

CHAPTER 3
APPEARANCE

From the patterns of social and behavioural identification embedded in Roman exemplarity, I turn now to issues of physical identification, that is, to the ways in which individual bodies reveal or conceal, communicate or misrepresent elements of their owners' identities. The central dynamic here is one of interior versus exterior, first-person versus third-person, as the body's visible qualities are assumed to channel information outwards from the private realms of psychology, emotion, and intent. Corporeal surfaces gain significance as meeting points of internal and external selfhood, and of subjective self-knowledge pitted against the appraisal of onlookers. In Senecan tragedy, this dynamic derives from a potent combination of Stoic materialism – which elides emotional with physical states – physiognomy, and awareness of enactment, all three of which perceive the body as an index of intangible, psychological traits. Just as the physiognomist and, in related ways, the Stoic infer character from a person's gait, or gestures, or face, so the actor's body is tasked with conveying to audiences information about the character it represents. The face blends into a mask and the mask a face, since on stage and off it claims the same capacity to signify. In all three cases, the body is assumed to offer itself for analysis, analysis that simultaneously heightens 'humanness' by inferring the presence of a private interior consciousness, and lessens it in favour of the body's primarily semiotic surface, its similarity to a text.

Bodily identity is of course an enormous topic spanning disciplines from Theology to Neuroscience.¹ Mind–body interaction is at once the most fundamental and the most contested aspect of human selfhood. Does identity reside in an individual's mind / soul / cognitive faculties, or in his or her embodied existence (or

¹ For overviews of the various disciplines and issues involved, see Coupland and Gwyn (2003) 1–16; Turner (2012) 1–17; and Westphal (2016). On the mind–body debate as it relates to theatre, see Conroy (2010) 41–57.

both)?² Seneca's approach largely elides the two, for while he follows Stoic orthodoxy in regarding the soul as the ultimate repository and pre-requisite of human existence, his emphasis on embodiment and on the corporeal reality of even abstract qualities leads him to situate many components of identity in the *corpus* as well. This chapter begins by considering how Seneca's Stoic precepts underpin the tragedies' numerous instances of physical description, before proceeding to examine the relationship of corporeality to internal emotional or psychological states in the *Phaedra*. Questions of bodily identity acquire particular urgency in this play, where beautiful *corpora* break apart under the strain of moral ugliness, and mental suffering is seen to imprint itself on flesh. In a process both paradoxical and comprehensible, Phaedra and Hippolytus are granted inner realms chiefly because of their envelopment in a body. But, at the same time, the *corpus*' essentially external orientation, its constant exposure to view, leaves audiences wondering about the truth and presence of what lies beneath.

As mentioned, physical description and physiognomic analysis can also have the opposite effect of augmenting a body's textual qualities, translating skin and bones into symbols and literary tropes. Seneca, too, often portrays the *corpus* as an assortment of marks, signs, and indications, a legible surface inviting decipherment. In the tragedies, this technique highlights characters' fictional nature, for instance, when Hippolytus' disjointed frame comes to resemble a series of poetic fragments that Theseus qua reader must recompose. Such 'textual' corporeality gains further prominence in Seneca's *Oedipus*, the second play discussed in this chapter. Here, characters and audience alike are called upon to decode the manifest signs of the protagonist's body. As an omen, a sacrificial victim, a piece of well-known poetry, Seneca's Oedipus claims his identity from the symbols his *corpus* displays to others, and the play's continual process of interrogation heightens audience awareness of Oedipus qua dramatic construct, a body composed by Seneca, whose identity does not extend beyond the surface of text and enactment.

² A question tackled superbly by Frow (2014) 264–96, with particular emphasis on its exploration in literary texts/film.

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Senecan Bodies

Act 2³ of Seneca's *Phaedra* contains the lengthiest physical description in all of Seneca's tragedies. It begins with the chorus leader inquiring about the progress of the queen's malady. In reply, the Nurse launches into an elaborate account of Phaedra's bodily and mental state:

torretur aestu tacito et inclusus quoque,
quamvis tegatur, proditur vultu furor;
erumpit oculis ignis et lassae genae
lucem recusant; nil idem dubiae placet
artusque varie iactat incertus dolor:
nunc ut soluto labitur moriens gradu
et vix labante sustinet collo caput,
nunc se quieti reddit et, somni immemor,
noctem querelis ducit; attolli iubet
iterumque poni corpus et solvi comas
rursusque fingi: semper impatiens sui
mutatur habitus

She is seared by secret heat and, locked inside,
though covered up, passion reveals itself on her face;
fire springs from her eyes, and her tired gaze
shuns the light; she wavers, nothing pleases her,
and restless pain makes her body toss and turn at random:
now she sinks to the ground on weakened legs, as though dying,
and scarcely can her head find support from her drooping neck,
now she takes her rest and, forgetting sleep,
drags out the night in weeping; she orders us to lift her body
and lay it down again, and to undo her hair
and do it up again: she keeps changing her mien,
perpetually discontent

(*Phaed.* 362–73)

The Nurse continues in this vein for a further ten lines, reporting to the chorus and to the play's audience her observations about

³ Boyle (1987) 134, following Heldmann (1974) 71, argues the case for dividing the *Phaedra* into six Acts instead of the usual five, with lines 1–84 and 85–273 comprising Acts 1 and 2 respectively. But I follow Coffey and Mayer (1990) in treating all of lines 1–273 as Act 1, on the basis of there being no choral division. I also maintain – this time against Coffey and Mayer (1990) *ad Phaed.* 1–84 – that Act 1 of the *Phaedra* is not unique in comprising two separate scenes, since the same occurs in Act 2 of the *Troades*.

Phaedra's present eating habits, her bodily strength and complexion, and the appearance of her tears. Dramatic action is suspended while Phaedra's symptoms are catalogued, and it recommences only when Phaedra herself emerges from the palace at 384. This is unusual theatrical practice, to say the least. Seneca could just as easily have foregone the Nurse's narrative and had Phaedra enact her suffering directly before the audience, or cause it to emerge gradually through dialogue, as happens in Euripides' *Hippolytus* (129–250).⁴ That Seneca rejected both of these options raises questions about the role of description, especially physical description, in his plays.

Phaedra 360–83 is not an isolated example. Lengthy narrative accounts have long been recognised – and often deplored – as hallmarks of Senecan drama. To many critics' fascination and dismay, Seneca interrupts the progress of events on stage to have his characters chronicle past experiences, report on their natural surroundings, and, as in the example cited above, describe each other's bodily features or gestures.⁵ Uniquely, some of these ekphrastic passages also form 'running commentaries' in which the character being described is simultaneously present on stage: at *Medea* 380–96, the Nurse catalogues the symptoms of Medea's emotional condition in the heroine's presence, as does the chorus with Cassandra's frantic movement at *Agamemnon* 710–19; *Hercules* 1042–50 sees Amphitryon describe Hercules as the hero sinks into unconsciousness on stage, and it is quite possible that Amphitryon's earlier reports in this scene are likewise accompanied by Hercules' performance.⁶ Narrative

⁴ In fact, Barrett (1964) 36, followed by Coffey and Mayer (1990) *ad Phaed.* 358–9, attributes Seneca's arrangement of material to inept adaptation of the Euripidean model, namely his having Phaedra confess the source of her passion in Act 1 only to revisit the issue, this time with physical symptoms, in Act 2. I am inclined to give Seneca more credit, though: he deviates from Euripides not out of dramaturgical clumsiness but in order to suit his own aesthetic purposes.

⁵ The role of description in Senecan tragedy has been studied in detail by Tietze Larson (1989) and (1994). Other treatments of the topic include Evans (1950); Herington (1966) 433–43 and 447–52; Zwierlein (1966) 56–63; Zimmerman (1990) 161–7; Zanobi (2014) 89–127 and 147–99; and Aygon (2016) 179–91 and 207–19.

⁶ According to Zwierlein (1966) 42 and n. 8; Fitch (1987) *ad Her.* 895–1053; and Zanobi (2014) 104–5, Hercules exits the stage at 1001, reappearing briefly in pursuit of Megara at 1008–18, exiting again with Megara at 1018, and reappearing at 1035. Sutton (1986) 47 and Kohn (2013) 103–5 take the slightly more conservative approach of having Hercules offstage continuously from 1001–35.

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descriptions, even in the midst of stage action, are such a distinctive trait of Seneca's dramatic style that they feature also in the work of his early imitator, the unknown author of the pseudo-Senecan *Oetaeus*. This play contains a scene like that of *Phaedra* 360–82, in which the Nurse relays the offstage event of Deianira's frenzied physical and emotional reactions to Iole's arrival (*H.O.* 238–55).

Greek tragedy, by comparison, lacks such extended ekphrastic passages; with the notable exception of the messenger's *rhexis*, it employs description sparingly, either to convey information crucial to the plot (witness Jocasta's brief portrayal of Laius at *O.T.* 742–3), or to signal the entrance of a specific character.⁷ Even the conventional messenger's speech, which Seneca's accounts of offstage action may reasonably be expected to resemble, exhibits fundamental differences in length, temporality, and plot relevance.⁸ Seneca's descriptions are a unique phenomenon in extant ancient drama and, viewed in relation to works of classical Athenian tragedy, they can seem both superfluous to and disruptive of a play's enactment. This singularity has prompted numerous attempts to explain their presence and function within Senecan drama, with older generations of scholars labelling them a regrettable outgrowth of florid rhetoric, or a symptom of Seneca's misplaced enthusiasm for epic narrative, and for Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in particular.⁹ Another, more influential approach is Otto Zwierlein's *Rezitationsdrama* theory, which cites Seneca's descriptions as evidence of his composing tragedies for the recital hall rather than the stage, on the assumption that these passages provide vital, visual guides to the action unfolding in the purely nominal

⁷ Comparison of Seneca's descriptions to those of the Attic tragedians can be found in Tietze Larson (1989) and (1994) 19–44, and Zwierlein (1966) 57.

⁸ As charted by Zanobi (2014) 111.

⁹ Lucas (1922) 57 dismisses Seneca's descriptions as 'purple patches'; Eliot (1999a) [1927] 71 calls them 'beautiful but irrelevant'; for Mendell (1968) [1941] 108 they are 'of an overstated character, showing at times an exaggeration of the exclamatory monologue, at times too much the influence of epic'. Good summary of these (typically outdated) scholarly attitudes can be found in Faber (2007) 427–8. The descriptions' 'epic' quality has also been proposed, more recently, by Aygon (2016) 193–220 and by Tietze Larson (1989) and (1994) who, however, uses the term a little differently, in the Brechtian sense of 'epic theatre'. For more detail on Seneca's appropriation of Ovid, see Jakobi (1988).

theatre of Seneca's – and the audience's – imagination.¹⁰ In Zwierlein's words, 'wir vernehmen den Dichter, der seinem Hörer beschreibt, welches szenische Spiel er sich vorzustellen hat' ('we hear the poet describe to his listener which scenic action he has to imagine').¹¹ For proponents of this theory, narrative descriptions in Senecan tragedy represent clumsy, non-theatrical tactics for circumventing the problems inherent in dramatic recitation.¹² Yet a third group of scholars advances the contention that Seneca's *ekphrases*, especially his 'running commentaries', could have been designed for pantomime performance, because this wildly popular early imperial genre entailed a split between a dancer's silent, physical enactment, and a singer's or chorus' verbal narrative.¹³ Lengthy descriptions would, on this basis, not disrupt the performance so much as provide actors with opportunities for virtuoso physical display.

While many of these propositions boast a degree of plausibility and validity, there is to my mind only one explanation that accounts fully for the effect of Seneca's bodily *ekphrases*, and that is Stoic physics. Scholars have often noted that Senecan drama elides the moral with the material universe such that evil manifests itself as cosmic disruption and psychological disturbance becomes meteorological as well.¹⁴ The same holds true for bodies in these plays: they reflect characters' turbulent passions and deep-seated anxieties; they communicate psychology via the flesh. Whenever *dramatis personae* in these tragedies surrender themselves to the irresistible tug of immorality, in the words of John Herington, 'the result is at once visible and concrete (such is the instant causal connection between moral and material realities): the regular lineaments of the human face collapse into the contorted mask of mania'.¹⁵

¹⁰ Zwierlein (1966) 56–63.

¹¹ Zwierlein (1966) 63.

¹² For example Fantham (1982) 40–2 and Goldberg (2000) 223–5.

¹³ An idea first proposed by Zimmerman (1990) 161–7 and elaborated substantially by Zanolini (2014) esp. 89–127 and 147–99. Slaney (2013) similarly envisages pantomimic performance for the choral lyrics of Senecan tragedy.

¹⁴ Evans (1950); Herington (1966); Mastrorade (1970); Pratt (1983) 50, 81, and 162; Rosenmeyer (1989) esp. 93–159; Tietze Larson (1994) 135–68.

¹⁵ Herington (1966) 434–5.

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The chief reason for this convergence is Seneca's materialist worldview, his Stoic belief in the corporeality of even such abstract ethical categories as vice and virtue. For the Stoics, every movement and state of the soul was corporeal; mind and body were not regarded as ontologically distinct substances and their essential difference was claimed to lie in dichotomies of active versus passive, or divine versus terrestrial, not material versus immaterial.¹⁶ Against the dualism of Platonist metaphysics, the Stoics propounded more of a monist theory in which both God and matter constituted *corpora*.¹⁷ In this worldview, psychology is bodily: Cleanthes and Zeno are reported to have believed that ἦθος could be known from εἶδος (*SVF* 1.618; Diog. Laert. 7.173); Chrysippus maintains that the passions are perceptible (*SVF* 3.85). According to Seneca himself (*Ep.* 106.5–6), one should not doubt 'whether emotions are corporeal' (*an adfectus corpora sint*) since they accomplish physical changes such as furrowed brows and blushes; what happens in the interior realm of the psyche rapidly impresses itself upon the surface of the flesh.

Seneca is particularly taken with this idea of embodied emotions and visible psychology, returning to it repeatedly across the arc of his entire oeuvre. Recalling in *Epistle* 66 his recent meeting with an old classmate, Claranus, Seneca remarks that the man's sturdiness of spirit all but eclipses his frail and feeble physique: 'I think Claranus has been produced as an example, so that we can understand that the soul is not disfigured by the body's ugliness, but rather, that the body is adorned by the soul's beauty' (*Claranus mihi videtur in exemplar editus, ut scire possemus non deformitate corporis foedari animum, sed pulchritudine animi corpus ornari, Ep.* 66.4.). As a corporeal entity, goodness can lend a certain amount of physical grace to even the most unattractive of flesh and blood *corpora*. Correspondence of ethical with bodily states likewise underpins Seneca's thinking in *Epistle* 115.3, where he imagines the visibly radiant beauty of a good man's soul, and in

¹⁶ For an overview of Stoic materialism and how it shapes Stoic concept of mind-body interaction, see Smith (2014) 343–61, and the more cursory treatment of Pratt (1983) 46–51. Also useful in this context is the oft-cited statement of Long (1968) 341: 'Stoic ethics is ultimately parasitical upon physics.'

¹⁷ Vogt (2009) is an informative comparison of the two schools' views on this issue.

Epistle 52.12, where he catalogues the gestures indicative of specific moral temperaments. *Epistle* 114.3 equates intellectual dissipation with soft, flabby bodies;¹⁸ *Epistle* 11.10 describes the wise man as someone whose face expresses what is in his soul; *Epistle* 106.6–7 charts some of the *notae corporis* produced by, and therefore signalling, vicious and virtuous behaviour, while in Book 6 of the *de Beneficiis*, Seneca anticipates Liberalis' question on the grounds that his countenance communicates his thoughts (*intellego iam, quid velis quaerere; non opus est te dicere; vultus tuus loquitur*, 'I know what you want to ask; there's no need to say anything; your face speaks for you', *Ben* 6.12.1). The idea of the face as a text for the heart, as a barometer of one's personal, emotional atmosphere is a standard trope in ancient literature, but here it acquires the additional significance of complementing Stoic precepts.¹⁹ It is the material nature of the universe that ultimately enables Liberalis' intent to be inferred from his expression.

The two culminating examples of this Senecan obsession come from the *de Ira*, 1.1.3–5 and 2.35.3–36.2. Both passages describe the symptoms exhibited by irate and unhinged people, with a view to identifying shifts in internal, psychological conditions. Seneca diagnoses those affected by *furor* as displaying 'a bold and threatening countenance, grim brow, savage features, rapid step, restless hands, altered complexion, fast and laboured breathing' (*audax et minax vultus, tristis frons, torva facies, citatus gradus, inquietae manus, color versus, crebra et vehementius acta suspiria, Ira* 1.1.3). As for those experiencing *ira*, 'their eyes flare and sparkle, redness suffuses their face ... lips shake, teeth are ground together ... breathing is forced and harsh ... they groan and bellow' (*flagrant ac micant oculi, multus in ore toto rubor ... labra quatiuntur, dentes comprimuntur ... spiritus coactus ac stridens ... gemitus mugitusque, Ira* 1.1.4). Once again, the corporeal quality of emotional states causes the body to disclose the movements of the soul almost involuntarily. Anger cannot remain hidden; it forces its way onto the visible planes of the face

¹⁸ Graver (1998) 612.

¹⁹ Remarkd by Tarrant (1976) *ad. Sen. Ag.* 128, with a full list of comparanda.

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(*Ira* 1.1.5). An angry person's physical conduct is a direct reflection of his or her inner state: the angry soul is just as deformed as the angry body (*Ira* 2.36.2). So fascinated is Seneca by this interplay of internal and external realms that he even disregards, momentarily, the central tenets of Stoic materialism, declaring, 'if the mind could be made visible and shine forth in some material form its black, blotchy, seething, twisted, swollen appearance would stun viewers' (*animus si ostendi et si in ulla materia perlucere posset, intuentis confunderet ater maculosusque et aestuans et distortus et tumidus*, *Ira* 2.36.2 trans. Kaster). Such temporary aberration from Stoic precepts is not just an example of Seneca employing common sense terminology, as Robert Kaster would have it,²⁰ but also a hyper-development of his interest in the body qua cipher for psychological activity. What one experiences in the private domain of one's own mind or soul, the body renders public. As much as a materialist worldview makes this exchange possible, for Seneca it also highlights the fact of constant dialogue between inner and outer expressions of self.

Significantly, for the purposes of my present investigation, *de Ira* 1.1.3–5 exhibits demonstrable similarities to a lengthy physical description in the tragedies, namely, *Medea* 382–96.²¹ Here, the Nurse produces a running commentary on the heroine's agitated mindset: Medea 'runs back and forth' (*recursat huc et huc*, 385), 'draws deep breaths' (*spiritum ex alto citat*, 387), 'issues threats' (*minatur*, 390), 'groans' (*gemit*, 390), displays a 'fiery expression' (*flammata facies*, 387) and a changeable mien that 'takes on the appearance of every emotion' (*omnis specimen affectus capit*, 389). In like fashion, those suffering from *ira* and *furor* display a 'rapid step' (*citatus gradus*, *Ira* 1.1.3), their breathing is 'fast and laboured' or 'forced and harsh' (*crebra et vehementius acta suspiria*, *Ira* 1.1.3; *spiritus coactus et stridens*, *Ira* 1.1.4), they 'act out anger's enormous threats' (*magnas . . . irae*

²⁰ Kaster and Nussbaum (2010) 119. Using common cultural assumptions as a basis for further ethical reasoning appears to have been regular Stoic practice: see Long (1996) [1971] 139 and Inwood (1995) 20. Roller (2001) 76–7 and 87 argues that Seneca mixes common sense with Stoic registers when he writes, for the purpose of 'getting off the ground', even if this sometimes leads to inconsistencies.

²¹ Parallels amply documented by Marti (1945) 229–34; Costa (1973) *ad Med.* 382ff; Pratt (1983) 90; Tietze Larson (1994) 140–1; and Hine (2000) *ad Med.* 380–96.

minas agens, Ira 1.1.4), they issue ‘groans’ (*gemitus, Ira* 1.1.4), and exhibit a ‘bold and threatening countenance’ (*audax et minax vultus, Ira* 1.1.3). Beyond basic lexical correspondences, both passages present the body as a reliable index of internal emotional activity. Movements and changes to facial expression are documented in quasi-medical fashion²² and presumed to function as a set of codes or signifiers: Medea’s face bears the ‘signs’ (*signa*, 386) of her emotional condition, and the Nurse claims to ‘recognise the marks’ (*novimus . . . notas*, 394) of her charge’s now habitual anger; similarly, Seneca prefaces his list of symptoms at *de Ira* 1.1.3–5 by calling them ‘definite clues’ (*certa indicia*, 1.1.3) and ‘signs’ (*signa*, 1.1.4). The *corpus* resembles a text capable of conveying to onlookers crucial information about the individual who inhabits it. Seneca elides emotional with physical *motus* to show how feelings of *ira* body forth in specific gestures and actions.

The body’s power to signify also necessitates a viewer, someone to interpret and decipher the symptoms on display. *corpora* in Senecan tragedy are always being seen and reported through somebody else’s eyes, and Seneca is at pains to demonstrate how individuals, on stage or in life, employ corporeal clues to fashion judgements about each other. It is this emphasis on interpretation, on ‘reading the body’, that requires a narrator’s presence, even at the expense of smoother dramatic sequence. The Nurse’s commentary at *Medea* 382–96 fulfils just such a need, and this seems to me a fundamental if overlooked reason for the passage’s narrative quality. At very least, the close resemblance of *Medea* 382–96 to *de Ira* 1.1.3–4 weakens the *Rezitationsdrama* argument, because the *de Ira*’s description is not there to help an audience visualise an unperformed theatrical scene, but to provide a visual diagnosis of internal, emotional pathology. The *de Ira* furnishes a catalogue of symptoms chiefly in order to explore the relationship between bodies and emotions, the latter of which cannot be disclosed without the former. Why, then, could Seneca not be pursuing the same aim in the *Medea*, and indeed, in all of his tragedies’ bodily descriptions? Though we need not discount

²² Robin (1993) 108 and Hine (2000) *ad Med.* 380–96.

