-traumatic attempts to replicate Hector and Troy in Epirus are reworked by Seneca back into the original, immediate Trojan context of her grief, it generates an uncanny double perspective, suddenly unveiling the violence underpinning the *Aeneid*'s naturalization of the necessity of 'turning one's back'—on mothers, on the past, on grief. While in the *Aeneid* Andromache's grief is seen (and pathologized) from the perspective of Aeneas' public-oriented, 'modernizing' destiny to found a civilisation, in Seneca the pathological demands of the public sphere, of politics and 'fate', are viewed from Andromache's isolated, emotional perspective. And what in the *Aeneid* is represented as a tension between the processes of heroic remembering and forgetting, in Seneca is localized in the mother as a tension or ambivalence between love for dead father and living son, an ambivalence that tears at the very fabric of Roman social relations, founded on the transfer of paternal power. Deprived of any optimistic references to Rome as a future Troy, the recursive temporality of this Senecan tragedy—its emphasis on regression, circularity, repetition—offers a negative, specular image of Virgilian epic temporality, in which "meaning derives from the past but is given only in the future" (Selden 385).

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Psychoanalysis' model of identity formation shares with post-Augustan Latin literature an obsession with the interplay of before and after, remembering and repeating. As Marshall has argued, "from a psychoanalytic point of view all forward movement through the human sphere is subject to...the "temporal illogic" of recursivity" (25). Armstrong, discussing how psychoanalysis participates in "the uncanny afterwork generated by the archive of ancient culture," poses a question that is relevant to my own exploration of a relation between the two narratives of Senecan drama and psychoanalysis: is psychoanalysis "the return of repressed antiquity, distorted by modern desire to be sure, but still bearing the traces of the ancient archive"? Freud uses ancient writers—Sophocles, Empedocles—as instruments to work out deadlocks in his own theory and authorize it with the stamp of "foundational truth" (Armstrong 97). When he decides that his early seduction theory is untenable he turns to Sophocles' Oedipus story, for which he then claims universal applicability. At the same time, Freud positions this as a 'progress through return'; he re-interprets the ancient play to reveal its full significance, not clear to Sophocles himself (Armstrong 96). Thus his use of ancient sources can be seen as part of psychoanalysis' wider tendency to search truth, like Oedipus himself, by uncovering primitive origins, e.g. in an individual's childhood or in civilization's early stages. But Freud's selective use of antiquity can also be to disavow, deflect or repress—his debts to modern thinkers such as Nietzsche, or his growing unease with his confidante Wilhelm Fliess or even

his father/mother. If psychoanalysis *is* the return of a repressed antiquity, exposing long hidden truths, that return is itself is a selective, repressive mechanism.

In his piece on Jensen's *Gradiva*, a narrative about 'Rome' itself as the repressed, Freud slightly misquotes a Stoic-sounding Latin proverb from Seneca's Augustan predecessor, Horace (*Epistles* 1.10.24): *naturam furca expellas, semper redibit* ('you may drive out nature with a two-pronged fork, but it will always return'). Freud glosses this as: "the very thing which has been chosen as a means of repression—like the "two-pronged fork" of the proverb—becomes the carrier of the thing recurring; in and behind the agencies of repression the material repressed finally asserts itself victoriously" (Orrells 190). When Freud states that *Hamlet* "has its roots in the same soil as *Oedipus Rex*" and in the process 'discovers' proof of the existence of repression, it is, I would argue, the Senecan tradition, linking Greek and Renaissance drama, that uncannily constitutes both the repressed in Freud's narrative *and* the agent of 'repression', the fork. Left out of the genealogical narrative of tragic proof on which Freud's psychoanalysis was founded (and still, despite its emphasis on fantasy, remains invested in), Senecan tragedy problematises the very notion of (paternal) proof, through a persistent return to repressed feminine origins. Yet within this dynamic of maternal/material concealment and revealment, it is Andromache's psychic dilemma, torn between burying her son alive and preserving this dead father's remains, which implicates us all in a narrative of ambivalence, about mothers and psychoanalysis, about tradition and being left behind, and the preservation—or burial—of ancient texts in modern discourses.

## NOTES

1. Unless otherwise stated all translations are my own.
2. Seneca's *Oedipus* is not mentioned in studies of Freud's relation to classical antiquity by Armstrong or Bowlby.
3. "We know how Seneca distorted the perfect plan of [Sophocles'] *Oedipus the King* by making Oedipus suspect from the first act that he could well be the murderer of Laius. These plays [Seneca's *Oedipus* and *Phoenissae*], which do not seem to have been destined for production, are only a pretext for emphatic declamation or minute and realist description."
4. See Evans 34-35.
5. Benjamin (88): "Psychoanalytic theory has ... largely been unable to conceptualize the mother as a separate subject, to see the mother-child relation from the viewpoint of both subjects."