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entirely recitation's possible influence, Stoicism still seems the most immediate, most plausible source of Seneca's narrative passages.

Keeping this Stoic background in mind, I return now to the passage cited at the beginning of this section, *Phaedra* 362–83. Here, too, the body plays a major role in disclosing the individual's psychological and emotional state. The Nurse's account of the queen's malaise elides emotional with physical suffering, to suggest that whatever Phaedra experiences in the private realm of her mind finds corresponding expression on the public surfaces of her body.²³ Phaedra is 'seared by secret heat' (*torretur aestu tacito*, 362) and that *aestus* represents at the same time lust for Hippolytus and debilitating corporeal fever; her *dolor* (366) similarly designates both mental anguish and physical pain.²⁴ Equally ambiguous is Phaedra's *habitus*, which she is said to change repeatedly (*semper ... / mutatur habitus*, 372–3). Commentators and translators are divided over whether to render this word as 'clothing' – since Phaedra *does* change her outfit when she subsequently appears on stage at 387–403 – or as something more abstract: 'mood', or 'condition'.²⁵ Most likely, however, Seneca is not forcing readers to choose but instead taking advantage of the word's polyvalence, in order to show how Phaedra's mental instability translates into sartorial fussiness; the *habitus* on Phaedra's body represents and communicates the *habitus* of her

²³ Cf. the illuminating remarks of Ruch (1964) 362 – though I would stop short of labelling Seneca's description 'realism': 'le langage de la psychologie amoureuse se meut aux limites du physique et du mental, de la sensation et du sentiment, ou plutôt le sentiment s'exprime en premier lieu par la sensation; le corps y joue un grand rôle: c'est la marque du réalisme de Sénèque, observateur averti des 'symptômes' du phénomène affectif' ('the language of the psychology of love pushes itself to physical and mental limits, limits of sensation and feeling, or rather, feeling is expressed primarily through sensation; the body plays a large role here: it is the mark of Seneca's realism, his keen observation of the 'symptoms' of an emotional condition').

²⁴ Ruch (1964) 356 describes Phaedra's *dolor* as 'à mi-chemin entre le physique et le moral' ('halfway between physical and moral').

²⁵ Boyle (1987) 66 translates 'moods'; Fitch (2002) 479 'condition'; Wilson (2010) 'clothes'. Lawall, Lawall, and Kunkel (1982) do not mention clothing but give their student readers the full choice of 'condition, habit, deportment, nature, character', while Coffey and Mayer (1990), though they do not provide a translation, obviously lean towards 'dress' as per their comment *ad Phaed.* 371–3. A similar use of *habitus* to mean 'mood' or 'condition' is found at Juvenal *Sat.* 9.18–20: *deprendas animi tormenta latentis in aegro / corpore, deprendas et gaudia; sumit utrumque / inde habitum facies.*

mind. What we and the Nurse see on the outside tells us what Phaedra is like on the inside.

The Nurse's account further augments this interplay of interior with exterior selfhood by characterising Phaedra's psychology as a hidden, internalised space. The queen experiences a 'secret heat' (*aestu tacito*, 362); her *furor* is 'locked inside' (*inclusus*, 362) and 'covered up' (*tegatur*, 363) only to be betrayed by her expression (*proditur vultu*, 363); even her eyes are said to 'emit fire' (*erumpit oculis ignis*, 364) as though conduits for the spiritual *aestus* she endures. By implication, Phaedra's emotional states would be inaccessible to others were it not for the unbreakable bond that the mind shares with the body. Phaedra's *corpus* is simultaneously a covering for her self – something that creates a private, inner realm – and a reliable revelation of that self to others. So intimate is the link between psychological and physical states in Senecan tragedy that Phaedra cannot, though she tries, succeed in dissembling: her body inevitably displays how she feels.

Thus, Seneca charts Phaedra's physical reactions chiefly in order to show how her body communicates aspects of her identity. Deploying Stoic precepts, Seneca invites the play's audience to accompany the Nurse in deciphering Phaedra's symptoms. Additionally, his detailed portrayal of her expression and physique endows Phaedra with quasi-human selfhood, principally by generating illusions of psychological depth and privacy.²⁶ The Nurse's narrative encourages the play's audience to think beyond Phaedra's immediate surface, or more precisely, to imagine that *there is something* beyond her surface: a consciousness, a mind. Like a person, Phaedra is assumed to possess greater profundity and complexity than immediately meets the eye. This essentially penetrative act of interpretation that divines Phaedra's secrets

²⁶ Psychological interiority has long been a contentious topic in Seneca scholarship. Eliot (1999a) [1927] 70 famously claimed that Seneca's characters 'have . . . no "private" life', a position also upheld by Hook (2000). Of Seneca's physical descriptions, Tietze Larson (1994) 61 avers, 'They are not revelations of "inaccessible privacy" but authorial descriptions, appropriate to an omniscient narrator, placed into the mouths of the dramatic characters themselves.' But these are minority views. The majority of scholars working on Seneca understand the playwright to have had an abiding interest in internal psychological and emotional states; see, for instance, Herrmann (1924) 488–92; Regenbogen (1927/28) 187–218; Ruch (1964); Segal (1986) esp. 1–38; and Boyle (1997) esp. 15–84.

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from her face necessarily implies that *Phaedra* has both secrets and an interior realm in which to hide them.²⁷

It may, of course, be objected that as a dramatic character *Phaedra* lays no real claim to inner selfhood: the face and body she presents are themselves products of a play script, while in performance, her inner realm is a mere fantasy adumbrated by an actor's skilful gestures. Some critics go as far as arguing that Greco-Roman traditions of masked drama preclude *any* possibility of interior revelation; the mask, they maintain, is all surface and no depth – a public, changeless face.²⁸ Yet there is far less difference between interpreting fictional and actual bodies than critics tend to believe. Whether we watch an actor playing a role or a person just being him/herself, whether we witness these scenes in a theatre or read them on the page, in every instance we absorb the same set of corporeal clues which we then use to build judgements about internal moral character, even if the person in question is fabricated and his or her inner realm a mere mirage.²⁹ Just because *Phaedra* lacks real human psychology does not prevent an audience from making assumptions about it, and such willingness to assume, to become invested in a character's quasi-humanity, is essential to the play's overall effectiveness. Although *Phaedra's persona* may be no more than skin deep, Seneca encourages spectators and readers to approach it via the same methods they would apply to actual people: gesture; physique; clothing; mannerisms.

²⁷ My analysis here approximates the 'mental character models' described by Eder, Jannidis, and Schneider (2010) 13: 'in contrast to objects, characters have mental states, such as perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and aims. Accordingly, characters have both an outer appearance and an inner state of psyche that is not visible from the outside'.

²⁸ A position argued forcefully by Jones (1962), and pursued by Gould (1978) 49, 'in masking we lose the flickering procession of ambiguous clues to inaccessible privacy'. Seidensticker (2008), 340 is one of its more recent manifestations: 'the mask cannot (as the human face) be used to reveal the character of the "inside"'.

²⁹ In this regard, claims like those made by Garton (1972) 15 are only partially right: 'the attributes of a *persona* [i.e. dramatic character] differ from those of a person in that the sum of them is totally accessible'. True, in that an audience's quantifiable knowledge of a dramatic character is circumscribed by a play's contents. But a lot of audience knowledge about characters is not so readily quantifiable: it comprises inferences, extrapolations, and emotional reactions, all of which enable audiences to imbue characters with levels of human meaning and human motivation impossible to measure in strictly academic terms.

The same arguments may be used to overturn the mask/face distinction, which seems needlessly artificial. First, ancient masks were not immobile but supple, expressive objects capable of imparting a range of emotions according to the angle at which they were positioned.³⁰ In emotional terms at least, the Greco-Roman theatrical mask was far from being unchangeable. Second, the mask's various components were intended to relay information about a given character in a manner equivalent to a face. Granted that even the most naturalistic mask could never match the sheer complexity and range of the human *vultus*, nevertheless it performs the same basic signifiatory function, for instance by using tilted eyebrows to convey anger, or an upturned mouth for happiness. In fact, it could be said that all actors wear masks, no matter their era or their style of performance. For the face that has been trained to imply certain emotions or dispositions via subtle tweaks in expression does the same duty as a mask, even though it is made from real flesh and blood. The human body may be *naturalistic* in performance, but it is never purely *natural*. Hence it is difficult to maintain that the mask denies interior selfhood, since it operates on precisely the same plane as the human face, even more so in the context of the theatre.

In sum, Phaedra's fictional existence does not preclude her implied interiority. Granted her inner realm displays none of the uniqueness and idiosyncrasy that modern audiences have come to associate with individual selfhood, but neither does that of the angry man described in the *de Ira*, and he clearly possesses quasi-human status within Seneca's text. Moreover, Seneca's materialism naturally inclines him to produce typologised sketches because it assumes the body's universal legibility, which in turn relies on an accepted catalogue of fleshly traits. To the extent that these physical characteristics specify psychological ones, psychology too is standardised, but that is no barrier to its (implicit or

³⁰ The mask's visual versatility is championed by Meineck (2011) and (2018) 79–119, and Johnson (1992); Marshall (1999) 189 assumes it as a given. Though all of these studies focus on fifth-century Attic theatre conventions, it seems unlikely – Cicero's caveats at *de Orat.* 3.221 notwithstanding – that the Roman mask was more restricted than the Greek in its range of expression (see, e.g. Ballio remarking on Pseudolus' *acuti oculi* at *Pseud.* 1219, in what is clearly a reference to a mask).

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actual) existence. Phaedra's body matters for what it tells audiences about her mind/soul, even if that information is somewhat generic.

Physiognomy and Stoic Physics

Seneca is hardly alone among the writers and thinkers of antiquity in making the body a cipher for mental and emotional states. Inferences from appearance are, in fact, so widespread across the various authors, eras, and philosophical schools of the ancient world as to suggest a shared social discourse of codifying and interpreting individual physical qualities.³¹ One result of this interest is an intermittent yet persistent stream of works about physiognomy: the earliest surviving text is the Pseudo-Aristotelian *Physiognomica*, which dates from the third century BC; the most famous treatise was Polemon of Laodicea's work, produced in the early second century AD and surviving in a Greek abridgement by Adamantius (fourth century AD) and an Arabic epitome (the original completed c. eighth–tenth AD) as well as constituting the main source for the anonymous Latin *Physiognomia* (fourth century AD). From Socrates to Apuleius, physiognomic ideas were prevalent and its practice popular.³²

³¹ The premise of Corbeill (2004), on Roman gesture. Weiler (1996) similarly speaks in terms of 'naïve physiognomy' that may owe more to folk traditions than to official treatises. Evans (1969) wants to see the popularity of drawing inferences from appearance as evidence for the pervasive influence of physiognomic doctrine, but the trend is likely more diffuse than this. See also the survey of material in Misener (1924) 103–23, and for more recent discussion, the collected essays in Cairns (2005).

³² Evans (1969) provides a comprehensive overview in addition to which the following selective list of scholarship merely confirms the wide dissemination of physiognomic precepts in Greco-Roman antiquity. On Socrates' reputed encounter with the physiognomist Zopyrus, see Boys-Stones (2007) 23–6. In a different context entirely, Xenophon has Socrates voice quasi-physiognomic ideas to the painter Parrhasius: *καὶ τὸ μεγαλοπρεπές τε καὶ ἐλευθέριον καὶ τὸ ταπεινὸν τε καὶ ἀνελεύθερον καὶ τὸ σωφρονικὸν τε καὶ φρόνιμον καὶ ἐστῶτων καὶ κινουμένων ἀνθρώπων διαφαίνει* ('nobility and dignity and baseness and servility and wisdom and understanding and insolence and tastelessness are made known in people's face and through the body's poses when still or in motion', *Mem.* 3.10.5). Wiles (1991) 85–90, followed by Petrides (2014) 138–50, argues for physiognomy's significant role in shaping the semiotics of the New Comic mask. Pertsinidis (2018) considers Theophrastus' use of physiognomy in his character sketches. Gleason (1995) investigates physiognomy and paradigms of masculinity in the oratorical practices of the Second Sophistic. Barton (1994) considers the function of

There can be little doubt that Seneca was acquainted with its general principles, even though the majority of formal physiognomic works postdate him. More specifically, Seneca's Stoic approach to bodily signals appears to have a lot in common with ancient doctrines of physiognomy, and since physiognomy has been proposed as a possible influence on Seneca's plays,³³ this relationship needs to be explored in greater depth. Doing so will not only help to clarify the purpose of Seneca's physical descriptions but also elucidate more fully the relationship Seneca envisages between bodies and personal identity.

The most significant aspect of ancient physiognomy – as concerns my present study of Seneca – is its emphasis on intrinsic and supposedly unalterable character. Extant ancient treatises on the topic are uniform in the attention they devote to innate physical characteristics, which they tend to classify on the model of animals. The pseudo-Aristotelian *Physiognomica* lists three possible methods of bodily interpretation: an ethnological approach, based on people's racial and geographic origins; a zoological one, from analogies with animals' appearance and behaviour; and a pathognomic approach that deals with transient expressions of emotion (805a20–805b1). The central method is preferred as being both subtler than ethnology and more reliable than pathognomy. Hence, the text abounds with observations such as, 'to hold one's shoulders straight and stiff and roll them as one walks and to have weasel-arms is haughty, on the analogy of the horse; but to roll the shoulders if one stoops a little forward means a proud soul, as in the lion' (οἱ δὲ τοῖς ὤμοις ἐπισαλεύοντες ὀρθοῖς ἐκτεταμένους γαλιάγκωνες <γαῦροι> ἀναφέρεται ἐπὶ τοὺς ἵππους. οἱ τοῖς ὤμοις ἐπεσαλεύοντες ἐγκεκυφότες μεγαλόφρονες· ἀναφέρεται ἐπὶ τοὺς λέοντας, 813a10).³⁴ Since physiognomy takes an essentialist

physiognomy alongside medicine and astronomy in imperial Rome. Rohrbacher (2010) argues for Suetonius' eclectic use of physiognomy in his biographical portraits of the emperors, while Opeku (1979) and Mason (1984) examine the presence of physiognomic concepts in Apuleius. Weiler (1996) reads Juvenal 10.356 – *orandum est ut sit mens sana in corpore sano* – against the background of physiognomic thought both ancient and modern.

³³ Evans (1950).

³⁴ The text and translation are those provided by Swain (2007). For analysis of the pseudo-Aristotelian *Physiognomica*, its context and its influence, see Evans (1969) 6–17, and Boys-Stones (2007) 44–75.

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approach to questions of identity, and aspires to delineate inborn characteristics, it tends accordingly to focus on unalterable elements of individual bodies. For example: the pseudo-Aristotelian *Physiognomica* declares, ‘an ill-proportioned physique indicates a rogue’ (οἱ ἀσύμμετροι πανοῦργοι 813b35–814a1 trans. Swain), while Polemon’s *Physiognomy* contains such curious, almost comic, details as, ‘very small nails indicate villainy’ (μικροὶ πᾶνυ ὄνυχες πανουργίας σημεῖον, Adamantius *Phys.* B4 trans. Repath).

In contrast, an orthodox Stoic approach to bodily signals employs the pathognomic method rejected by the Pseudo-Aristotelian text (805b1–10). Given their abiding interest in emotional states as evidence of vice and virtue, Stoics focus chiefly on the acquired or transient elements of facial and bodily expression, as opposed to immutable characteristics. When Seneca charts the symptoms of anger and madness at *de Ira* 1.1.3–5, or Medea’s derangement at *Med.* 382–96, he traces the progress of temporary, albeit intense, emotions that – arguably – need not indicate anything fundamental about the personalities of those who experience them. As the author of the Pseudo-Aristotelian *Physiognomica* remarks, ‘a man may at times wear an expression that is not normally his: for instance, a morose person will now and again . . . assume a cheerful countenance, while a naturally cheerful man, if he be distressed, will change his expression accordingly’ (κατὰ χρόνους τινὰς τὰ ἦθη οὐ τὰ αὐτὰ ἀλλὰ ἑτέρων ἔχουσιν· δυσανίους τε γὰρ οὔσιν ἐνίοτε συνέβη . . . τὸ ἦθος λαβεῖν τὸ τοῦ εὐθύμου, καὶ τοῦναντίον εὐθύμον λυπηθῆναι. ὥστε τὸ ἦθος τὸ ἐπὶ τοῦ προσώπου μεταβαλεῖν 805b5–9). From a strictly physiognomic viewpoint, what Medea and the angry man feel at any given moment may not tell us much about *who they are*. From a Stoic viewpoint, discerning the corporeal presence of the passions is a crucial step towards curing them: Stoics differ from physiognomists in believing that the body and the person can change.

Should it be said, then, that Stoics judge emotion rather than identity *per se*, or can physiognomy and pathognomy claim some common ground? In fact, despite divergent precepts, the two schools of thought actually arrive at some similar conclusions.

The divide separating pathognomy from physiognomy narrows upon closer inspection, especially when we consider that repeated indulgence of particular emotional reactions can lead to the formation of habits, and habitual behaviour – as discussed in Chapter 1 – as a core constituent of identity.³⁵ Many Stoics attributed the development of dispositional traits such as boldness or timorousness to the habit-forming effects of emotion; Seneca at *de Ira* 1.4.1–2 likewise distinguishes between being merely angry and being irascible.³⁶ Medea's Nurse reaches an equivalent conclusion when she admits to seeing the marks of her mistress' 'old anger' (*irae novimus veteris notas, Med.* 394): the heroine does not experience a transient emotional state, but instead displays the corrosive effects of a perpetually recurring passion, one that has moulded her face and her identity over many years. The dark shadow that clouds Medea's features is proof of an ingrained trait that other characters in the tragedy would do well to heed. So, in Seneca's work at least, pathognomic observations do not preclude judgements about the person as a whole, about his or her major attributes and sense of self. Contrary to the physiognomists' claims, what the characters of Senecan tragedy *feel* does actually tell us a lot about who they *are*, and about who they have *become*.

I hasten to add that these similarities should not be taken as evidence for any deliberate physiognomic basis or borrowing in Stoic thought, especially since true physiognomic doctrine contradicts some core Stoic tenets. After all, the self-improvement of the *proficiens* would be a futile exercise if both physical and moral character were unalterable, and Stoic writers do not characterise the *sapiens* as being any more beautiful in his appearance despite his moral perfection.³⁷ Instead, it could be said that Seneca's

³⁵ In similar fashion, Baumbach (2008) 36 counsels against drawing too strict a line between innate physical traits and temporary changes wrought by emotion, because 'repetitive actions of a particular pathognomic expression are prone to inscribe themselves into one's physiognomy'.

³⁶ See Graver (2007) 133–71 on the relationship of emotion to disposition in Stoic thought.

³⁷ These and similar objections to physiognomic influence on Stoic thought are raised by Boys-Stones (2007) 79. Plutarch *Mor.* 1058a and Seneca *Ep.* 66.4 both seem to suggest – I say 'seem' because the Plutarch passage is lacunose – that wisdom beautifies a person without actually altering his bodily features. The point Seneca stresses in *Ep.* 66 is that Claranus' virtue overshadows and almost causes one to forget his manifest physical defects.

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descriptions are ‘small-p’ physiognomic inasmuch as they share some of the school’s methods without adhering to or promoting its precepts.

Stoic preoccupation with the body as a marker of identity is likewise present in Zeno and Cleanthes’ reported belief that ἦθος (‘character’) could be known from εἶδος (‘appearance’, *SVF* 1.618; Diog. Laert. 7.173). As told by Diogenes Laertius, this tenet comes from an anecdote in which some young men try to trick Cleanthes by bringing before him a *cinaedus* whose body has been toughened up through agricultural labour. Despite Cleanthes’ touted expertise in judging moral character from appearance, the philosopher is stumped and sends the man away. But just as the man turns to leave, he sneezes, whereupon Cleanthes cries out, ‘He’s a *cinaedus*!’ (Diog. Laert. 7.173; Dio 33.53–4). The story shares several elements with physiognomic discourse and has sometimes been taken as proof of Stoicism’s engagement with physiognomy.³⁸ The tale stresses the body’s involuntary revelation of character despite an individual’s strenuous efforts at concealment (more on this *topos* below), and it pivots around the notion of immutable character traits – the *cinaedus* cannot help being what he is even if his body presents misleading signals.³⁹ It can and has been argued that the anecdote downplays the relevance of innate physical characteristics because it is not the set of his jaw or the width of his brow that gives the *cinaedus* away, but a simple sneeze.⁴⁰ Yet the notion that sneezes can designate effeminacy is present in the fourth-century AD anonymous Latin *Physiognomia* (Anon. Lat. 11) and was most likely a standard trope of physiognomic advice as far back as Polemon’s second-century work.⁴¹ The sneeze, too, can be considered innate, and even if we count it as learned behaviour instead, (in the sense that its quality – pitch, noise level and spluttering – may be acquired and changed), it does not differ significantly from, say,

³⁸ Evans (1969) 10–11 and Petrides (2014) 147 treat the anecdote as purely physiognomic. Boys-Stones (2007) 78–80 refutes the assumption.

³⁹ Augmenting the anecdote’s ‘physiognomic’ character is its similarity to the tale of Zopyrus and Socrates reported by Cicero *Tusc.* 4.80 and *Fat.* 10, and by Diogenes Laertius 2.45.

⁴⁰ Boys-Stones (2007) 79.

⁴¹ On the origins and relevance of the sneeze in physiognomic literature, see Boys-Stones (2007) 78 n.133.

the acquired qualities of a person's walking style, which is also an issue of great concern to physiognomists (e.g. Ps-Arist. *Physiognomica* 813a1–20; Adam. *Phys.* B39–40; Anon. Lat. 75–6). A Stoic view – if one can be attempted from such slender evidence – might by contrast be more inclined to count the effeminate man's sneeze as a kind of physical habit developing alongside and in direct relation to the moral habit of effeminacy.

Clearly, the anecdote is insufficiently forthcoming to be pushed too far in either direction and, as I have noted in the preceding section of this chapter, Cleanthes' belief, however reductively reported by Diogenes Laertius, can also be used as evidence of Stoic materialism. The point worth emphasising here is that Stoic notions of corporeal identity lend themselves easily to physiognomic colouring, which only increases their bearing on the detection and definition of individual psychological qualities. Although in the realm of the body Stoic materialism focuses chiefly on the passage of emotions, it is not as though such emotions leave the core of the individual untouched; ἦθος ('character') is not immune to πάθος ('passion/emotion'). In Seneca's case, bodily features, expressions, and reactions are not mere epiphenomena but primary indications of a person's mindset. If Seneca's work sometimes resonates with quasi-physiognomic sentiments that is because he regards people's *corpora* as integral to their personal identity.

For his part, Seneca also associates ἦθος ('character') with εἶδος ('appearance'), when he counsels Lucilius on assessing men's dispositions prior to selecting the correct moral guide:

Omnia rerum omnium, si observentur, indicia sunt, et argumentum morum ex minimis quoque licet capere: inpudicum et incessus ostendit et manus mota et unum interdum responsum et relatus ad caput digitus et flexus oculorum; improbum risus, insanum vultus habitusque demonstrat. Illa enim in apertum per notas exeunt

If you take note, all actions are significant, and proof of character can be ascertained even from the smallest things: the lascivious man is indicated by his gait, by the movement of his hand and occasionally, by a single reply, by his raising a finger to his head and by the slant of his gaze. The rascal is revealed by his laugh; the madman by his face and bearing. These traits are made known through identifying marks. (*Ep.* 52.12)

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Like the anecdote about Cleanthes and the *cinaedus*, this passage describes the physical revelation of deviant qualities that individuals would, presumably, prefer to keep hidden. Gesture, posture, expression and movement are classified as an *argumentum morum*, that is, as proof of customary (repeated and thus somewhat ingrained) behaviour, not just transient emotional reactions. The passage also shares with physiognomic literature an interest in the body's semiology. Physical and/or gestural quirks offer themselves up to scrutiny (*si observentur*) and furnish evidence (*ostendit; demonstrat*) in the form of meaningful signs (*indicia; notae*). Physiognomic treatises likewise tend to speak of bodily traits and gestures as inherently communicative; they are σημεῖα ('signs'), σύμβολα ('symbols'), *signa, indicia / indices*, and *notae*.⁴² For Seneca as for the physiognomists, the body is a visual object and a readable one; it invites decoding.

The body's involuntary disclosure of private information is another core trope that Seneca's work shares with physiognomic texts. A frequent theme in these treatises is the unmasking of deceptive identities achieved through precise attention to corporeal signals.⁴³ For instance, Adamantius' epitome of Polemon declares that even if androgynous men pretend otherwise, 'thinking to hide their lewdness . . . the deviation of their eyes, the noncoordination of their feet . . . and the screaming of their voice denounce them' (οἶονται τὴν μαχλοσύνην ἐπικρύπτειν, κατηγοροῦσι δὲ αὐτῶν . . . ὀφθαλμῶν παρατροπή καὶ ποδῶν παραφορά . . . καὶ φωνῆς κραυγή, Adam. B21 trans. Repath). The anonymous author of the Latin *Physiognomia* similarly avers, 'the attentive practitioner will detect even the man who is taking precautions' (*et praecaventem attentus artifex detegat*, Anon. Lat. 11 trans. Repath), because the sound of his voice reveals the sybarite, the sneeze the effeminate man, and the abuser 'betrays (*prodidit*) his desire by tears when others start up the abuse' (Anon. Lat. 11 trans. Repath). Seneca uses the same verb to describe Phaedra (*proditur*, *Phaed.* 363) as she strives unsuccessfully to conceal the desire she feels for her stepson; in fact, it is not hard to see how this extended portrait (*Phaed.* 362–83, above)

⁴² Noted more or less implicitly by Gleason (1995) 55–81.

⁴³ See Gleason (1995) 76–81, who refers to 'the X-rays . . . of physiognomical insight'. Also, Petrides (2014) 147.

coincides with elements of physiognomic discourse. The same idea of mute, corporeal revelation recurs elsewhere in the tragedies as well. Atreus worries that his children, Agamemnon and Menelaus, may inadvertently reveal his scheme to Thyestes simply through their expression: ‘a fearful face often reveals a lot, and great plans betray a person even against his will’ (*multa . . . trepidus solet / detegere vultus, magna nolentem quoque / consilia produnt, Thy. 330–2*). In similar fashion, Clytemnestra’s Nurse tells her ‘though you yourself are silent, all your pain is in your face’ (*licet ipsa sileas, totus in vultu est dolor, Ag. 128*), while Jason uses almost identical phrasing of Medea: ‘she bears her anger before her: all her pain is in her face’ (*fert odia prae se: totus in vultu est dolor, Med. 446*). The unknown author of the *Hercules Oetaeus* appears to have understood such remarks as characteristically Seneca, since he imitates them in the chorus’ address to Deianira: ‘although you yourself deny it, your face announces whatever you cover up’ (*licet ipsa neges, vultus loquitur quodcumque tegis, H.O. 705*).

Of Stoicism’s relationship to physiognomy it could therefore be said that the two schools are neither entirely incompatible nor identical in their approach to the body. Both assume the body’s fundamental honesty and reliability – that it will disclose the truth even when its owner is trying to lie. Both also envisage the body as a collection of signals that articulate an unbreakable bond of mind and flesh, identity and appearance. Although at a deeper level Stoics and physiognomists quickly part company, the similarities that Seneca’s work displays to physiognomic discourse are indispensable for understanding his notion of bodily identity. Most importantly for my present study, the quasi-physiognomic quality of Seneca’s corporeal descriptions indicates their pertaining to the individual as a whole and not just to the fleeting passage of emotions across the skin’s surface. In Senecan tragedy, *how* one seems and *who* one is are inextricably bound.

The Inner Worlds of Seneca’s Phaedra

As we have seen already in the description of Phaedra’s malaise, Seneca’s fascination with bodily signals and with the soul’s influence over fleshly form draws his attention inwards to the private

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spaces of selfhood, where individual mores are constituted and from which they emanate. Physiognomic notions of bodily revelation complement this motif by urging observers to see through or strip away the body's layered wiles in order to reach an inner, essential truth. For observers in Seneca's tragedies, the body provides precious access to another person's secluded interior while at the same time acting as a covering, a potentially obstructive and misleading screen intended, usually unsuccessfully, to conceal a person's true qualities. Movement from inside to out, outside to in, typifies Seneca's thoughts about physical appearance.⁴⁴

This pull towards the (possibly) unfathomable, secretive interior of the self is a powerful theme in the *Phaedra*, where it articulates both the forbidden nature of the protagonist's passion and also her implied human characteristics, generating an illusion of depth that makes Phaedra seem more than the sum of words and actions dictated by the playwright. The spatial metaphor features chiefly in depictions of Phaedra's love, which 'burns inside like the heat billows out of Aetna's cavern' (*ardet intus qualis Aetnaeo vapor / exundat antro*, 102–3). Its flame 'devours her innermost marrow deep within and courses through her veins, submerged in her vitals and hiding in her bloodstream' (*intimas . . . vorat / penitus medullas atque per venas meat / visceribus ignis mersus et venis latens*, 641–3).⁴⁵ The chorus refer to *amor* as a 'furtive fire' (*igne furtivo*, 280),⁴⁶ and Phaedra protests to the Nurse that she does not fear the consequences of her passion because, 'I bear within me Love's great kingdom' (*Amoris in me maximum regnum fero*, 218). Corporeal and spiritual sensation merge to the extent that it is not always clear where Phaedra's

⁴⁴ Relatedly, metaphors of inner space typify Seneca's thoughts about the soul: see Bartsch (2009) 201–4 and Traina (1974) 20–3, who remarks, 'il linguaggio dell'interiorità . . . è forse il maggior contributo di Seneca alla terminologia filosofica dell'occidente' ('the language of interiority . . . is perhaps the greatest of Seneca's contributions to the vocabulary of Western philosophy').

⁴⁵ There are several issues of transmission affecting *Phaed.* 641–3: Zwierlein (1986a) brackets 642 for deletion since it does not appear in the *E* branch of MSS; he also sides with the Gronovian emendation of 641 – *intimis saevit ferus* – and has *venas* rather than *venis* in 643. In contrast, I follow the text of Boyle (1987), which in this instance, I feel, deviates less radically from manuscript tradition. In any case, both versions succeed in conveying Seneca's emphasis on interiority.

⁴⁶ *Phaed.* 280 has also been bracketed for deletion by Zwierlein (1986a), but I am inclined to agree with Boyle (1987) that it should be kept on the basis of the lexical and thematic links it displays to other sections of the tragedy.

metaphors end and where they begin. The ‘insides’ she refers to are at once literal and figurative, a collection of *viscera, medullae, venae* and an intangible psychic space beset by imaginary flames. Whatever takes place in this interior realm imprints itself rapidly on the surface of Phaedra’s flesh. *Amor* leads her to waste away: ‘anxiety ravages her limbs, her steps falter, and her radiant body’s delicate beauty has collapsed’ (*populatur artus cura, iam gressus tremunt, / tenerque nitidi corporis cecidit decor*, 377–8). Infatuation for Hippolytus’ renowned *decor* (657; 1096; 1173) causes Phaedra to lose her own. In fact, such is the reach of love’s virulence that Hippolytus as well loses his beauty to it, in exact echo of Phaedra’s misfortune: *cecidit decor* (1270).⁴⁷

Critics have been quick to point out that Seneca’s portrayal of Phaedra’s love draws inspiration from two famous predecessors: Euripides’ Phaedra and Vergil’s Dido. The latter, like Seneca’s heroine, experiences love as a deep-buried destructive disease that devours her from the inside, physically and psychologically. Elaine Fantham charts the main parallels: in Vergil’s portrait of the Carthaginian queen, lines such as *vulnus alit venis et caeco carpitur igni* (‘she nourishes the wound with her veins and is consumed by hidden fire’, *Aen.* 4.2) and *est mollis flamma medullas / interea et tacitum vivit sub pectore vulnus* (‘meanwhile a flame eats at her soft marrow and a hidden wound thrives in her breast’, *Aen.* 4.66–7) find clear echoes in the love that afflicts Seneca’s Phaedra: *alitur et crescit malum* (‘the evil is nourished and grows’, 101); *vorat tectas penitus medullas* (‘it devours the marrow hidden deep within’, 282); *torretur aestu tacito* (‘she’s seared by silent heat’, 362).⁴⁸ Both sets of descriptions have their origins in the elegiac trope of love as illness,⁴⁹ and like Vergil’s, Seneca’s images of secretive internalised desire are meant to

⁴⁷ Although he does not record this particular parallel, Boyle (1985) 1302 notes other verbal correspondences between the scenes describing Phaedra’s illness and subsequent reactions to / accounts of Hippolytus’ death.

⁴⁸ Fantham (1975) 4–6. Prior to Fantham, connections between *Aen.* 4.2 and *Phaed.* 101 had also been noted by Ruch (1964) 361.

⁴⁹ Coffey and Mayer (1990) *ad Phaed.* 363 cite as parallel the portrait of the lovesick stepmother in Apul. *Met.* 10.2, but in addition, the Nurse’s account of Phaedra’s suffering also demonstrates more diffuse elegiac undertones. On the play’s interaction with Ovidian elegy, see Davis (2012) 449–51 and Trinacty (2014) 67–93; and for its interaction with elegiac poetry more generally, see Littlewood (2004) 264 and 274–85.

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arouse the audience's sympathy by emphasising the character's quasi-human quality. Repeated allusions to a private psychological landscape, however overwrought in Seneca's version, create the impression of consciousness, as though Phaedra herself laid claim to inwardly constituted subjectivity, independent of the dramatist's pen.

However, just because Seneca's images owe a debt to Vergil does not preclude them from serving their own, independent function within the text, chiefly as a means of interrogating how identities are fashioned and interpreted. In Seneca's *Phaedra*, motifs of psychological interiority do not just build the impression of a character but also, on a more abstract plane, articulate a complex relationship between exterior and interior manifestations of selfhood: whether the body covers or discloses one's inner thoughts and whether one's appearance really matches the reality of one's personal qualities.

In this regard, Seneca can be seen to build upon Euripides, whose tragedy on the same topic likewise considers the hermeneutic and revelatory power of the body, albeit in a less comprehensive fashion. In the scene following the first choral ode, Euripides' Nurse remarks to the chorus leader that Phaedra will not disclose the cause of her troubles (πάντα . . . σιγᾷ τᾶδε; 'she keeps quiet about everything', 273) and that she 'conceals her suffering [from Theseus] and denies she is ill' (κρύπτειν γὰρ ἦδε πῆμα κοῦ φησιν νοσεῖν, 279). When, in response, the chorus leader wonders why Theseus cannot 'deduce it by looking at her face' (ὁ δ'εἶς πρόσωπον οὐ τεκμαίρεται βλέπων; 280), Euripides activates the contending claims of verbal and visual evidence that structure this play's events.⁵⁰ He also activates the idea of the body as a semiotic object that can be deciphered (cf. τεκμαίρεται) and so provide

On the elegiac resonance of Vergil's Dido, see in particular Cairns (1989) 129–50 (esp. 142, on the symptoms of lovesickness).

⁵⁰ Thus, Nikolsky (2015) 32: 'In *Hippolytus*, vision turns out to be . . . [a] key motif, which develops in parallel and constant juxtaposition with the motif of words.' Characters in Euripides' version are inclined to treat speech with suspicion and to believe all too readily the evidence set before their eyes. The play's linked themes of concealment, misinterpretation, and the instability of verbal and physical signs are also explored by Segal (1988) and (1992).

evidence of internal character.⁵¹ Like Seneca's Phaedra, Euripides' heroine is implied to have difficulty disguising what she really feels: the body will betray what the tongue holds back. The idea surfaces again at *Hippolytus* 416–18, where Phaedra wonders how adulterous women manage to 'look at their husbands face-to-face . . . unafraid that the chambers of the house may at some point cry out' (βλέπουσιν ἐς πρόσωπα τῶν ξυνευνετῶν / . . . / τέραμνά τ' οἴκων μή ποτε φθογγήν ἀφῆ). Besides evoking such women's brazen lack of shame, Phaedra's imagery here suggests that the face may inadvertently communicate one's secrets, just as the house, another voiceless entity, may reveal what has gone on inside it. These are auxiliary motifs in Euripides, but, thanks largely to the influence of Stoicism, they become the driving force of Seneca's *Phaedra*, underpinning the characters' knowledge of and judgements about one another, as well as the audience's insight into the figures presented on stage.

To complement this notion of private subjectivity, moreover, Seneca employs throughout his tragedy images of interior space, secrecy, and concealment.⁵² The heroine hopes fervently that she may be able to 'hide [her] crime with the torch of marriage' (*forsan iugali crimen abscondam face*, 597) and begs Hippolytus to receive her confession 'confidentially' (*secretus*, 600). Earlier, the Nurse argues that it will not be easy for Phaedra 'to cover up such great wrongdoing' (*tegere . . . tantum nefas*, 153), and that even if 'the gods' favour were to conceal' the crime (*numinum abscondat favor*, 159), Phaedra's father would not 'allow it to hide in secret' (*latere . . . occultum sinet*, 151) nor would Phaedra herself 'manage to evade [her] all-seeing ancestors' (*effici, / inter videntes omnia ut lateas avos*, 157–8). Parallel lexical choices convey close thematic links: Phaedra aspires to conceal her transgressions (*latere*, 151; *lateas*, 158) at the same time as

⁵¹ For Segal (1992) 435, this is one of the *Hippolytus*' main structural themes: 'discovering our inner being beneath the outer covering of what we seem to be'. Jones (1962) 239–70 detects in Euripidean drama a broader trend of exploring discrepancies between internal moral character and external markers of honour/social status.

⁵² Segal (1986) 29–37 offers an insightful though far from exhaustive study of these motifs in the *Phaedra*.

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passion conceals itself in her veins (*latens*, 643); the body qua *covering* for her psyche is further evoked through her attempts to *cover up* her wayward lust.

Repeated references to interiority and secrecy accentuate the drama's oppressive atmosphere. The guilt and shame that Phaedra feels inside her person find counterparts in the buried sexual misdemeanours of her mother, Pasiphaë, and the resulting labyrinthine home of the Minotaur that lies beneath the Cretan palace like a murky Freudian subconscious.⁵³ While Euripides' Phaedra imagines fearfully that the house itself could speak her secrets, the characters of Seneca's version return again and again to visions of the Cretan labyrinth sheltering its hideous occupant. Phaedra remarks of Daedalus that he, 'confined our monster in a sightless dwelling' (*nostra caeca monstra conclusit domo*, 122), and Hippolytus alludes to the maze in his tirade against the corrupting effects of wealth. Whoever pursues a simple life of rustic purity, he claims:

non in recessu furta et obscuro improbus
quaerit cubili seque multiplici timens
domo recondit: aethera ac lucem petit
et teste caelo vivit

does not seek out adultery, shamelessly, in hidden nooks
and darkened couches, nor hides away, scared,
in a labyrinthine house: he seeks the air and the light
and lives under heaven's gaze

(*Phaed.* 522–5)

in recessu, obscuro, se . . . recondit: this is the same web of visual symbolism that entwines Phaedra herself, a continuity that shows Seneca identifying the psyche with the murky corners of private rooms.⁵⁴ Whatever suspicious activity takes place under this knot of roofs is on par with the shameful thoughts concealed in Phaedra's mind. Granted, elaborate houses are commonplace in

⁵³ Segal (1986) pioneered a Freudian/Lacanian reading of the *Phaedra* and the success of his study initiated a trend of psychoanalytic Senecan criticism, for example, Schiesaro (2003) and (2009); Staley (2010); Rimell (2012). Detailed justification for applying such frameworks to Senecan tragedy is given by McAuley (2016) 272–80.

⁵⁴ A good parallel is *Epistle* 43.4–5. Using buildings to symbolise personal *mores*/interior selfhood is a notable Senecan tactic, for example *Epp.* 12, 55, and 86, with Henderson (2004).

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Seneca's denunciations of wealth and overweening power (cf. *Thy.* 455–7; *de Clem.* 6.1: *multiplicibus . . . muris turribusque*), but in the context of the *Phaedra*, and in such close conjunction with *furta*, the *multiplex domus* irresistibly conjures images of the convoluted Cretan palace.⁵⁵ Rather than become trapped in this sinful tangle, Hippolytus opts for the open air, by which he also implies a life free from deception. His rage against Pasiphaë's sexual misconduct grows more explicit when he addresses Phaedra later in the same scene:

tamen tacitum diu
crimen biformi partus exhibuit nota,
scelusque matris arguit vultu truci
ambiguus infans

but the birth exposed
the long hidden crime, through its double form,
and the hybrid child proved by its savage face
the guilt of its mother.

(*Phaed.* 690–3)

With its emphasis on the body's *nota* or 'imprint', and on the face as capable of revealing closely guarded secrets, Hippolytus' description of the Minotaur recalls even if it does not quite replicate the quasi-physiognomic assessments of bodies performed elsewhere in Seneca's *Phaedra*. Moral transgressions are reified in corporeal monstrosity, and what is patently visible on the outside points towards what is hidden within. Mention of a *tacitum crimen* also looks back to Phaedra's preceding experience of *tacitus aestus* (362) and to her plea that Hippolytus heed the entreaties of her 'silent mind' (*tacitae mentis*, 636),⁵⁶ a set of lexical links that further associate what is silent and concealed with what is internal and subjectively experienced.

Psychological interiority, therefore, is often paired with the threat of deception in the *Phaedra*, and this pairing makes sense

⁵⁵ Confirming this connection, Coffey and Mayer (1990) *ad Phaed.* 523–4 note that Seneca probably borrowed the phrase *multiplex domus* from Ovid's description of the Labyrinth at *Met.* 8.158.

⁵⁶ Against Axelson's emendation, *pavidae mentis*, accepted by Zwierlein (1986a), I prefer the manuscript reading, *tacitae mentis*, printed by Boyle (1987), Coffey and Mayer (1990), and Viansino (1993). For discussion of the issue, see Morelli (1995).

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because both motifs imply hidden depth. Just as a person's psyche is assumed to lie beyond or behind the screen of his/her face and body, accessible only in mediated form, so deceptive behaviour presupposes veiled intentions that observers must delve to uncover. Phaedra's hope of hiding her love affair (*tegere*, 153) points also to the sensations of *amor* eroding her *tectas medullas* (282) and culminates in her ambiguous gesture of veiling her face in Theseus' presence (*optegis*, 887); the act of decoding her movements and bodily condition coincides with the push to reveal her potential falsity. Deception and secrecy are used not just by Seneca but by many writers of fiction to convey the elusive, unreachable nature of individual consciousness and thereby to endow characters with quasi-human features. Another example from this tragedy centres around the participle *abditus*: Theseus uses it to decry – mistakenly, it turns out – Hippolytus' misleading behaviour and the shameless lust supposedly hidden beneath the young man's serious visage (*abditos sensus geris*: 'you keep your true feelings hidden', 918); he also uses it in his promise to hunt down Hippolytus 'even though [he] is hidden deep in the far-most corner of the earth' (*licet in recessu penitus extremo abditus*, 933); the word is also applied, by the Nurse, to Theseus himself, 'submerged in the underworld' (*Lethaeo abditum*, 147) for the underhand purpose of helping Pirithous abduct Persephone; and by the chorus to describe, in obviously Ovidian fashion, the seductive perils of the noontime woodland (*te nemore abdito*, / *cum Titan medium constituit diem*, / *cingent turba licens Naides improbae*; 'in a secluded forest glade, when Titan halts the day at its height, a lustful crowd of wanton Naiads will encircle you' 778–80).⁵⁷ Again, literal acts of hiding and supposedly deceptive appearances are paired with the seemingly unfathomable depths of personal psychology, an association reinforced by *de Ira* 1.1.5 where Seneca likewise uses *abditus* to denote internally experienced passions not readily noticeable to others (*in abdito alere*). In this quasi-physiognomic schema, personal character is inwardly situated. As Cicero remarks in the *de Legibus* 1.26, *tum [natura] speciem ita formavit oris, ut in ea penitus reconditos mores*

⁵⁷ On the Ovidian quality of this *topos*, see Segal (1986) 68.

effingeret ('nature shaped the appearance of the face so as to reproduce in it the disposition hidden deep inside'). Seneca's *Phaedra* pursues much the same idea, via multiple images of bodies enveloping minds and of people attempting to hide themselves or their intentions (cf. *se . . . / . . . recondit*, *Phaed.* 523–4).

As a brief epilogue to this section, it is worth noting that the dramaturgy of Seneca's *Phaedra* complements this theme of inwardness by drawing the audience's attention towards private, offstage space. When *Phaedra* is presented before the audience following the Nurse's physiognomic report at 360–83, 'the stage action of showing the queen languishing in her palace interior enacts the process of revealing the mystery of passion hidden in her soul'.⁵⁸ Likewise, Theseus' aggressive desire to gain entry into *Phaedra*'s chamber (863) mirrors his more protracted attempt to discover what lies behind his wife's intention to commit suicide (864–85). The queen's location within the enclosed space of the palace matches her reticence: *haud pandit ulli; maesta secretum occulit* ('she unfolds nothing; sorrowfully she covers up her secret', 860). It is equally fitting that *Phaedra*'s two great scenes of confession take place outdoors, first in the woodland with Hippolytus (589–718) and later, outside the palace, in front of Theseus and the gathered citizenry of Athens (1155–98). In echo of the play's quasi-physiognomic themes, the spatial placement of stage action guides audiences to interrogate the relationship between inside and outside, between the private, internal regions of the psyche and the public, readily accessible planes of the body. The extent to which they correlate or diverge forms the subject of the next two sections.

Deceptive Appearances

Ultimately, *Phaedra*'s attempts at concealment prove ineffectual, as does her body's task of veiling her psychological states. This happens not just as a consequence of the tragedy's spiralling revelatory impulse towards catastrophe, but also through its monist, material treatment of the mind–body relationship. If in the

⁵⁸ Segal (1986) 48.

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Senecan universe passion is always involuntarily made manifest somewhere on an individual's body, then successful acts of physical deception become more or less impossible. That the body does not, *cannot*, lie is a central theme both in Stoic and in physiognomic narratives: misleading appearances are partial at best and typically due not to the *corpus* itself, but to the misinformed eye of its beholder. For Seneca, symptoms are reliable; it is their interpreters who make mistakes.

Much of the action in Seneca's *Phaedra* pivots around such questions of whether and to what extent the body can actually deceive its witnesses. Hippolytus' ascetic beauty is claimed to belie the ugliness of his conduct (915–22); Phaedra is accused of accentuating her distressed appearance for the fraudulent purpose of condemning her stepson (826–8); Theseus misconstrues the meaning of his wife's gestures (886–7) and of the sword she presents to him as an evidential token (898–900). From these sinister ambiguities disaster unfurls like waves across the shore, with Phaedra in particular being held culpable for displaying a dishonest façade. Scholars of Senecan tragedy tend to label the heroine as duplicitous: they point to her changeability, her inconsistency and uncertainty that lead her to play numerous roles throughout the drama, as proof of her falsity.⁵⁹ Phaedra's appearance is assumed not to accord with her intentions at critical points in the play, a dissonance that is further assumed to highlight her status as a dramatic character, an enacted part, a theatrical performance. There is some substance to these views, especially because, as Christopher Trinacty notes, Seneca uses the same verb, *finco*, to describe Phaedra's changeable hairstyles (*solvi comas / rursusque fingi*; 'undoing her hair and doing it up again', 371–2) and her false accusation of rape (*mentita finxi*; 'I fashioned lies', 1194).⁶⁰ Since *finco* can also denote 'playing a part',⁶¹ the constellation of theatrical performance, contrived

⁵⁹ An argument pursued in various forms by: Trinacty (2014) 45–6 and 67–93, and (2017) 180; Kirichenko (2013) 51–9; and Fitch and McElduff (2002) 32–6. On the incongruities and possible duplicity in Phaedra's conduct, see also Hill (2004) 159–75, and Coffey and Mayer (1990).

⁶⁰ Trinacty (2014) 45–6.

⁶¹ *OLD* s.v. *finco* entry 9c.

physical appearance and deliberate falsehood begins to look convincing. Fabricated behaviour is posited as the natural correlate of a fake guise, on the model of actors donning costumes to express what they do not personally, individually, feel. How, if at all, can this be squared with the principles of Stoic materialism?

Surprisingly, it can be, in much the same way that Atreus' superficially deceptive conduct does not preclude behavioural consistency. The clue lies in the erroneous equation of acting with pretence, for the body on stage does not merely *pretend* to be someone else, but also, through its posture and movement, communicates to the audience a given character's inner state. Granted the actor's body lies in respect of not (or not wholly) representing the actor's own, internal psyche, but in respect of displaying a character's disposition, it very much tells the truth. In Colette Conroy's formulation, 'it is important to recognise that actors are not *copying* behaviour, but are performing it in a way that involves a formal and aesthetic relationship to the play, the conventions of theatre and the world outside the theatre'.⁶² Audiences use essentially the same set of codes to interpret bodies both on stage and off. Like the body in Stoic physics or in physiognomy, the *corpus* on stage is a meaningful, legible object providing onlookers with information crucial to their deciphering a character's traits, inclinations, and emotional states.

Hence, belief in the coincidence of moral character and physique informs the practice of performing fictional roles in the theatre almost as much as it informs the pursuit of physiognomy. An actor's gesture, an actor's body, symbolise the psychology, emotions, and intentions of the *dramatis persona* he or she has assumed. This happens even in the case of duplicitous characters, for without such information an audience would not be able to judge whether the character in question was in fact duplicitous. The body on stage can therefore be remarkably sincere, and we should be wary of presupposing that all instances of Seneca's characters performing their identities necessarily entail a divorce

⁶² Conroy (2010) 40. The distinction between acting and pretence is stressed by Zamir (2014) 33–8.

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between internal motivation and external display. Contrary to common scholarly belief, performance can actually unite the two.

This sincerity of bodily signals is key to understanding Seneca's *Phaedra*, since the queen passively exploits ambiguities at least as much, if not more, than she practises active deception.⁶³ All responsibility lies with the interpreter of these physical cues, who, like a well-schooled Stoic or capable physiognomist, must exercise corporeal knowledge in order to reach the truth. When the queen sits stunned in the aftermath of her ill-conceived attempt at seduction, the Nurse plots a cover-up by declaring *Phaedra's* shattered appearance evidence of pre-meditated assault at Hippolytus' hands. 'Leave her pulled hair and torn tresses as they are', she admonishes the servants, 'the marks of so great a crime' (*crinis tractus et laceratae comae / ut sunt remaneant, facinoris tanti notae*, 731–2). Certainly, the Nurse's aim is dishonest, and her instructions seem to acquire a metatheatrical tint as she stage-manages *Phaedra's* appearance in the manner of a director. Yet this dishonesty and pretence need not falsify the state of *Phaedra's* body, which really does bear the *facinoris tanti notae*, even if the *facinus* in question is attempted adultery, not attempted rape. Hippolytus has wrenched *Phaedra's* hair (707–8: *crine contorto . . . / laeva*; 'with her hair twisted back in my left hand') and threatened her with violence (706–9). Thus, the *notae* exhibited on her body are fundamentally reliable, and it is only a slight slant in context that makes them convey a misleading impression.

It is at the end of the play's second chorus that Seneca comes closest to crediting *Phaedra* with actual physical deceit. The speakers protest that *Phaedra* 'is preparing heinous charges against an innocent youth' (*nefanda iuveni crimina insonti apparat*, 825), in the service of which she deliberately composes her looks, for maximum effect: 'see her villainy! With her torn hair she seeks to be believed; she spoils her head's full beauty, drenches her cheeks: she sets her trap with every feminine wile' (*en scelera! quaerit crine lacerato fidem, / decus omne turbat capitis, umectat genas: / instruitur omni fraude feminea dolus*, 826–8). With its excitable

⁶³ For this perspective on Seneca's *Phaedra*, see in particular Davis (1983) and Roisman (2000).

en! the chorus indicates the performative quality of Phaedra's appearance: her corporeal distress is a spectacle both for the audience and for other characters within the tragedy. As a piece of theatre, moreover, this staging of the body is assumed to lack truthfulness; Phaedra's desire for belief (*fides*) only accentuates the absence of trustworthiness (*fides*) from her looks. Her interior and exterior are assumed not to correspond.

Yet Phaedra's bodily state may be more genuine than the chorus would have us believe because her disordered visage recalls not just Hippolytus' violence (707–8 and 732, above) but also the queen's own distraught reaction to the disastrous encounter with her stepson, which leaves her 'clawing at [herself]' (*te ipsa lacerans*, 734 cf. *lacerato*, 826). Her tears are likewise a standard symptom of her suffering, and in the play's second Act the Nurse cites them as reliable evidence of Phaedra's lovesickness: 'tears fall down her face and drench her cheeks in perpetual dew' (*lacrimae cadunt per ora et assiduo genae / rore irrigantur*, 381–2). Lexical and visual associations between the chorus' and these earlier descriptions of Phaedra's physical condition suggest that the chorus has misjudged the queen's physiognomy. Her symptoms may well be reliable indications of something other than what the chorus chooses to see; her distress may be genuine, not counterfeit, even though it is being directed towards an underhand purpose.

From the better-informed perspective of the audience, moreover, Phaedra's performance of crying and tearing at her hair can actually convey a high level of sincerity. Since the audience knows about the queen's distressing encounter with Hippolytus, it is able to ascertain the potential *fides* linking her external bodily signals to their internal correlatives: the pain displayed on the surface of Phaedra's skin communicates the psychological pain she experiences underneath. Like an actor using his or her body to convey a character's ethos, Phaedra performs her suffering in a manner arguably no less reliable for being deliberate. Admittedly, Seneca provides too little detail in this passage to allow full resolution of the issue, but the clear distance separating the chorus' interpretation from the audience's more sophisticated understanding shows that for Seneca misconceptions rather than outright falsehoods are indeed the central concern of this tragedy.

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Despite allegations of pretence, then, Phaedra's appearance tends throughout the play to demonstrate the logic of her feelings. A good example is the elaborate scene near the beginning of Act 2 where she exchanges her royal robes for the compact kit of an Amazonian huntress (387–403). Christopher Trinacty interprets the new costume as evidence of Phaedra's desire to re-invent and therefore contrive her appearance along with her *persona*; he cites in support the chorus' preceding comment that love compels even the gods to undergo metamorphosis and visit earth 'in disguise' (*vultibus falsis*, 295).⁶⁴ Following hard upon the chorus' tales of Apollo as a herdsman (296–8), Zeus as a bull (303–8) and Hercules in women's garb (317–24), Phaedra's change of outfit may well seem to realise the deceptive effects of passion. It may also seem to highlight Phaedra's inconstant performance of multiple roles, as it does in the case of Thyestes exchanging exilic rags for royal drapery at *Thyestes* 524–6. To some extent this is correct: Phaedra's change of clothing indicates a changeable disposition and draws attention to her status as a fabricated, enacted character. But it is also true that her sartorial transformation is not unfaithful to her internal state, both in the sense that it illustrates her struggle to escape love's physical oppression – as Charles Segal has shown⁶⁵ – and also in its leading her to resemble Hippolytus' mother, a similarity that only confirms the incestuous, transgressive nature of her desire.⁶⁶ The queen's exterior thus reflects her interior even when she seems at her most fickle.

Events in the latter half of the *Phaedra* are likewise driven by misinterpretation far more than by active deceit. The problem of bodily communication grows more acute by the middle of Act 3, when Theseus struggles to prise an explanation from his wife, and subsequently misreads his son's character from his looks. Having gained access to Phaedra's chamber at 863, Theseus tries to access her worries as well, only to be greeted with obdurate silence. He falls back on endeavouring to decipher her gestures instead, but in

⁶⁴ This view is actually a combination of Trinacty (2014) 73–4, with n.44 in particular, and Trinacty (2017) 180.

⁶⁵ Segal (1986) 30–2.

⁶⁶ An association noted by Davis (1983) 115, Kirichenko (2013) 52, and, far earlier, by the anonymous interpolator of *Phaed.* 398: *talis severi mater Hippolyti fuit*.

this regard, too, he remains at a loss: *quidnam ora maesta avertis et lacrimas genis / subito coortas veste praetenta optegis?* ('why do you turn away your sorrowful face and why hold up your robe to veil tears suddenly sprung from your eyes?' 886–7). Like the preceding examples discussed in this section, this act of veiling could be construed as a deceitful move, especially in its visual echo of the Nurse's earlier proposal to 'cloak crime with crime' (*scelere velandum est scelus*, 721), that is, to salvage Phaedra's reputation by accusing Hippolytus. Certainly, the gesture fits within the play's economy of hidden intentions and physiognomic revelation; Phaedra's move to cover her face is at once a bid for concealment and a publicly available sign of what her psyche contains.⁶⁷ The latter point deserves stressing: Phaedra's body language still communicates her state of mind even as, or *because*, it tries to shroud it. Essentially, Phaedra's body reifies her psyche even against its owner's will (cf. 363: *quamvis tegatur, proditur vultu furor*); the act of covering her face may, paradoxically, uncover a dishonest intent. In Seneca's Stoic universe, cerebral deception need not translate into bodily falsehood.

But neither Theseus nor the play's audience has sufficient information at their disposal to decipher this action, and so Seneca throws us back into questions of how and with what degrees of success bodily signals are interpreted. Theseus seems to regard the veiling as a gesture of grief, which is not an unreasonable guess given the conventions of the Greco-Roman tragic stage.⁶⁸ Still, Phaedra's gesture is more multivalent than Theseus allows. Michael Coffey and Roland Mayer suggest that the veiling signifies Phaedra's intent to lie under oath.⁶⁹ Anthony Boyle points out that Phaedra's gesture resembles her earlier behaviour when the Nurse revives her following her confrontation with Hippolytus: *quid ... omnium aspectus fugis?* ('why do you avoid everyone's glance?' 734).⁷⁰ Both instances may be intended

⁶⁷ Thus Cairns (2011) 19–20: 'as well as drawing attention to and expressing emotion ... veiling creates a personal space, a barrier behind which the emotional self can be protected ... the veil is a symbol ... for what the character is feeling inside: what we see makes manifest what we cannot see'.

⁶⁸ On veiling and grief, see Cairns (2011).

⁶⁹ Coffey and Mayer (1990) *ad Phaed.* 887.

⁷⁰ Boyle (1987) *ad Phaed.* 886.

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to illustrate Phaedra's acute sense of shame, an explanation that seems especially plausible when we consider that Euripides' lost *Hippolytus Kalyptomenos* had the protagonist veil himself in response to the shame he felt at Phaedra's overtures,⁷¹ and also that Euripides' extant tragedy on the same myth has Phaedra, at the height of her lovesickness, command that her veil be removed (*Hipp.* 201) and later replaced (*Hipp.* 243–4) when she regains her sense of sexual propriety. The extent of Phaedra's covering indicates the measure of her modesty, and this equation may apply equally well to Seneca's as to Euripides' heroine.⁷² For Seneca's, moreover, a sense of shame may be caused by acknowledgement of her illicit lust, recent experience of assault, the intention to lie, or any combination thereof. But Theseus does not pause to pursue any such reasoning, nor to recognise let alone choose between these multiple significations. He proves himself a poor student of physiognomic analysis.

Theseus' emphatic yet ineffectual desire to decipher his wife's movement further underscores the observer's role in (mis)construing identity. He is just as hasty and imprecise in his treatment of Hippolytus. When he demands that Phaedra reveal what has happened to her, she recounts her misfortune in elliptically ambiguous language: *temptata precibus restiti; ferro ac minis / non cessit animus; vim tamen corpus tulit* ('I stood firm though assailed by entreaties: my mind did not yield to threats of violence, but my body endured assault' 891–2). Theseus takes this to mean that Phaedra has been raped, though of course, her words can equally well refer to the *ferrum*, *minae* and *vis* Hippolytus *did* visit upon her, and also to the more figurative *vis* she has suffered at the

⁷¹ Boyle (1987) *ad Phaed.* 886 is surely right to suggest, 'There may be some counterpoint here with Eur.'s first *Hippolytus (Kalyptomenos)*.' Given Seneca's (and indeed all Roman dramatists') preference for Euripidean material, some interaction with the *Hippolytus Kalyptomenos* seems likely, though it should not be overstated. Beginning with Leo (1878) 173–83, there developed in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century German scholarship a trend of linking Seneca's *Phaedra* to Euripides' lost *Hippolytus*, whereas later scholars, for example Grimal (1963) and Barrett (1964) 16–17 and 29–45 correctly advise extreme caution in deriving any of Euripides' plot details from Seneca.

⁷² Covering the head to express shame/modesty is of course a common gesture in ancient tragedy. See, for example, Euripides' *Herakles* 1160–2 and 1199–201, with Cairns (2011) 20–2.

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hands of Cupid.⁷³ Like her physical appearance, Phaedra's pronouncement does not exactly lie even though it is liable to misinterpretation. Her next move is just as cryptic: she accuses Hippolytus not by speaking his name, but by handing the young man's sword to her husband. Theseus must now decode yet another set of visual clues, and his interrogation of the sword substitutes for his interrogation of the actual person:

quod facinus, heu me, cerno? quod monstrum intuo?
regale patriis asperum signis ebur
capulo refulgent, gentis Actaeae decus.
sed ipse quonam evasit?

Alas, what crime is this I see? What monstrosity before my eyes?
Royal ivory embossed with ancestral symbols
gleams on the hilt, the glory of the Actaeon clan.
But he – where did he go?

(*Phaed.* 898–901)

Theseus' reading of the sword is quasi-physiognomic in the sense that he pays careful attention to the object's *signa* (*patriis . . . signis*, 899), which he uses to form a judgement about his son's character. Here Seneca establishes an analogy between bodies and material objects in respect of their mutual ability to represent an individual. The sword stands in for Hippolytus himself, not just because it belongs to him, but also because it evokes masculine sexuality and even more literally, the penis.⁷⁴ The weapon's symbolism equates it with Hippolytus' flesh and physique. Further, in calling the sword *gentis Actaeae decus* (900), Theseus alludes to Hippolytus' own much-praised physical *decus* ('beauty': 659; 741; 1110) and the phrasing he employs could just as easily apply to Hippolytus qua person as to the sword's decoration.⁷⁵ The sword's interchangeability with Hippolytus' actual *corpus* highlights once again the body's role as a symbolic, spectatorial object in physiognomic discourse. In a simplistic sense, Theseus

⁷³ These lines' multiple ambiguities have been examined by Seidensticker (1969) 149; Davis (1983) 122–3; Boyle (1987) 31–2 and (1997) 80; Mayer (2002), 57; and Hill (2004) 170.

⁷⁴ A standard metaphor: see Adams (1982) 19–22. On this specific scene, Segal (1986) 134 remarks, 'in her false accusation of Hippolytus, the sword is indeed an instrument of desire. It replaces the phallus metonymically as well as metaphorically'.

⁷⁵ Refer to Chapter 1, 80, for other examples of *decus* being used to denote individuals.

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reads the item correctly – the sword really does represent Hippolytus. But his judgement from appearances is ill-informed, with the result that the body's truthfulness is undercut by poor discernment. Things really are what they seem, just not what they seem to Theseus.

It is worth stressing once more that I do not deny the deceitful quality of Phaedra's actions in the latter half of the play. She gives Theseus misleading information, she does not correct his erroneous inferences, and she complies with the Nurse's underhand plot to accuse Hippolytus. Throughout these events, though, Phaedra's body remains a reliable index of her emotions and experiences. For the most part, it seems to indicate how and what she actually feels, and even its changeability is reliable for alerting onlookers to her potential duplicity. In line with Seneca's Stoic views, in line also with physiognomic assumptions, Phaedra's *corpus* does not lie even when she herself does.

Hippolytus' Face

As ought to be clear from the preceding discussion, corporeal descriptions in the *Phaedra* highlight, often simultaneously, the fictional and quasi-human aspects of characters' identities. On the one hand, Seneca's portrayal of bodily surfaces intensifies audience awareness of what lies behind these surfaces, namely the inferred, invisible presence of motives, emotions, intentions, and psychology. The play's incorporation of Stoic physics and 'small-p' physiognomy further accentuates the characters' quasi-human aspect because it applies in a fictional setting paradigms developed for the actual, offstage world: Phaedra and Hippolytus invite and receive the same kind of analysis as any real, living and breathing physiognomic subject. On the other hand, though, Seneca's descriptions draw attention to the body's enactment on stage and hence, to a character's identity as a constructed dramatic role. The body acquires a strong tint of metatheatricality: it may be moulded and fashioned to elicit the desired response from its audience, its clothing may serve the same purpose as a costume, and the face a mask. It can even be likened to a literal text, inscribed as it is with *notae* and *indicia*.

Appearance

This combination of ethical and textual identity comes notably to the fore in the play's treatment of Hippolytus' face. Enraged at the crimes he believes have been committed against his wife, Theseus decries a perceived mismatch between Hippolytus' appearance and his conduct:

ubi vultus ille et ficta maiestas viri
atque habitus horrens, prisca et antiqua appetens,
morumque senium triste et affectus graves?
o vita fallax, abditos sensus geris
animisque pulchram turpibus faciem induis:
pudor impudentem celat, audacem quies
pietas nefandum; vera fallaces probant
simulantque molles dura

Where is that countenance, and the man's feigned dignity
and the unkempt clothing, imitating ancient custom,
his austere and gloomy habits, and harsh character?
O treacherous life, you hide your true feelings:
you put a fair face on foul thoughts:
shame conceals the shameless man; placidity, the reckless;
respect, the wicked; liars sanction the truth
and the feeble pretend to be tough

(*Phaed.* 915–22)

With the participle *ficta*, Theseus affirms not only the supposed falsity of Hippolytus' morals, but also their constructed quality, as part of a *fictional* text. Hippolytus' character and Hippolytus *as a character* have been composed (*fingere*, *OLD* entry 6a) in a work of poetry. The theme of literary and more specifically, dramatic composition extends to the verb *induo*, which often refers to the assumption of a part, a costume, or a mask. For instance, Seneca's Medea, in her opening speech, urges herself in overtly metatheatrical terms, *inhospitalem Caucasum mente indue* ('clothe your mind with [the behaviour of] the inhospitable Caucasus', *Med.* 43), while the phrase *induere personam* is a common theatrical metaphor for Latin writers.⁷⁶ Arguably, such a context could elicit the association of *facies* (919) with its root meaning, *facere*, thereby implying that the face may be designed and shaped like

⁷⁶ On the metatheatrical resonance of *Med.* 43, see Boyle (2014) *ad loc.* Seneca uses *induere personam* at *Ben.* 2.17.2. Other pertinent examples from Latin texts include Cic. *Cael.* 35.1 and *Tusc.* 5.73.3, and Quint. *Inst.* 3.8.50 and 12.8.15.

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any other object of manufacture.⁷⁷ Hippolytus' face may be constructed, either by Hippolytus himself as an implied human individual, or by his author, Seneca.

Moreover, the passage's repeated emphasis on the face as an index of personal character draws attention to the purpose and quality of the theatrical mask. Does Hippolytus veil his true feelings the way a mask is assumed to shroud the face? Is there a discrepancy between his exterior and his interior, or does the face that he wears provide reliable information about his disposition? The audience knows, of course, that Theseus is mistaken, and that Hippolytus' austere appearance really does convey his *mores*: witness the Nurse's earlier attempt to have Hippolytus swap his grimace for a smile on the basis that 'a grim brow befits an old man' (*frons decet tristis senem*, 453), not a young one. But the audience's background knowledge only accentuates the conflation of metatheatrical with physiognomy, textual with quasi-human modes of identification in *Phaedra* 915–22. Hippolytus' mask *is* his face, and vice versa: it is the front-on, visible, legible surface that communicates to viewers what kind of character Hippolytus is. As discussed earlier in this chapter in connection with *Phaedra*, the actor's face is performative and physiognomically legible regardless of whether a mask is worn.⁷⁸ The same goes for the character's face: it provides clues about the intangible, invisible aspects of a *dramatis persona*'s disposition. An audience's interpretation of the mask runs parallel to the physiognomist's (and in Seneca's case, the Stoic's) interpretation of actual, human faces. In fact, rising popularity of physiognomic discourse appears to have influenced mask-making in Hellenistic times, albeit only in the genre of New Comedy.⁷⁹ Such

⁷⁷ Bettini (1996) 184–9 remarks on the connections ancient etymologists would draw between *facies* and *facere*. See also Baumbach (2008) 68.

⁷⁸ Thus, Baumbach (2008) 130 links the face and the mask: 'both point to something beyond the visible and act as ciphers awaiting a diligent reader to unfold their meaning'.

⁷⁹ The topic has been explored at length by Wiles (1991) 85–90 and Petrides (2014) 138–50. Magli, quoted by Frow (2014) 260, remarks an 'odd coincidence' between the 'stiff facial masks of ancient actors, which set expressions according to a few symbolic representations, and ancient physiognomics with its interest in the stable and lasting traits of a face, as separate from the passions that might move it'. Physiognomy, for its part, also draws connections with masks, for example Anon. Lat. 72: *Aristoteles addit etiam hos esse versutos, qui habent inflexa supercilia, sicut sunt in personis senum comicorum*. The objections of Poe (1996) notwithstanding, it seems that a solid case can be built for physiognomy interacting with Hellenistic mask design.

overlap between the physiognomist's and the dramatist's art collapses notions of mask–face dualism, that persistent yet often erroneous 'dichotomy of inner truth and conventional exterior'.⁸⁰ Just as Phaedra's body reveals her thoughts and feelings, so does Hippolytus' visage indicate his character, both at the level of conscious dramatic enactment and at the level of implied human existence. In the words of Roland Barthes, 'the temptation of the absolute mask (the mask of antiquity, for instance) . . . implies less the theme of the secret (as is the case with the Italian half mask) than that of an archetype of the human face'.⁸¹

The interchangeability of mask and face is likewise key to Phaedra's interaction with Hippolytus at the close of Act 2. When Phaedra confesses her love for her stepson, she does so in elliptical language that rationalises her passion at the same time as underscoring its incestuous bent. 'Hippolytus', she says, 'it is like this: I love Theseus' face, the looks he once bore as a young man, long ago' (*Hippolyte, sic est: Thesei vultus amo / illos priores quos tulit quondam puer*, 646–7). She proceeds to recall the hero's appearance and to trace its outline in Hippolytus' form:

tuaeque Phoebes vultus aut Phoebi mei,
tuusve potius – talis, en talis fuit
cum placuit hosti, sic tulit celsum caput.
in te magis refulget incomptus decor.
est genitor in te totus et torvae tamen
pars aliqua matris miscet ex aequo decus:
in ore Graio Scythicus apparet rigor.

His face was like your Phoebe's, or my Phoebus',
or rather, like yours – this, this is how he was
when he beguiled his enemy, he held his head high, like this.
Unkempt beauty shines more brightly in you.
All of your father is in your face, but also some part
of your wild mother, mixed in, with equal grace:
Scythian ruggedness in a Grecian countenance.

(*Phaed.* 654–60)

In her use of the terms *sic* (656) and *talis* (655), Phaedra not only conflates her memory of the father's face with the present form of

⁸⁰ Frow (2014) 248.

⁸¹ Barthes (1972) 56.

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the son's, but also behaves like a director instructing an actor in how to pose. Like Andromache's portrayal of Hector/Astyanax at *Troades* 465–8, discussed in Chapter 2, Phaedra's description blends metatheatrical self-consciousness with explicit confirmation of biological descent.⁸² It is by standing and, given the dramatic context, *performing* in such a way that Hippolytus reinforces his resemblance and family relationship to Theseus. Once again, the concept of the theatrical mask and its evocation of specific character traits forms an undercurrent in the passage: the *vultus* Hippolytus displays to his internal and external audience is a totalising vision of his self. It is tempting to speculate that, were the play staged in ancient Rome, Theseus and Hippolytus would wear similar masks, or even be played by the same actor, staging choices that would bring another layer of poignancy to this scene. But even without such ingenious dramaturgy, Phaedra's speech still gives prominence to the face as a dramatised, visual symbol of identity: this is Hippolytus as a *persona* in a play.

At the same time, though, Hippolytus' *vultus* can also be said to convey who he is as an implied human individual, the habits and choices (*volo*) that comprise his personal attributes.⁸³ The wildness and austerity that appear in his countenance correspond to the texture of his preferred lifestyle, while his physical similarity to Theseus points to the more troubling aspects of his nature, which he shares with his father: a propensity for violence, wilfulness, hostility towards women (e.g. *Phaed.* 226–9; 927). Most importantly, his *vultus* affirms his quasi-human status by corroborating his bloodline: Hippolytus is Theseus' offspring in looks as well as character.

Performance, even just the *idea* of performance, is one more element contributing to Hippolytus' quasi-humanity in this scene, because the face Phaedra touches on stage is attached to a real body, a real person, regardless of the mask's stylised presence. I remarked in the Introduction to this book that live performance endows dramatic character with an additional layer of human

⁸² Boyle (1987) *ad Phaed.* 655 notes the correspondences between these two passages.

⁸³ Bettini (1996) 181–4 argues that *vultus*, for Roman writers, evoked interiority and personal disposition, chiefly via association with *voluntas*. On the association of *vultus* and *volo* in Seneca's *Phaedra*, see Bexley (2011) 385–6.

resemblance.⁸⁴ The simple fact of their embodiment grants *dramatis personae* an extra degree of reality, completeness, and selfhood. In Hippolytus' case, actual physicality is overlaid by and merges with Phaedra's projections, making the young man's *vultus* both a tangibly present object and an incorporeal image, a simultaneous marker of his implied personhood and his fictional status. When Phaedra gives stage directions to Hippolytus (*talis*, 655; *sic*, 656) and proceeds to describe the beauty of his countenance, there is an actual body on stage beside her, ready to receive and perform these directives. Metatheatrical language, in this instance, only emphasises the physical reality of what is being presented: Hippolytus' embodied identity, his 'personal' existence. And even if the scene is not staged but merely read, the text's dramatic form is such that it cannot avoid evoking embodiment and the sort of physical identity that brings literary characters closer to the human sphere. Arguably, these associations would be all the more immediate to Seneca's contemporary audience whose familiarity with ancient stage conventions would enable them to envisage such embodiment even in the context of a dramatic recital.

From sapiens to Shapelessness

Immediately following Phaedra and Hippolytus' encounter in the woods, the play's second chorus devotes itself to celebrating the young man's unrivalled *forma*. The speakers insist that Hippolytus's 'beauty shines more brightly just as the moon glitters more clearly when its orb is full' (*pulchrior tanto . . . forma lucet, / clarior quanto micat orbe pleno / . . . / . . . / . . . Phoebe*, 743–4; 747). They then proceed to issue gnomic warnings about beauty's transience – *res est forma fugax* ('beauty is a fleeting thing', 773) – and about the trouble it can cause: *anceps forma bonum mortalibus* ('beauty is a dubious boon for mortals', 761). After reviewing some cautionary tales of divine attraction (777–94) and stark images of natural decay (764–72), the chorus compares Hippolytus' beauty to that of the gods, whom he easily outstrips

⁸⁴ Introduction, 18–19.

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(795–811) and concludes by wishing that his beauty go ‘unpunished’ (*impunita*, 821) and survive to ‘display the imprint of ugly old age’ (*deformis senii monstret imaginem*, 823). Repetition of the term *forma* enables Seneca to achieve several aims: first, it contrasts Hippolytus’ beauty with his final, gruesome fate of shapelessness, his ultimate lack of any discernible *forma*, and second, it focuses attention on the issue of Hippolytus’ less than attractive behaviour and whether that behaviour should, in Seneca’s Stoic scheme, imply an uglier exterior. The two topics are, at base, interrelated.

Of course, from a Stoic perspective, physical beauty need not imply virtuous behaviour, nor is there any expectation that achieving *virtus* ameliorates the appearance of an unattractive body. But there is in Seneca’s work the persistent idea that immoral qualities that corrupt the soul will have a correspondingly deleterious effect on an individual’s *corpus*. Writing about the physical symptoms of anger, Seneca avers, ‘you would not know whether it is a more detestable vice, or an ugly one’ (*nescias utrum magis detestabile vitium sit an deforme*, *Ira* 1.3.4). He continues to refer to its *deformatas* sporadically throughout the *de Ira* (2.11.2; 2.35.3; 2.36.1–2), adding, ‘no emotion disturbs the face more than this one: it spoils the most beautiful countenances, it turns the most calm visages into savage ones; all physical grace deserts the angry’ (*non est ullius adfectus facies turbator: pulcherrima ora foedavit, torvos vultus ex tranquillissimis reddit; linquit decor omnis iratos*, *Ira* 2.35.3). Such *deformatas* also befalls Hippolytus, albeit in a much more literal way: Theseus describes his son’s broken body as ‘lacking shape’ (*forma carens*, *Phaed.* 1265) and the messenger reporting the details of Hippolytus’s death wonders incredulously, ‘is this beauty’s glory?’ (*hocine est formae decus?* 1110). Significantly, Hippolytus’ face is ravaged when he falls from his chariot (1095–6) and Phaedra, in her struggle to comprehend the extent of his physical destruction, asks, ‘which bi-formed bull, fierce and horned, tore you apart?’ (*quis ... / ... /taurus biformis ore cornigero ferox / divulsit?* 1170; 1172–3). Like a reification of beauty’s dubiety (*anceps forma*, *Phaed.* 761, above) the double-bodied Minotaur that Phaedra imagines attacking Hippolytus symbolises the threat of formlessness, of the

disproportion and distortion that sabotage beauty's implied balance. In the end, Hippolytus' *forma* is worse than merely *anceps*; it is countless bloody pieces.

Does Seneca then imply that Hippolytus is morally responsible for his own disintegration? This is a tempting line of argument, especially since Hippolytus admits to the possibility of *furor* underpinning his hatred of women (567) and since his character appears quick to anger.⁸⁵ Relatedly, scholars of Senecan tragedy have often noted that Hippolytus' accounts of his Golden Age idyll in the forest reveal unsettling undercurrents of destruction and discontent: the young man seems more at war with nature than at one with it.⁸⁶ Although he compares his sylvan lifestyle to an innocent *prima aetas* in which the earth spontaneously nourished men and which men subsequently destroyed through greed, rage, and warfare (525–68), Hippolytus hunts with the very weapons whose invention he condemns. He criticises the corrupting influence of city life that, among its many sins, teaches men to lie (*verba fingit*, 497) and contrasts this immorality with the harmless forest-dweller who 'knows only how to set clever traps for beasts' (*callidas tantum feris / struxisse fraudes novit*, 502–3), but the two activities are presented as equivalent in a way that begins to undermine Hippolytus' point: the forest still teaches him a form of trickery, the only difference being that he does not perpetrate it against fellow men.⁸⁷ Although he decries both intra-familial murder (553–8) and sacrifice (498–500), his immediate response to Phaedra's revelation is to combine the two (706–9). Hippolytus' stance is contradictory at best, and by the end of the play, the natural world he so reveres turns on him, transforming him from hunter to hunted, victor to victim.⁸⁸ He cannot, it seems, preserve his ideals.

⁸⁵ When Theseus accuses Hippolytus of rape, he similarly attributes the young man's misdeeds to an inherited impulse of Amazonian *furor* (*Phaed.* 909).

⁸⁶ Davis (1983) 126 and n.21; Segal (1986) 60–105; Boyle (1987) 18–24 and (1997) 64; Roisman (2000) 77–82. Notwithstanding the objections of Mayer (2002) 54–7, the overall approach is a convincing one.

⁸⁷ Cf., however, the comments of Mayer (2002) 55: 'tricks were morally satisfactory if directed towards securing your dinner, they are obviously wrong when used against your fellow man'.

⁸⁸ Boyle (1985) 1302–3 is an insightful study of these motifs.

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But assuming his utter moral *deformitas* would be unfair both to Hippolytus and to Seneca. Like many of the tragedies' waverers, Hippolytus is a complex figure:⁸⁹ he desires a life in the forest but cannot fully achieve it; his austere self-control unravels; his desperate attempts at self-coherence and self-containment meet with literally shattering defeat.⁹⁰ He bears mild resemblance to Thyestes in his profession of, yet ultimate failure to maintain, Stoic or Stoic-sounding principles. His dismemberment is, in many ways, the physical realisation of this failure, just as Thyestes' faltering body illustrates his inconstancy. What we see in Hippolytus' *deforme corpus*, therefore, is not just moral weakness but also his failure to attain a consistent, fully integrated identity. The fate of Hippolytus' celebrated *forma* mirrors, and to some extent evolves from, the tensions and contradictions in his personality itself. Once again, the body tells an essential truth about its owner's traits: lack of moral and lack of corporeal unity go hand-in-hand, as Hippolytus' lost *forma* also symbolises his ineffectual pursuit of *sapientia*.

Hippolytus' fate similarly illustrates his ultimate lack of individual autonomy. He cannot control how others – specifically, how Phaedra perceives his beauty, nor when and how that beauty will fade. The idea that Hippolytus' body will undermine as well as encapsulate his identity recurs throughout the play. When the chorus wishes him *deforme senium* ('shapeless/ugly old age', 823) as the best possible outcome for his *forma*, it acknowledges time's inevitable, inexorable extinction of his corporeal selfhood. What happens by the tragedy's conclusion is an even more radical instance of lost bodily integrity: Hippolytus' *forma* is pulverised by natural forces beyond his control. From the monstrous, sea-birthing bull to Phaedra's sexual obsession, wild and often hostile *natura* threatens to destroy Hippolytus' physical boundaries. In Seneca's tragic *corpus*, where self-definition and self-determination are such persistent concerns, the end of the *Phaedra* raises pressing questions about the extent to which

⁸⁹ Coffey and Mayer (1990) 28 are surely misled in their assertion that 'the presentation of Hippolytus is uncomplicated'. He may, as they note, be prone to 'angry rhetoric', but his characterisation reveals its complexity via multiple layers of internal contradiction.

⁹⁰ On Hippolytus' potential for self-coherence, see Kirichenko (2017) 279.

individuals can actually govern their own identities. To the degree that Hippolytus is an embodied self, he actually has very limited command of how that self is constructed, not to mention how long that construction lasts.

Admittedly, Hippolytus' body is only one element of his identity overall, and there is a strong sense in which his memory, reputation, and representation survive the bull's attack. But, as Glen Most points out, Stoic materialism makes dismemberment a particularly problematic event, because if everything that exists is a *corpus* 'at what point [does] the mutilation of a body lead to the loss of personal identity of that body's owner?'⁹¹ If Hippolytus' *forma* is one of his most identifying features, what happens to 'Hippolytus' when that shape is gone? Conversely, who or what is Hippolytus if this shapeless mass, *forma carens* (1265), most accurately represents him? When Phaedra bends over the young man's mangled remains and asks, 'Hippolytus, is this your face I gaze upon? Is this what I have done to it?' (*Hippolyte, tales intuoꝝ vultus tuos / talesque feci?* 1168–9), and when she later wonders, 'where has your beauty fled?' (*quo tuus fugit decor,* 1173), her perplexity articulates a deeper philosophical quandary. At an emotional level, Phaedra struggles to come to terms with her loss; at a grimly literal level, she is unsure whether the pieces of flesh set before her really do come from Hippolytus' face;⁹² at a far more abstract level, her questions prompt the audience to consider precisely what bodily form constitutes the person and character of Hippolytus. Seneca does not provide definite answers to these

⁹¹ Most (1992) 406.

⁹² The sequence of events here has caused some confusion. At *Phaed.* 1105–14, the messenger reports that servants are scouring the woods to bring back what remains of Hippolytus' body; at *Phaed.* 1159–98, Phaedra emerges to lament and kill herself over these remains; and at *Phaed.* 1247–74, Theseus commands the servants to bring in Hippolytus' broken pieces before proceeding himself to lament and assemble them. Are these actions coherent? Zwierlein (1966) 15–24 regards the scenes as inconsistent and not composed for stage performance. Sutton (1986) 52–3 envisions the remains brought on at *Phaed.* 1156, the beginning of Act 5. Kohn (2013) 76–8 has them brought on at *Phaed.* 1247 and thus has Phaedra lament over an *imaginary* corpse. From personal experience of staging this play, I see no problem with some remains being brought on during the end of the messenger's speech, and some more being brought in response to Theseus' command at *Phaed.* 1247. True, they sit around on stage for a long time, but there is nothing dramaturgically problematic about that, and this arrangement means that Phaedra really *is* addressing some part of Hippolytus (face or not) when she speaks lines 1168–9.

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questions – that is not his purpose in the play – but by bringing them into such visually impressive focus, he demonstrates how the body, with its seemingly limitless capacity for abjection, can elude control and destabilise the concept and the fact of individuality. Hippolytus' body is simultaneously an important index of his identity and a potential betrayal of it.

Identifying Hippolytus

Besides highlighting the fragility of Hippolytus' embodied identity as a quasi-human, the young man's *forma* also highlights his textual status as a constructed, fictional figure. His appearance is the result of poetic composition, it is a rhetorical creation (*forma, figura*), while its devastation reflects and is reflected in the disjointed style of the *Phaedra*'s final scene.⁹³ This last episode, in which Theseus endeavours to recompose Hippolytus' broken body, has not always been granted a favourable reception. Barrett dismissed it as a 'grisly jigsaw', and many others have criticised it for including unnecessarily grotesque detail, and for being either implausible, impossible, or simply laughable to stage.⁹⁴ But the Act's thematic relevance to the preceding events of this tragedy make it a fitting – if also arresting and unsettling – finale to *Phaedra* and Hippolytus' story.⁹⁵ For a play that has stressed the significance of bodily and facial expression, it seems perfectly appropriate to conclude with a scene in which Theseus painfully and methodically reassembles his son's fragmented frame, an action that is at once an attempt to comprehend what has happened, and to ascertain, if possible, precisely *who* Hippolytus was. As Theseus puts his son's limbs back together, he struggles to come to terms with his son's identity, to sort it out, to make sense of it. The act of arranging body parts in an attempt to

⁹³ See Segal (1986) 215–20.

⁹⁴ Barrett (1964) 44. The scene's detractors include Beare (1945) 14; Zwierlein (1966) 24; Coffey and Mayer (1990) 17–8 and *ad Phaed.* 1256–61; Mayer (2002) 31–2. For defence of its potential enactment on stage, see Fortey and Glucker (1975) 713–15; Sutton (1986) 52–3; and Kohn (2013) 76–8.

⁹⁵ The thematic importance of the *Phaedra*'s final Act has been explored by Segal (1982) 215–20, and Most (1992) 394–5, and touched upon more lightly by Davis (1983) 117; Boyle (1985) 1304 and 1332–4; and Bexley (2011) 389.

fashion a coherent whole evokes simultaneously a process of literary composition and of quasi-physiognomic corporeal interpretation. It is here in this last scene that Hippolytus's fictional and quasi-human identity finally, fully coincide.

Faced with his son's fractured remains, Theseus turns at once to matters of identity, leaning over the limbs to wonder, *Hippolytus hic est?* ('Is this Hippolytus?' 1249). As Glen Most points out, the question is multivalent, since it articulates Theseus' distress – like a futile cry of 'why?' – but also unfolds the complex issue of how selfhood relates to bodily integrity.⁹⁶ Like Phaedra, who expresses similar perplexity over how and whether these limbs can signify Hippolytus, Theseus struggles to reconnect such scattered pieces with the (former) person of his son. To what extent can these parts still symbolise Hippolytus even though Hippolytus the individual has evidently been destroyed? One of the question's many effects is to stress Hippolytus' current role as interpretive material, and concomitantly, Theseus' – and any observer's – role as 'readers' of these corporeal fragments. Hippolytus' body resembles a text, a set of signs that must be scrutinised and assembled if they are to yield any meaning. Theseus' activity, by extension, is analogous to rhetorical or literary interpretation, or even composition, as he examines in turn each body part, to ascertain its place within the larger structure of Hippolytus' frame.

Appropriately enough, Theseus' speech is replete with literary vocabulary, an issue explored briefly by Charles Segal and Glen Most,⁹⁷ but worth reprising and elaborating here. The grieving father places Hippolytus' pieces 'in order' (*in ordinem*, 1257) and 'counts the limbs' (*membra . . . adnumerat*, 1264); the *locus* of the body's final arrangement (1257–8; 1268) blends into the literary *locus* of the play's final speech, both articulating an uncomfortable sense of burial and closure.⁹⁸ Seneca also has Theseus 'fashion the body' (*corpus fingit*, 1265), as though fabricating the text of Hippolytus' limbs just as a poet writes verse. The link is further facilitated by a long tradition of Greek and Roman writers using corporeal metaphors to furnish terminology for rhetorical and

⁹⁶ Most (1992) 409.

⁹⁷ Segal (1986) 215–20 and Most (1992) 407–8.

⁹⁸ Erasmo (2008) 53–61 discusses the scene's association with Roman burial rituals.

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literary composition and criticism: *membra, caput, corpus, oculi* all claim places within rhetorical discourse alongside the vocabulary of assembling, joining, cutting, and dissecting.⁹⁹ Horace famously says of breaking up the sequence of an Ennian line (*Ann.* 7 frag. 13 Manuwald-Goldberg), ‘you would find the limbs of a poet even when he had been dismembered’ (*invenias etiam disiecti membra poetae, Serm.* 1.4.62). It is tempting to hear an echo of this comment in Theseus’ self-exhortation, *disiecta, genitor, membra laceri corporis / in ordinem dispone et errantes loco / restitue partes* (‘Father, place in order the torn body’s dismembered limbs and restore to their place these scattered parts’, 1256–8). Hippolytus is now little more than a set of clauses and metrical feet.

A closer and equally rhetorical parallel to Theseus’ activity comes from Seneca’s own prose, specifically *Epistle* 89.1, in which Seneca extols the benefits of making philosophy more manageable and accessible: *rem utilem desideras . . . dividi philosophiam et ingens corpus eius in membra disponi; facilius enim per partes in cognitionem totius ducimur* (‘you desire a useful thing . . . namely, dividing up philosophy and arranging its huge body into limbs; for through the parts we are brought more easily into comprehension of the whole’). Although Theseus at this point in the tragedy is recomposing rather than dividing Hippolytus’ body, his activity seems likewise geared towards comprehension of the matter at hand. Seneca hopes to lead his readers *in cognitionem totius*, and Theseus, as he gazes at the parts arrayed before him, proceeds to discern not only their specific physical features – *laevi lateris agnosco notas* (‘I recognise the marks of your left side’ 1260) – but also the broader sequence of events and culpability that has led to this conclusion: *crimen agnosco meum* (‘I recognise my crime’ 1249). Like the readers of *Epistle* 89, Theseus strives for global comprehension of the material laid before him, though arguably with less success.

Motifs of recognition in this passage also contribute to this sense of Hippolytus’ textual constructedness. I remarked in

⁹⁹ Most (1992) 407–8 stresses the key role of bodily rhetoric / rhetorical bodies in Neronian literature. Useful collation of such rhetorical/bodily terms can be found in Svenbro (1984). See also Kennerly (2018).

Chapter 1 that recognition scenes can invite a semiotic approach whereby the person being recognised is assimilated to an interpretive object, a conglomerate of signs and symbols.¹⁰⁰ The well-known scenario from New Comedy, in which birth tokens are presented to a Nurse or to a long-lost relative, equates the person with the tangible memento, such that the latter signifies the former and enables the individual to be ‘deciphered’ in terms of social status and background. Another common scenario, exemplified this time by Sophocles’ (and Seneca’s) Oedipus, conflates the person completely with the recognition token, since the object to be deciphered is the body itself. Seneca’s Hippolytus represents an extreme version of such bodily recognition: the marks/signs that designate his left flank (*laevi lateris . . . notas*, 1260) imply a specific set of physical features that help Theseus to recognise this body part, and, at the same time, evoke letters inscribed on paper, written communication (*notae*).¹⁰¹ Instead of an aged servant presenting the estranged father with objects that prove his children’s paternity, the servants in Seneca’s *Phaedra* scour the fields and carry back to Theseus pieces that represent, that *stand in for*, the son he once had. Recognition, for Theseus, is an act of semiotic reconstruction in which he pulls together his son’s actual and inscribed *corpus*.

Significantly, the term *nota* likewise correlates the body to a text in physiognomic discourse. When Seneca lists degenerate character types and behavioural traits in *Epistle* 52.12, he declares that they *in apertum per notas exeunt* (‘are made known through identifying marks’). In *de Ira* 1.1.5 he similarly uses *notae* to denote the warning signs of aggression in animals, which he likens in turn to bodily expressions of anger in humans. The anonymous Latin *Physiognomia*, too, has recourse to this term, for example 11: *denotabit*; 16: *notat*; 105: *denotatur*, albeit with less frequency than its equivalents, *signa* and *indicia*. Common to all of these passages, nonetheless, is the idea that physical features and gestures have the same ability to signify and to generate meaning as

¹⁰⁰ Chapter 1, 27–8.

¹⁰¹ *OLD* s.v. *nota* entries 1 and 6. Seneca uses *notae* to mean ‘writing’ at *Epistle* 40.1: *quanto iucundiores sunt litterae, quae vera amici absentis vestigia, veras notas adferunt?*

3.1 *Phaedra*

letters on a page or words in a sentence.¹⁰² In the *Phaedra*, Theseus performs a quasi-physiognomic act by perceiving and interpreting the *notae* on Hippolytus's body (1260), while the servants sent to fetch those scattered limbs engage in a subordinate process of textual assemblage by tracking down 'the bloody imprint [that] signifies the long path' of Hippolytus' final journey (*longum cruenta tramitem signat nota*, 1107). The metapoetic language of the tragedy's last Act combines literary inflections with the *Phaedra*'s persistent interest in physiognomic observation; in fact, it shows how the former often underpins the latter.

At the same time, any physiognomic and recognition motifs present in this scene also bolster Hippolytus' quasi-human status as an individual within the world of the play. By examining the *notae* (1260) and by recognising/acknowledging (*agnosco*, 1249; 1260) parts if not all of his son, Theseus tries to confirm his personal as well as metapoetic knowledge of Hippolytus. The verb at the root of both words, *noscere*, indicates not just Theseus' cognisance of a fact or study of a text, but also his final, painful attempt to understand his son's character. Just as a physiognomist reads bodily surfaces in order to divine the type of person situated behind them, so Theseus discerns through his careful recomposition of Hippolytus' *corpus* the young man's true nature, which he had earlier misread. Unlike the recognition scenes in *Medea* and *Thyestes*, this episode really does hinge on a *dramatis personae*'s acquisition of new knowledge and on the realisation of a drastic reversal in fortune. The *facies* that Theseus previously condemned as a false covering for deviant conduct he now sees as a true index of Hippolytus' physical and moral *forma* (1269), although its radical destruction also implies that Theseus may never quite succeed in his task of comprehensive knowledge. Thanks to his fragmented form, Hippolytus remains just as elusive and ambiguous a figure in death as he was in life; his reconstitution can only ever be partial.

Hippolytus' implied humanity is similarly conjured via Seneca's simple yet emotive technique of using second-person forms in this

¹⁰² Baumbach (2008) 98 is particularly perceptive in this regard: 'Physiognomy is above all an art of *reading*, of deciphering and interpreting a text.'

speech. 'I destroyed you', Theseus admits to his son's remains (*ego te peremi*, 1250), and later, in grim puzzlement, 'I don't know what part of you this is, but it is part of you' (*quae pars tui sit dubito; sed pars est tui*, 1267). The tone is affectionate as well as sorrowful. Its sense of intimacy only makes Hippolytus' absence all the more shockingly palpable: by having Theseus talk 'to' his lost son, Seneca points to the unbridgeable chasm separating the 'person' Hippolytus was just lately from the 'parts' that exist now. Hippolytus is no longer 'you', he can no longer respond to such a form of address, and Theseus' use of it accentuates this loss of selfhood, of *being*. Though Hippolytus' component parts lie available for reassembly, they lack the agency that once animated them, helped them cohere, and gave them meaning. Like the compositional, textual elements of literary character, they cannot hope to convey the impression of a person without the addition of some extra, almost ineffable human colouring. All the pieces are there, but Hippolytus isn't. And his absence, indicated so clearly by these second-person forms, only confirms his implied human status in all of his preceding appearances in the tragedy: this was a figure endowed with sufficient agency, psychology, and individuality to merit being called 'you'.

Such contemplation of Hippolytus' absence brings us back again to the multiple meanings of the question, *Hippolytus hic est?* (1249, above). Besides evoking the limbs' ability to signify and querying the extent to which they succeed in encapsulating the person to whom they once belonged, this plain yet remarkably resonant question also interrogates what, in the first place, made Hippolytus who he was. Obviously, this collection of bloody limbs both is and is not Hippolytus: it stands in for the person who was always, in any case, accessed via the external surfaces of his body, and it signals the lack of defining features – both corporeal and psychological – necessary to Hippolytus' selfhood. Interpreted at an extra-dramatic, meta-literary level, the question also prompts us to consider how actor, character and person coincide. Is Hippolytus the actor who plays the role (and who is now, concomitantly, absent from the scene)? Or is he the role itself, fabricated by Seneca, assembled from language, rhetorical tropes, and a range of pre-existing literary components? Finally, is Hippolytus

the person we see within the world of the play, the individual now broken by fate and lamented by Theseus? The answer, of course, is that Hippolytus is all three, and that all three layers – the metatheatrical, the metapoetic, and the intra-dramatic – telescope together to present Hippolytus' identity as simultaneously fictional and quasi-human. Hippolytus is an illusion created by poetry and its enactment on stage; he is also an implied human personality capable of being subjected to suffering and to physical devastation. As depicted by Seneca, the young man's corporeal ruin articulates the gap separating singular body parts from the whole, integrated, embodied person,¹⁰³ and also the gap separating singular rhetorical or literary components from the final, finished poetic product. Close examination of Hippolytus' pieces, such as that performed by Theseus, functions almost as a metaphor for the ways in which character is built, and the ways in which it may be dissected.

Bridge: Character Portraits

Physiognomy and Literary Portraiture

It is a profitable exercise to consider how the *Phaedra's* various physical descriptions relate to the literary technique of character portraits, not only as a means of elucidating their effects, but also for the sake of further contextualising their representation of fictional people. Typically, character portraits are designed to mediate between a character's interior and exterior, using the latter to define the former and assuming that inner nature can be perceived from outward form.¹⁰⁴ While they do not always refer explicitly to the private worlds of characters' psychology, as Seneca does, they nonetheless adhere to broadly physiognomic principles of bodily and mental states coinciding.

The most plentiful and representative examples of character portraits come from the eighteenth and nineteenth-century novel,

¹⁰³ Thus, Slaney (2016) 31: 'The human body is here reduced to components and deprived of the formal unity which now appears at the very least transient and unreliable, if not downright illusory.'

¹⁰⁴ Heier (1976) 321.

in which abundant descriptions of physical appearance are used to enhance narrative realism. These depictions evolved from the belief that additional corporeal detail would produce more life-like characters, partly through making them seem unique and psychologically complex. In fact, the era's and the genre's interest in literary portraiture derives much of its momentum from one specific source, the physiognomic handbook of Johann Caspar Lavater, which galvanised the reinstatement of physiognomy as a scientific discipline as well as influencing swathes of European novelists, inspiring them to contemplate mind–body interaction in their narratives.¹⁰⁵ The character portraits resulting from this trend generate the illusion of personality by enticing readers into inferring psychological traits from physical ones, and tempting them into thinking that a character's façade necessarily implies – and may even give access to – the labyrinthine structure of personality qualities lying behind it.¹⁰⁶ We may think, for instance, of Charles Bovary, whose ill-fitting, ill-matched clothes and ill-considered haircut conjure the awkwardness, hopelessness, and rustic ignorance that will define him throughout the novel.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, Nelly Dean's observations in *Wuthering Heights* uphold the notion of dialogic exchange between mind and body, such that reading a person's surface equates to comprehending his or her moral character and vice versa.¹⁰⁸ Nelly says of Heathcliff, 'personal appearance sympathised with mental deterioration; he acquired a slouching gait, and ignoble look' (Chapter 8), and of Hareton, 'his brightening mind brightened his features, and added spirit and nobility to their aspect' (Chapter 33). A major purpose of these passages is to motivate readers to engage in the same pursuit as Nelly. When she treats others' bodies as symbols of internal, psychological activity, readers are likewise meant to extrapolate

¹⁰⁵ The most comprehensive study of Lavater's influence on literature is Tytler (1982). See also Heier (1976) 324–5.

¹⁰⁶ The comments of Segal (1986) 23 on the *vraisemblance* of literary character are instructive in this regard: 'we inevitably endow a character with a three-dimensional life of thoughts and feelings like our own, through our sympathetic identification with another human being'.

¹⁰⁷ Further discussion of Charles Bovary can be found in Tytler (1982) 221.

¹⁰⁸ Tytler (1982) draws frequent examples from *Wuthering Heights* and stresses Lavater's influence on Brontë.

depth from façade, and to imagine a fully rounded personality hidden behind the narrator's descriptive plane.

Hence, the paradox of character portraits in eighteenth and nineteenth-century novels is that, by focusing so closely on visual data, they manage to imply that there is more to a given literary figure than immediately meets the eye. Diversity of somatic and sartorial detail creates a sense of characters' individuality, as though they were not forever bound within a specific, iterable text, while the interplay of external and internal features often conveys an impression of subjectivity, of individual consciousness, and of the distance separating a first-person from a third-person viewpoint. Character portraits are capable of drawing attention – again, paradoxically – to a private, internalised world of conscious thought: Heathcliff's movement and posture grants us, as readers, privileged access to how he, personally, feels. To the extent that character portraits achieve any or all of these effects, they can be said to perform the mimetic function of enabling literary figures to approximate to actual humans.

This mimetic quality becomes even more sharply defined in light of physiognomy's own dialogic relationship with literature. In his handbook, Lavater exhorts the would-be physiognomist to learn from 'die Menge physiognomischer Züge, Charaktere, Beschreibungen, die man in den grössten Dichtern so häufig findet' ('the mass of physiognomic sketches, characters, and descriptions which one so often finds in the greatest poets').¹⁰⁹ Such remarks reveal Lavater's inclination to treat fictional characters as pseudo-people, as templates to be applied in real-world situations. At the same time, they signal the literary quality of physiognomic analysis, virtually to the point of aligning physiognomists with readers or poets. Just as ancient Greek and Roman physiognomists describe the body as a set of legible signs, so Lavater directs readers to employ fictional paradigms for the decoding of actual people. Character and person overlap. In each case, identity is thought to depend on much the same clusters of corporeal information.

¹⁰⁹ Lavater, in Tytler (1982) 5.

Besides emphasising characters' quasi-humanity, though, literary portraits also draw attention to their textual construction, chiefly via self-conscious dependence on internal readers and narrators. Again, *Wuthering Heights* provides pertinent examples in the form of Catherine's diary and of Nelly Dean's reminiscences. A particularly telling instance of literary self-consciousness occurs when Nelly leads Heathcliff to the mirror and teaches him the meaning of his countenance (Chapter 7):

'Oh, Heathcliff, you are showing a poor spirit! Come to the glass, and I'll let you see what you should wish. Do you mark those two lines between your eyes; and those thick brows, that, instead of rising arched, sink in the middle; and that couple of black fiends, so deeply buried, who never open their windows boldly, but lurk glinting under them, like devil's spies? Wish and learn to smooth away the surly wrinkles, to raise your lids frankly, and change the fiends to confident, innocent angels, suspecting and doubting nothing, and always seeing friends where they are not sure of foes. Don't get the expression of a vicious cur that appears to know the kicks it gets are its desert, and yet hates all the world, as well as the kicker, for what it suffers.'

'In other words, I must wish for Edgar Linton's great blue eyes and even forehead', he replied. 'I do—and that won't help me to them.'

An acute observer of physiognomy, Nelly instructs Heathcliff in how to 'read' his own face. The mirror's reflection facilitates the novel's self-reflection on the techniques used to convey character, the lines drawn on the countenance and the personality inferred thereby. At the same time as Nelly schools Heathcliff, she also instructs the novel's external readers in how best to process and interpret physiognomic signs. We have seen already a similar presence of physiognomic narrators in Senecan tragedy: the Nurse describing Phaedra (*Phaed.* 362–83); the Nurse describing Medea (*Med.* 382–96); the chorus describing Cassandra (*Ag.* 710–19). Despite vast differences in genre and era, these Senecan examples share with *Wuthering Heights* an emphasis on decoding psychological states via external, corporeal observation; narrators as interpreters are paramount. Hence, as I remark above, Seneca relies on narrative passages even though they stall dramatic action.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Nor is Seneca the only dramatist to employ such techniques, although he does so at greater length than most: see, for example, Baumbach (2008) 98–178 on Shakespeare's physiognomics.

Of course, Seneca's approach also differs in some fundamental respects from that of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century novel. The pathognomic portraits in the tragedies do not envisage a bilateral exchange between mind and body; influence proceeds from the soul to the *corpus*, not the other way around, and this is in line with Stoic as opposed to physiognomic thought. Whereas ancient physiognomists happily entertain notions of two-way mind-body interaction (e.g. Ps.-Arist. *Physiognomy* 805a1–10), as do many of the novelists inspired by Lavater, Seneca sees only unidirectional causation: in *Epistle* 66.4 he states outright that the soul 'is not disfigured by the ugliness of the body' (*non deformitate corporis foedari animum*). No matter how much the body may dictate another person's judgements, it is always, ultimately the soul that is being judged.

Another crucial difference, which emerges from the *Wuthering Heights* passage in which Nelly directs Heathcliff to the mirror, is the concept of fixed personalities existing under unalterable exteriors. By complaining that he cannot swap his black eyes for blue ones, or make his forehead more even, Heathcliff covertly acknowledges the impossibility of changing his disposition as well. In contrast, Seneca's stance, thanks largely to its Stoic background, permits such change: even if most of his characters exhibit ingrained dispositions that have come to define them through a combination of literal and literary iteration (viz. Medea's anger), there is still the possibility, typically proffered by a Nurse or confidant, of altering one's emotional responses and following a different path. In the puzzling second Act of Seneca's *Agamemnon*, the Nurse declares that Clytemnestra's countenance communicates her distress in place of speech: *licet ipsa sileas, totus in vultu est dolor* ('Though you yourself are silent, all your pain is in your face', *Ag.* 128). By the end of this conversation, when the Nurse appears to have prevailed on Clytemnestra's sense of shame and convinced her to return to her husband, the queen's countenance changes accordingly: Aegisthus wonders why 'pallor spreads over [her] trembling cheeks, and [her] gaze is downcast, dazed, [her] face weary' (*sed quid trementis circuit pallor genas / iacensque vultu languido optutus stupet?* *Ag.* 237–8). Although Seneca never

clarifies the depth or integrity of this change,¹¹¹ the very fact of its existence indicates the possibility of altering one's countenance and concomitantly, one's mindset. That most of Seneca's dramatic characters deliberately ignore such possibilities is a key part of their tragic fates.

One final point of divergence concerns personal distinctiveness and idiosyncrasy, qualities prized by eighteenth and nineteenth-century novelists but credited with far less importance in Senecan tragedy. Against the widespread and comparatively modern assumption that increased interiority and privacy equals increased individuality and uniqueness,¹¹² Seneca presents his audience with character portraits that are at once internally focused and reasonably generic. Though descriptions of Phaedra are rife with references to her internal psychological state, they do not reveal a complex singularity so much as a standard, recognisable pattern of emotional symptoms. Phaedra's feelings resemble a disease that can be classified and catalogued, much as ancient physiognomic thought catalogues types rather than individuals: the devious man; the gluttonous man; the stingy man; the flatterer. Stoicism likewise specialises in emotional and psychological typology because it shares – at least superficially – physiognomy's aim of *diagnosis*: anger, lust, and other diseases of the spirit must, from Seneca's perspective, be detected and cured. This means, as I observed briefly in the very first section of this chapter, that Seneca's portraits convey a sense of interiority and internally situated identity without concomitant expressions of singular selfhood; the two are not mutually interdependent – something modern audiences and scholars really need to keep in mind when assessing Seneca's dramatic work.

¹¹¹ Is Clytemnestra's change of heart sincere or motivated by a desire to deceive Aegisthus? Critics are divided. Supporting the former option are Herrmann (1924) 411–13, Herington (1966) 454, and Tarrant (1978) *ad Ag.* 239ff, who suggests in addition the two scenes' lack of dramatic connection. Schiesaro (2014) 180 seems to support the sincerity hypothesis, though, to be fair, this is far from the focus of his paper. Advocating for the latter option are Croisille (1964) 487 and Calder (1976) 32. The debate appears to have been largely abandoned by recent scholarship.

¹¹² A phenomenon tackled by Sennett (1974) with particularly insightful results. For the literary consequences of this turn towards individuality, Trilling (1973) remains a classic study.

Even when they are not directly prompted by physiognomy, all character portraits obey implicitly physiognomic principles of encouraging observers to deduce behaviour from, or match it with, appearance; this is just as true of Homer as it is of Dickens. In fact, Homer's portrait of Thersites is a perfect example of physiognomic reasoning uncoupled from any immediate doctrinal influence. The most detestable of Homer's Achaeans is presented as an ungainly, ill-shaped body:

αἴσχιστος δὲ ἀνὴρ ὑπὸ Ἴλιον ἦλθε:
 φορκὸς ἔην, χωλὸς δ' ἕτερον πόδα: τῷ δὲ οἱ ὤμω
 κυρτῷ ἐπὶ στήθος συνοχωκότε: αὐτὰρ ὕπερθε
 φοξὸς ἔην κεφαλῆν, ψεδνή δ' ἐπενήροθε λάχρη.

This was the ugliest man who came beneath Ilion. He was bandy-legged and went lame of one foot, with shoulders stooped and drawn together over his chest, and above this his skull went up to a point with the wool grown sparsely upon it.

(*Il.* 2.216–19 trans. Lattimore)

Here, physical description follows rather than precedes an account of the character's behaviour, as though to ensure the audience's dislike of this particular figure; Thersites' ugly physique is meant to confirm the ugliness of his conduct. Although it is highly unlikely that this passage owes any debt to ancient physiognomy, its correlation of body and behaviour nonetheless displays affinities with physiognomic principles.¹¹³ Thersites' propensity for 'disorderly words' (ἔπεα . . . ἄκοσμά, 2.213) and for speaking 'in a disorderly fashion' (οὐ κατὰ κόσμον, 2.214) is reified in his jumble of mismatched body parts, which are themselves far from being κατὰ κόσμον ('orderly'). Likewise, his inclination for strife (ἐριζέμεναι, 2.214) complements the obvious lack of harmony in his own physique – bandy legs, stooping shoulders, pointy skull, and sparse hair.¹¹⁴ The impression is of

¹¹³ Evans (1969) 58–9, and Weiler (1996) 163, regard Homer's Thersites as an early example of physiognomic thought. Boys-Stones (2007) 20 n.4 counters these suggestions: 'one might take Thersites' ugliness as further proof of the gods' disfavour towards him, rather than an indication of his character'. I prefer the approach of Thalmann (1988) who sees in the portrait a correlation of moral worth and physical appearance, but does not posit any specific *doctrinal* influence from physiognomy.

¹¹⁴ I follow standard practice in translating φορκὸς (*Il.* 2.217) as 'bandy-legged', though Kirk (1985) *ad loc.* suggests 'dragging one foot'.

a man who not only falls far below the standard of heroic beauty in Homer¹¹⁵ but worse, whose body has not even been fully formed. With his disproportionate limbs and immoderately ugly appearance (not merely αἴσχροτος but αἴσχιστος, 2.216) Thersites mirrors in his body the ‘endless volubility’ (ἀμετροεπής, 2.212) attributed to his character; he exceeds acceptable limits both in his physical features and in his conduct.¹¹⁶ True, Homer makes no mention of Thersites’ interior; this is not a view into his psyche. But the portrait does imply a link between his disposition and his physique, a link that Homer stresses at the level of lexis and imagery.

There is, then, a strong sense in which Seneca’s corporeal descriptions may be considered a variety of character portrait, both for their connection of internal with external states and for their loose association with physiognomic ideas. Like countless other fictional bodies from Homer’s Thersites to Brontë’s Heathcliff, the *corpus* in Senecan tragedy is a means for audiences inside and outside the play to identify and comprehend individual characters, whether at the level of psychology and emotions, or more simply in terms of matching a name (and face/body) to a deed. Identifying characters in the former sense is a major, unifying theme in Seneca’s *Phaedra*, where beautiful bodies give way to monstrous passions and psychological turmoil finds rapid parallels in physical ruin. In the following sections of this chapter, by contrast, I examine how the depiction of bodies in Seneca’s *Oedipus* repeatedly – often ironically – identifies the protagonist more as an object than a subject. Moving away from the secluded world of internalised dispositions and consciousness, I examine how Oedipus’ bodily characteristics designate an almost wholly external identity: his belonging to certain social and familial categories, his pre-established dramatic part, his formation from words. While Oedipus’ surface *does* indicate his particularity – as ‘Oedipus’ rather than anyone else – Seneca is not much concerned with the depth of what lies behind this façade.

¹¹⁵ Kirk (1985) *ad ll.* 219.

¹¹⁶ He also threatens to exceed narrative constraints, on which, see Woloch (2003) 4–5.

3.2 *Oedipus*

3.2 *Oedipus*

Oedipus' Body

Investigation of bodies and bodily qualities is a major motif in the *Oedipus*. Tasked with discovering Laius' killer, Tiresias proceeds to scrutinise the physical signs revealed in an extispicy. He commands a bull and a heifer to be slaughtered and proceeds to interpret (as best he can) the information relayed to him by his daughter, Manto. This scene, with all of its Roman peculiarities, not to mention the challenges it poses for performance, has been much remarked on by scholars as a distinctively Senecan contribution to *Oedipus'* well-known tragedy.¹¹⁷ Several critics have shown in addition how the imagery of the extispicy provides proleptic evocation of *Oedipus'* own fate and the fate of his sons. Thus, for example: the sacrificed heifer is pregnant in an unnatural way, signifying Jocasta (371–5); smoke from the altar settles in a ring around the king's head, designating his kingship and self-blinding (325–6); the sacrificial flame splits in two and fights itself, designating Eteocles and Polynices (321–3); further signs of the impending Theban civil war are found in the liver, which has seven veins – the seven gates of Thebes (364) – and two nodes, indicating shared power (359–60).¹¹⁸ Most important to my present discussion are the features that relate specifically to the bodies of *Oedipus* and *Jocasta*: the heifer 'launches herself upon the sword' (*ferro semet opposito induit*, 341) just as *Jocasta* will later commit suicide, and blood leaks from the bull's wounds and gushes from his eyes: *huius exiguo graves / maculantur ictus imbre; sed versus retro / per ora multus sanguis atque oculos redit* ('this one's heavy blows are stained with a small trickle; but much of the blood, turned back again, flows out through the

¹¹⁷ Boyle (2011) *ad Oed.* 291–402 asserts that the scene is entirely Seneca's invention. Bexley (2016) 367 n.35 notes a possible connection to the episode of divination at Sophocles' *Antigone* 998–1114, an idea elaborated by DeBrohun (2017). Seneca's deviation from Sophocles, especially in the addition of the extispicy scene, has been emphasised by Paratore (1956) 111; Mendell (1968) [1941] 3–21; Töchterle (1994) 9–18; Ahl (2008) 120–3; Trinacty (2014) 230. On the challenges – and possibilities! – of staging it, see: Zwierlein (1966) 24–5 and 31–2; Sutton (1986) 23; Rosenmeyer (1993); Fitch (2000) 9–11; Ahl (2008) 119–20; Dodson-Robinson (2011); Boyle (2011) *ad loc.*

¹¹⁸ Pratt (1939) 93–8; Paratore (1956) 119; Bettini (1983) and (1984); Boyle (2011) *ad Oed.* 303–80.

mouth and eyes', *Oed.* 348–50).¹¹⁹ The latter image hints at Oedipus' self-inflicted blindness not just through the simple combination of eyes and blood, but also through the term *imber*, which Seneca uses again at 978 to describe the 'filthy rain' (*foedus imber*) that drenches Oedipus' wounded face, and the collocation of words for 'returning' – *versus, retro, redit* – which evoke throughout the tragedy Oedipus' return to Thebes, his (re)union with his mother, and his overturning of nature's laws.¹²⁰ The bull's body symbolises Oedipus' own. More significantly, it suggests that Oedipus' identity can and will be known via specific physical characteristics that mark him out as the very individual he seeks. Although Tiresias declares the extispicy's venture inconclusive because 'it cannot call up a name' (*nec ... potest / ciere nomen, Oed.* 391–2), the culprit's name turns out to be less consequential than the body from which it, in any case, derives. As in the *Phaedra*, bodies are the primary means by which characters in this tragedy become accessible and identifiable to others around them.

Further examples of physical evocation in the extispicy scene include the bull turning his face from the light (339), just as Oedipus will later consign himself to permanent darkness (971–3) and of it 'rushing uncertainly, to and fro' (*huc et huc dubius ruit, 343*) after having received two blows from the axe. The importance of this latter phrase lies in the word *dubius*, which has previously been used by Jocasta in the context of encouraging her husband's firmness of purpose:

regium hoc ipsum reor:
adversa capere, quoque sit dubius magis
status et cadentis imperi moles labet,
hoc stare certo pressius fortem gradu:
haud est virile terga Fortunae dare.

This I regard as regal:
seizing hold of adversity, and the more uncertain

¹¹⁹ Allegorical correspondences noted by Davis (1991) 157–9, Fitch (2004) 48 n.21 and Boyle (2011) *ad Oed.* 341 and 348.

¹²⁰ See, for example, *Oed.* 238, *turpis maternos iterum revolutus in ortus; Oed.* 371, *natura versa est; Oed.* 869–70, *rape / retro reversas generis ac stirpis vices; Oed.* 943, *natura in uno vertit Oedipoda*. Further discussion: Davis (1991) 157–8.

3.2 *Oedipus*

the situation, the more the mass of power teeters on the brink,
the more firmly you should stand, strong, sure of step:
it is not manly to turn your back on Fortune.

(*Oed.* 82–6)

While Jocasta employs *certo gradu* and *dubius* in a figurative sense, it is impossible not to hear in her words an echo of the very literal condition of Oedipus' body: his stance is anything but *certus* given the swollen feet that presumably impede his movement.¹²¹ Oedipus's *status* really is *dubius* both in the literal sense that his physical stance is hampered by the ancient wound in his ankles and in the sense that his circumstances are far from unambiguous: he is simultaneously son and husband, father and brother, stranger and long-lost relative. That *certus* and *dubius* can also signify paternity (cf. *Thy.* 240; 1102) further corroborates their applicability to Oedipus qua individual, for his origins are the clue to his identity. Thus, the inherent uncertainty of Oedipus' body affirms and underpins the broader uncertainty of who Oedipus is as a person and where he fits within a social, familial context.

So besides being a striking piece of Senecan innovation and/or a particularly gory instance of Neronian baroque, the extispicy scene in the *Oedipus* concentrates audience attention on the body as a cluster of indispensable physical signs. Twice in this episode Tiresias remarks upon the importance of corporeal *notae*, first when he declares, *solet ira certis numinum ostendi notis* ('the gods' anger is usually revealed through definite signs', 331), and again when he asks Manto to describe what she sees in the entrails: *ede certas viscerum nobis notas* ('report to us the innards' definite signs', 352). Crucially, Oedipus applies the same phrase to himself when he commands the Corinthian messenger, *nunc adice certas corporis nostri notas* ('now state in addition the definite marks on my body', 811). The repetition suggests Oedipus' status as quasi-extispicial material: his body may be analysed by others in

¹²¹ An interpretive point captured by Ahl's 2008 translation: 'Being a king, I think means this: coming to grips / with what confronts you. The harder it is / to stand, the more power's burden slips and slides, / the more determinedly you must take / your stand. Be brave! Step confidently now!' The passage's wordplay has also been noted more recently by Stevens (2018) 583.

a manner parallel to the bull's.¹²² It affirms the legibility of his physical presence and implies that his body, at least, is a reliable source of information even when everything else pertaining to Oedipus is so uncertain. In fact, Seneca's repeated emphasis on *notae* conjures the distant shadow of physiognomy and likens Oedipus' body to an object of physiognomic analysis inasmuch as it can be read for proof of his personal identity.

This connection between bodily and personal identity grows closer still when we consider how the term *notae* relates to Oedipus' name. As I observed above in the 'Identifying Hippolytus' section, the word's derivation from *noscere* leads Seneca, consciously or unconsciously, to associate it with moments of recognition. The idea is especially prominent in Act 4 of this tragedy, where Oedipus asks the Corinthian messenger whether he could 'recognise [the old shepherd] by his face and looks' (*potesne facie noscere ac vultu virum?* 819), to which the Corinthian replies, 'Perhaps I would recognise him. Often a minor sign summons back a memory faded and buried by time' (*fortasse noscam. saepe iam spatio obrutam / levis exoletam memoriam revocat nota*, 820–1). In wordplay that evades translation, the Corinthian shows how marks on the body facilitate initial knowledge of another person. Although the Corinthian refers here to the aged shepherd, Phorbas, who once delivered the injured baby Oedipus into his care, his remarks can also be taken as conjuring an image of Oedipus himself, the man recognised via his *notae*, and the man whose face, for the audience at least, will be one of his defining physical features. As happens so often in this tragedy, evocations of Oedipus' physical characteristics underlie descriptions of other bodies. Moreover, *noscere* is doubly significant because it recalls one of the possible etymologies of Oedipus' name, from οἶδα, 'to know'.¹²³ Seneca is familiar with the pun and advertises it clearly when he has Oedipus assert his power to solve riddles: *ambigua soli noscere Oedipodae datur* ('to Oedipus alone has been granted the skill in understanding ambiguities', 216).¹²⁴ The

¹²² Bexley (2016) 367–8.

¹²³ For the etymological roots of Oedipus' name and specifically, Sophocles' punning on them, see Goldhill (1986) 216–19 and Segal (1993) 56.

¹²⁴ Wordplay noted by Frank (1995) 129, Fitch and McElduff (2002) 26 and Boyle (2011) *ad Oed.* 215–16.

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'knowable' marks on Oedipus' body thus reflect the 'knowing' that is built into his name. While *notae* is a common term in Seneca's corporeal descriptions, it gains additional meaning in the context of the *Oedipus*.

Throughout this tragedy, Seneca stresses Oedipus' transition from riddle-solver to riddle, knowing to being known. A man once capable of defeating the Sphinx, Oedipus has now become 'a monster more convoluted' than her (*magis . . . monstrum Sphinge perplexum*, 641). He is a prodigy, an omen (*monstrum*) that must be subjected to others' scrutiny. Despite his persistent desire to interpret events as he sees fit, Seneca's Oedipus always ends up being interpretative material for others – characters in the play, the audience – to exercise their minds upon.¹²⁵ Once again, *noscere* and its cognates are important means for Seneca to signal this transition, as Oedipus' attempt to comprehend his situation collapses into others dictating and analysing it for him. Thus, the Delphi oracle, reported by Creon at 233–8, refers to Oedipus elliptically as *Phoebo iam notus et infans* ('known to Phoebus even as a child', 235). The passive form expresses not only Oedipus' lack of interpretive authority, but also his role as an object of inquiry. It is yet another instance of Oedipus' identity being closely linked to his body: both Oedipus qua individual and Oedipus qua *corpus* are scrutinised from an external perspective, the man's *notae* making him readily *notus*.¹²⁶

I remarked above that Seneca's *Oedipus*, unlike his *Phaedra*, rarely treats bodies as sources of psychological information. There is one, minor exception to this: the doubtfulness that plagues Oedipus' mind and defines his physique throughout the play. The topic has received a fair amount of critical attention ever since Donald Mastronarde first alerted scholars to the importance of *dubius* as a keyword in the tragedy.¹²⁷ For my purposes, a brief survey accompanied by some expansion of current views will suffice to show how Oedipus's mind complements his bodily qualities.

¹²⁵ Bexley (2016).

¹²⁶ Once again, Ahl's 2008 translation alerts readers to the significance of Seneca's vocabulary: 'marked out as an infant by Phoebus'.

¹²⁷ Mastronarde (1970) 292–4. See also Curley (1986) 91–100 and Boyle (2011) *ad Oed.* I. Allendorf (2013) 121–3 charts the play's more general motif of uncertainty. Hesitancy and fear are two of the main traits characterising Seneca's Oedipus, on which, see Henry and Walker (1983); Edmunds (2006) 61; Seo (2013) 97–101.

The protagonist's uncertainty tends to be reflected in the world around him. Oedipus commences the play by remarking on the wavering sunlight (*Titan dubius*, 1) that constitutes daybreak in plague-ridden Thebes. As Mastronarde observes, *Titan dubius* is a projection of Oedipus' own hesitancy and opaque sense of guilt.¹²⁸ It is also an instance of Stoic *sympatheia*, that is, of the physical universe responding to the dubiety, the sinful double-ness of Oedipus' incestuous identity. Similarly, Manto reports in Act 2 that the sacrificial flame flickers and changes so much that 'you would doubt which colour is and is not present' (*quis desit illi quive sit dubites color*, 318), its multiplicity along with the viewer's perplexity evoking Oedipus' inherent ambiguity. The protagonist's own emotional uncertainty comes to the fore in the tragedy's final Act, when Jocasta asks him, 'What should I call you? "Son"? You hesitate? You are my son.' (*quid te vocem? / gnatumne? dubitas? gnatus es*, 1009–10). As in Jocasta's earlier comments about bravery and surefootedness (*Oed.* 82–6, cited above), this question combines an emotional/psychological context with a distinctly physical one. Oedipus hesitates because, it seems, he cannot bear the idea of any further contact with Jocasta, even though her request attempts to evade their husband–wife relationship.¹²⁹ On a more literal level, he can also be said to hesitate because that is the nature of his movement – a blind, crippled man feeling his way around the stage. Although Seneca does not use the language of interiority/exteriority here, as he does in the *Phaedra*, he nonetheless implies that Oedipus' psychological state matches his corporeal one.

Seneca's Oedipus certainly does not wish to be *dubius*, and he tries throughout the play to quash all uncertainty in himself and in his attendant circumstances. When Creon warns Oedipus of the Delphic oracle's *respona dubia* ('ambiguous answers' 212), Oedipus replies that he will resolve this uncertainty just as he once solved the Sphinx's riddle (215–16). In his second encounter with Creon, in Act 3, Oedipus accuses his brother-in-law of conspiring to usurp the throne and asserts, against Creon's

¹²⁸ Mastronarde (1970) 293.

¹²⁹ Frank (1995) 124 notes this subtlety in Jocasta's address to her son.

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repeated protestations of innocence, *omne quod dubium est cadat* ('everything suspect must fall', 702). The phrase is not just indicative of Oedipus' authoritarian attitude; it also feeds into the play's economy of bodily images, because falling in death is what happens to the plague victims (*cadunt*: 63, 70), and because Oedipus, staggering blindly in the final scene, warns himself 'not to fall on [the body of his] mother' (*ne in matrem incidas*, 1051).¹³⁰ The claim *omne quod dubium est cadat* (702) may even be taken as referring to Oedipus himself, the ambiguous individual who tumbles from power and stumbles offstage at the play's end, who can only with difficulty be prevented from collapsing to the ground.

Hints about the state of the protagonist's body recur throughout Seneca's *Oedipus*, and those hints reveal in turn crucial aspects of his identity. Who Oedipus is and how he may be recognised depends largely upon the signals his *corpus* displays to others, and on whether they can interpret those signals correctly. The audience is best suited to picking up these clues because of its prior knowledge of Oedipus' story, which it employs to decipher both the protagonist's physique and his social/familial status as an implied person within the world of the play.

Oedipus' Face

Like Hippolytus' face, treatment of Oedipus' visage in this tragedy combines fictional with quasi-human aspects of character. On the one hand, the protagonist's countenance communicates what he is feeling, which is key to his representation as a human analogue and to his concomitant engagement of the audience's sympathy. On the other hand, Oedipus' face, alongside references to other faces in the tragedy, serves as a constant reminder of his dramatic role and mask and thereby, of his textually constrained existence.

¹³⁰ The significance of this final phrase has been remarked on by Henry and Walker (1983) 130, Boyle (2011) *ad Oed.* 1051 and most recently, Trinacty (2017) 176–7: it echoes and provides ring composition with *Oed.* 14: *in regnum incidi*. For the symbolic and lexical significance of *cadunt* at *Oed.* 63, see Littlewood (2004) 83 and Töchterle (1994) *ad loc.*

In Act 3, Creon returns from the necromancy to undergo interrogation from an increasingly irate and impatient Oedipus. ‘Although your face itself displays signs of sorrow,’ says the protagonist, ‘reveal whose life must be given to placate the gods’ (*etsi ipse vultus flebiles praefert notas, / exprome cuius capite placemus deos*, 509–10). The keyword *notae* not only indicates that the face is a legible surface disclosing emotional and psychological information to those nearby, but also hints at the significance of Oedipus’ own face, a *vultus* that will not just bear *notae* but be *known* for them. Understandably, Seneca focuses attention on faces throughout the tragedy, each one being in some way a reflection of or reference to the protagonist’s own. When Oedipus questions the Corinthian in Act 4, he asks whether he can recognise the doddering shepherd, Phorbas, by his countenance: *referesne nomen ac vultum senis?* (‘do you recall the old man’s name and face?’ 840). The Corinthian equivocates in reply, rather unhelpfully: *adridet animo forma; nec notus satis, / nec rursus iste vultus ignotus mihi* (‘his appearance is familiar; that face of his is not really known but then again not unknown to me’ 841–2). The conjunction of *notus* and *vultus* evokes once more the visage by which Oedipus comes to be known, as well as the ‘knowing’ incorporated into his name. It is Oedipus’ own recognition that lies behind this almost comical exchange concerning old men’s faces.¹³¹ Both passages, moreover, direct the audience to concentrate on Oedipus’ face as a major locus of his identity and of what he may be feeling at any given moment.

It is not until the messenger’s speech that Seneca focuses directly on Oedipus’ visage. The distraught ruler rushes into the palace:

vultus furore torvus atque oculi truces,
gemitus et altum murmur, et gelidus volat
sudor per artus, spumat et volvit minas
ac mersus alte magnus exundat dolor

¹³¹ This seems to be the case in other parts of the play as well, for example when Manto describes the sacrificial flame as having *non una facies* (*Oed.* 314), the line could be taken as referring obliquely to Oedipus himself, who will exhibit two versions of his face over the course of his tragedy. In a more abstract sense, it could also evoke Oedipus’ fluctuating identity. Likewise, the choral account of the plague victims’ eyes – *multo . . . genas sanguine tendit / oculique rigent* (*Oed.* 186–7) – looks forward (pun intended!) to the fate of Oedipus’ own countenance.

3.2 *Oedipus*

his face is grim with rage, his eyes fierce
there are groans and a deep roar, and chill sweat
flows over his limbs, he foams and reels off threats
great pain gushes forth from deep inside

(*Oed.* 921–4)

There are clear similarities between this passage and the lengthier, diagnostic accounts of the passions in *Phaedra* (362–83), *Medea* (380–96) and *de Ira* (I.1.3–5). Oedipus' physical symptoms betoken his present psychological condition and the entire process is envisaged as a dialogue between depth and surface, interior and exterior. His *dolor*, like Phaedra's, straddles bodily and emotional realms and bursts into view from some hidden chamber of his being (*mersus alte*). This is a representation of Oedipus as an implied human figure whose facial expressions and bodily reactions betray the presence of a private, internal psyche, however sparsely conveyed. As an index of his emotional state, moreover, Oedipus' face is meant to provoke a reaction, a sense of human engagement from the audience, whether that reaction comes in the form of horror, pity, fear, disapproval, or anything else. Just as the messenger employs this description to impress upon his internal audience the severity of Oedipus' fate, so Seneca employs it to motivate viewers and readers to judge Oedipus specifically in terms of human suffering. Despite our manifest awareness that Oedipus is a text, we respond to him – superficially, temporarily – as if he were a living, breathing entity. Even if we take the Stoic line that Seneca's ideal audience should condemn Oedipus' passions and strive to avoid them, this still means treating him as an implied human personality complete with human capacities and foibles.

Like Hippolytus', Oedipus' *vultus* also contributes to his quasi-humanity by reifying his wishes (*vult*). The damage he inflicts upon his eyes symbolises and communicates his desire to punish himself appropriately for the crime he has committed. Motifs of blindness and insight, so prominent in Sophocles' version, are granted at best secondary importance in Seneca's. Instead, Oedipus blinds himself as a way of achieving 'a night worthy of [his] wedding' (*thalamis digna nox . . . meis*, 977) and of dying without joining the world of the dead: 'find a way not to mix with

the dead yet to wander banished from the world of the living: die, but on this side of your father' (*quaeratur via / qua nec sepultis mixtus et vivis tamen / exemptus erres: morere, sed citra patrem*, 949–51).¹³² As I have signalled in the Introduction, the significance of Oedipus' punishment lies in its ambiguity, which matches his own ambiguous status: he is both son and husband, living and dead. The act of removing his sight has not literally killed him, of course, but the darkness he will endure from now on does conjure up death, more so if we think of it in the epic sense of 'darkness covering his eyes'. Thus, Oedipus creates for himself a face that exhibits core facets of his identity and the choices – conscious or otherwise – that have produced that identity. By the tragedy's end, his countenance expresses the process of reasoning and recrimination proceeding from his self-discovery, that is, it tells the audience and other characters something about how Oedipus *thinks*.

Interpreting Oedipus' *vultus* is more important to the external audience than to the other characters in the play, however, and this is where the balance starts to shift towards self-conscious theatricality. While the *dramatis personae* within the tragedy recognise Oedipus by his feet, his most distinctive corporeal feature for the play's audience is his face, the face that that will end up wounded, eyeless, and presumably represented by an appropriately bloodied mask.¹³³ This, rather than his swollen ankles, is what makes Oedipus fully recognisable to those reading or (better) watching the tragedy. From being 'grim with rage' (*furore torvus*, 921), Oedipus' countenance will forthwith display the permanent results of that rage in the form of gouged, gory eye-sockets. I have mentioned already in the Introduction that when the protagonist returns to the stage in Act 6 and declares, 'this face befits Oedipus'

¹³² For more discussion of 'appropriateness' in this scene, see Introduction, 20–1.

¹³³ It is generally assumed that Sophocles' Oedipus would have changed his mask before returning to the stage for the final Act – see, for example Webster (1956) 50 and more recently, Marshall (2012) 191 – although Seeberg (2002–3) 60–3 argues on the basis of extant archaeological evidence that blind masks probably were not used on stage and that if they ever *did* make an appearance, it was probably from the Hellenistic period onwards. Full change of mask is not, however, absolutely necessary for conveying Oedipus' countenance; paint mimicking bloodspots would work just as well. In Seneca's case, we possess too little evidence about staging to conjecture either way, but at least his version of the tragedy fits within the (post-)Hellenistic timeframe for blind masks.

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(*vultus Oedipodam hic decet*, 1003), his comment presumably gestures towards the mask, just as the citation of his own name gestures towards the role he is playing.¹³⁴ Notably, the phrase also brings Oedipus' face and feet into close conjunction: *vultus Oedipodam*. The juxtaposition is yet another of Seneca's methods for distinguishing between internal and external levels of recognition in this play: the audience, equipped with prior knowledge of Oedipus' story, is invited to agree that this *is* indeed the face it expects Oedipus to wear, while the tragedy's *dramatis personae*, enfolded in the dramatic illusion of living this story for the first and only time, cannot really say that they anticipated Oedipus' blindness, not, that is, without breaking the fourth wall and acknowledging their own fictive status. If they recognise anything, it is his feet.

It is possible to see this interchange of Oedipus' face and mask at other points in the play as well. When the messenger describes the king's countenance as 'violent, daring, angry, fierce' (*violentus audax vultus, iratus ferox*, 960) the sense conveyed is not only of an emotional state, but also of the distinguishing characteristics displayed by a mask. *iratus* and *ferox* are standard tragic attributes (e.g. *iratus Atreus*, *Thy.* 180; *Medea ferox*, *Hor. Ars* 123) and their combination with *vultus* could be seen as working proleptically to signify the qualities of the mask in which Oedipus will shortly re-emerge onto the stage. The conversation between Oedipus, Phorbas, and the Corinthian (819–21; 840–2) likewise acquires a mildly metatheatrical dimension when we consider that the two old men would, in performance, have worn quite similar masks: what methods can Phorbas and the Corinthian really use to recognise each other, and are there any features that encourage a distinction between them? How does reading this artificial, theatrical face help someone acquire knowledge of the person beneath its surface? When the Corinthian remarks, 'often a minor sign summons back a memory faded and buried by time' (*saepe iam spatio obrutam / levis exoletam memoriam revocat nota*, 820–1), his reference to *notae* combines the signifying potential of the mask with the face's physiognomic capacity to

¹³⁴ Boyle (2011) *ad Oed.* 1003.

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disclose specific personal qualities. Marks on the face can designate a particular *persona* in just the same way as lines on a mask; in performance, the two surfaces achieve the same ends. Thus, as in Hippolytus' case, mask and face often seem to coincide in this tragedy, since both fulfil the same function of making the bearer 'legible' to others.

Oedipus Text

As I have noted several times already in this chapter, the body's and the face's legibility assimilates them to texts,¹³⁵ which in turn emphasises characters' status as constructed, fictive entities. Such readability is a prominent theme in Seneca's *Oedipus*, as the protagonist is constantly scrutinised by others and turns, eventually, to scrutinising himself. Vocabulary of reading and interpreting saturates this play, likening Oedipus to poetic material, to extispicial matter, and to omens, all of which claim the power to signify.

One of Seneca's main inventions in his version of *Oedipus* is to depict the protagonist as a sacrificial victim. Not only does his body bear *notae*, which are previously associated with the extispicy (331; 352), but it also invites analysis in ways equivalent to this sacrificial ritual. For example: Tiresias begins the rite by declaring, *fata eruantur* ('let fate be dug out' 297) and Manto utters the exhortation *scrutemur* ('let us search' 372) as she probes the pulsing entrails. The same terms recur in the messenger's speech to describe the punishment Oedipus visits upon himself: he searches out his eyes (*scrutatur*, 965) and digs at his sockets (*eruentis*, 961). The parallels encapsulate Oedipus' transition from active inquirer to if not quite passive at least self-reflexive interpretive matter. He performs the same activity on his mutilated face as Manto and Tiresias do on the cattle's dissected bodies. Like the sacrificed animals, Oedipus is imagined as an assemblage of legible, interpretable signs.

¹³⁵ A point stressed by Conroy (2010) 14 in relation to all kinds of dramatic performance: 'bodies and their actions may appear within theatre as objects of analysis. That is to say, bodies may be thought of as texts'.

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Furthermore, Seneca merges the terms' literal and figurative meanings, so that the physical act of searching or digging (*scrutor*; *eruo*) through body parts accompanies the abstract quest of searching for truth, rooting out information. Both verbs can be used for acts of reading and/or literary analysis, as for instance in Quintilian's description of rhetorical emphasis: *cum ex aliquo dicto latens aliquid eruitur* ('when something hidden is extracted from some phrase' *Inst.* 9.2.64). *Oedipus*, like an ambiguous text, must be scoured for latent meaning. Religious signification slides into the poetic – hardly surprising when one considers that many Romans, and Stoics in particular, treated interpreting natural signs and interpreting literary texts as analogous activities.¹³⁶ Cicero places the two side-by-side in his *de Divinatione*: *interpretes, ut grammatici poetarum, proxime ad eorum, quos interpretantur, divinationem videntur accedere* ('men capable of interpreting seem to approach very near to the prophecy of the gods they interpret, just as scholars do when they interpret the poets', *Div.* 1.34). Although Seneca makes no such explicit comparison in his *Oedipus*, the tragedy's imagery certainly suggests a correlation between the poetic and the prophetic, extispicy and text. For *Oedipus*, this results in his body being as much a literary artefact as a sacrificial one, since both procedures assume the ultimate readability of his physique.

A similar effect emerges from *Oedipus*' brief recollection of his encounter with the Sphinx, whom he describes as *viscera expectans mea* ('waiting for my innards', 100). In any other context, the image may convey little more than the Sphinx's characteristic aggression, but in the world of Seneca's *Oedipus*, where details of religious ritual occupy almost a third of the drama, the Sphinx's activity cannot help but mirror that of Tiresias and Manto. As a poet/prophet figure who utters a *carmen* (98; 102) and 'weaves words in blind rhythms' (*caecis verba nectentem modis*, 92), the Sphinx bears some resemblance to Tiresias, the blind *vates* (522; 571; 670) who likewise recites *carmina* (561). Altogether, this nexus of lexical parallels suggests that the Sphinx is just as

¹³⁶ Struck (2004) is particularly insightful regarding the relationship between divination and allegorical interpretation of poetry, which was practised by a number of prominent Stoics (among others) and doubtless contributed to the Roman notion of *vates* as both poet and prophet.

intent on ‘reading’ Oedipus’ *corpus* as Tiresias is on deciphering the obscure signs present in the extispicy. Of course, both interpreters fail in some essential way, but Oedipus’ status as potential reading matter remains constant throughout the play.

Laius, too, characterises Oedipus as interpretable religious/poetic material when he denounces his son as *implicitum malum / magisque monstrum Sphinge perplexum sua* (‘an intertwined evil, a monster more perplexing than his own Sphinx’, 640–1). Images of enmeshing are apt for the man who has doubled back on himself to marry his mother and produce his own siblings/children with her. They are also, simultaneously, images that Seneca applies to poetry and poetic activity in this play: Oedipus calls the Sphinx’s song *nodosa . . . verba et implexos dolos* (‘knotted words and entwined trickery’, 101) and Creon says of the Pythia’s arcane pronouncement, *responsa dubia sorte perplexa iacent* (‘the replies are uncertain, the oracle tangled’ 212). Hence, Laius’ language associates Oedipus with the twisted, complex content of the Pythia’s and the Sphinx’s poetry: he himself is the one riddle he cannot solve. Seneca uses this technique to draw attention to Oedipus as an element of other people’s poetry and thus, as a fictive creation. The drama’s protagonist is a textual entity available for others to interpret in the same way as a literary work. Not only is his body portrayed as a legible, semiotic object, but Oedipus qua character is also shown to be – to some extent – a figure of others’ verbal ingenuity.

The protagonist’s semiotic qualities even extend into his being a *monstrum* (641), that is, a terrifying prodigy that offers itself for analysis. Whether derived from *monstrare*, as the ancients thought, or *monere*, as most modern linguists claim, the *monstrum* is something that explicitly invites interpretation.¹³⁷ In the words of Jeffrey Cohen, ‘the monster exists only to be read . . . a glyph that seeks a heirophant’.¹³⁸ This is certainly the case for Seneca’s

¹³⁷ For the ancient etymologies of *monstrum*, see Maltby (1991) 391–2. Lowe (2015) 8–14 surveys the development of the *monstrum*’s cultural meaning in ancient Rome. On the term’s significance in Seneca tragedy, see Staley (2010) 96–112, and Bexley (2011) 367 and 387–90.

¹³⁸ Cohen (1996) 4. In a similar vein, Garber (1988) 30, remarks how Thomas More’s description of Richard III treats the king’s ‘deformed body as readable text’; like the

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Oedipus, whose characterisation as a *monstrum* casts him once more in the role of riddling religious material, a puzzle that requires careful investigation in order for its full meaning to be revealed. Like the components of an extispicy, the *monstrum* functions as a metaphor; it communicates indirectly, via symbols. It is not merely the case that Oedipus' actions have *caused* Thebes' plague, but that they also *represent* it, conceptually: the protagonist's coupling with his mother is reflected in the indiscriminate damage of the disease that 'mingles young with old, parents with children' (*iuvenesque senibus iungit et gnatis patres*, 54).¹³⁹ The gloomy sky that hangs over plague-ridden Thebes evokes the permanent gloom that will eventually descend upon Oedipus' eyes. The plague and Oedipus are symbolically linked, just as the extispicy and Oedipus are. In fact, Seneca's heavy reliance on metaphor and symbolism in this tragedy could be seen as deriving from the very rituals he chooses to include, because extispicy itself (and, for that matter, the analysis of oracles) is an exercise in decoding figurative meaning. It is apt, though most likely coincidental, that Martial refers to reading the stories of Oedipus and Thyestes as 'reading monsters' (*monstra legis*, 10.4.2), by which he not only flags the typically hideous nature of tragic events, but also hints at the *monstrum*'s inherent legibility; it is something one *reads*. In Seneca's *Oedipus*, such legibility operates simultaneously at an extra-dramatic level (how the audience interprets Oedipus' symbolism), at an intra-dramatic one (how characters, including Oedipus himself, interpret it) and at a socio-historical one (how the rituals themselves rely upon symbolism). Although the term *monstrum* occurs but rarely in Seneca's *Oedipus*, it certainly qualifies as the leitmotif of the play.

So far in this section I have discussed the related ideas of Oedipus' body being a text and of Oedipus himself occupying the role of a poetic/prophetic symbol; I conclude by examining the ways in which this tragedy highlights Oedipus' textual identity as a literary and more specifically, dramatic character. As several critics have noted, Seneca's *Oedipus* features a number of

monstrum of Seneca's Oedipus, Richard III's physical disparities are assumed to indicate moral depravity, and vice versa.

¹³⁹ A connection spotted by Littlewood (2004) 23–4.

surrogate poet figures – the Sphinx; the Pythia; Tiresias; Laius – many of whom concentrate on portraying Oedipus in their verse.¹⁴⁰ Although the content of the Sphinx’s riddle is not reported in Seneca’s version, the audience would have known its relevance for Oedipus himself, the man whose destiny begins as a baby crawling on all fours and who will leave Thebes hobbling, guided by a stick. Next, the Pythia’s verse *is* reported, verbatim, by Creon (233–8), and provides a dense summary of the protagonist’s main traits. After deeming Oedipus an ‘exiled guest, guilty of the king’s murder’ (*profugus . . . hospes / regis caede nocens*, 234–5), the oracle proceeds to a second-person address: *nec tibi longa manent sceleratae gaudia caedis: / tecum bella geres, natis quoque bella relinques, / turpis maternos iterum revolutus in ortus* (‘the joy of this criminal slaughter will not last long for you: you will wage war with yourself and leave war to your sons, having returned once more, wretch, to your maternal origins’ 236–8). Like the extispicy, the plague, and so many other elements of this tragedy, the Pythia’s pronouncement depicts Oedipus metaphorically: the protagonist wages war with himself both in the sense that he has violated family boundaries and in his subsequent act of self-harm; he has returned not just to the city of his birth but to the very woman who gave birth to him.¹⁴¹ Via a standard tactic of foreshadowing, Seneca invites the audience to read the oracle in ways that Oedipus himself cannot.

Such cleverness is not the only purpose of this passage, however, since by inserting a description of Oedipus into the mouth of a surrogate poet, and by having that surrogate employ the same kinds of imagery used elsewhere in the tragedy, Seneca highlights Oedipus’ own status as a fictive creation. The Oedipus constructed by the Pythia’s verse is equivalent to the Oedipus depicted in Seneca’s tragedy overall; both are the products of language, symbolism, poetic inspiration. Seneca achieves this effect chiefly by having Creon quote the oracle directly instead of summarising its content. When Creon breaks into dactylic hexameter and uses

¹⁴⁰ Schiesaro (2003) 9–12; Trinacty (2014) 214–31; Bexley (2016). Contra: Staley (2014) 117–18.

¹⁴¹ The significance of the Pythia’s allusions is explored by Pratt (1939) 92 and Boyle (2011) *ad Oed.* 233–8.

the second-person forms typical of oracular utterances,¹⁴² he confronts the play's audience with a separable poetic text containing a miniature portrait of Oedipus. And if Oedipus cannot be considered a fully formed *character* in the Pythia's verse, he is at least a textual *figure*. The segment of verse is therefore mirrored by and echoes in the larger work that is Seneca's tragedy: the Pythia stands in for Seneca himself, her poetry creating an Oedipus just as Seneca's does.

A similar effect is achieved in Creon's account of the necromancy, where Tiresias raises Laius from the dead. Here Tiresias resembles a poet figure, as Alessandro Schiesaro has shown, and the incantation he utters gives rise to a specifically *literary* cast of spirits: Zethus and Amphion (611–12); Niobe (613–15); Agave and Pentheus (615–18). Schiesaro remarks that Tiresias' action 'powerfully re-enacts what poetry and poets do'; it revivifies – and in Laius' case, endows with speech – *personae* that otherwise have no agency of their own.¹⁴³ Furthermore, the poetry Tiresias generates belongs to the genre of tragedy above all: Zethus and Amphion featured in Euripides' lost *Antiopa*, and in Pacuvius'; Niobe in plays by Aeschylus and Sophocles; Pentheus and Agave most famously in Euripides' *Bacchae*. By conjuring this group of chiefly tragic characters, Seneca creates yet another situation in which the play's embedded poetry reflects upon his own activity as a tragedian. His Oedipus is likewise a revived figure from earlier literature, summoned back to life in order to replay his tragic tale.

In fact, Seneca builds several literary/dramatic layers into this scene by having Creon report the entire necromantic event, including Laius' speech, in full and vivid narrative. As he does with the Pythia, Creon quotes Laius directly rather than in summary or indirect statement. The effect is not just to intensify the scene's dramatic immediacy, but also to have Creon assume a multivalent role as creative¹⁴⁴ poet, skilled actor, and archetypal tragic messenger.¹⁴⁵ The sheer length of Creon's report – 128 lines! – its detail and its

¹⁴² As used, for example, in the oracles quoted in Herodotus 1.65 and 1.85.

¹⁴³ Schiesaro (2003) 9.

¹⁴⁴ The idea comes from Ahl (2008) 20, who associates Creon with the Latin verb *creo*, 'I create.'

¹⁴⁵ As remarked by Boyle (2011) *ad Oed.* 530–658.

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segments of speech-in-speech (*Oed.* 571–3; 626–58) afford opportunities for virtuosic, self-consciously theatrical performance, while also allowing Creon to seem more actively engaged in moulding and framing the event he has just witnessed. Whereas a perfunctory report would permit the speaker to remain relatively unobtrusive, this long, direct piece of communication flaunts its own artistry, and hence, the artistry of the one delivering it. Even if taken as a species of messenger speech, the passage verges on being a meta-example of this convention: the speaker begins by protesting his reluctance (*Oed.* 509–29), thereby drawing attention to his role as messenger; it conveys events that happen offstage in a drama where even the most implausible things tend to happen *on stage*; it situates Laius' prophecy in an undeniably tragic environment. Creon effectively 'performs' the messenger and in doing so, he increases our awareness of the entire scene as a performance.

Such self-reflexivity has obvious consequences for how an audience receives Oedipus' identity. When Laius describes the play's protagonist, and when Creon quotes that description, Oedipus seems once again to be the product of poetic composition, an explicitly literary character generated through the verse of these substitute poets. As it listens to Creon, the audience is encouraged to measure the Oedipus on stage against the one portrayed in the report, to see points of coincidence between the person and the text. Creon's dramatic enactment of the speech is also significant, because it heightens audience perception of the storyline as a theatrical event and of Oedipus as a *dramatis persona*. Hence, Oedipus' textual identity is underscored both in the internal world of the play – as other characters seek to decipher his body – and at the level of external reception. Oedipus' *corpus* cannot be separated from the symbols, the marks, the *words* that describe it. It is constructed and interpreted by others, even to the point of demanding such construction in order to acquire proper existence. Seneca's play turns Oedipus rex into Oedipus text.

Conclusion

Given Seneca's interest in mind-body interaction, and given his Stoic approach to *corpora*, it is not surprising to find him exploring

such topics through the medium of theatre, for all theatrical performance, at its core, deals with the representation of the mind via the body, and with the body's need to be decoded by an audience. Stage enactment encapsulates in miniature the problem of understanding another person's interior via his or her exterior. To quote Colette Conroy: 'The question of *where* thinking takes place is important because thinking seems to be an invisible activity, but humans must think audibly or visibly if they are to communicate with each other at all, let alone create theatre.'¹⁴⁶ An actor's body – its gestures and movements – is the visual, audible evidence of what a given character thinks and feels. This aspect of performance exhibits deep conceptual links with Stoic notions of material or embodied psychology: emotions are *corpora*; they are responsible for physical changes by which they make their presence known (and for the Stoics, thus make their diagnosis possible). The physiognomic views explored in this chapter also follow a similar line of reasoning and demonstrate equal – if slightly different – affinity with theatrical performance because they, too, make the body the primary site of characterological information. Traits, preferences, dispositions must all be embodied in some way – whether through clothing or gait or physical features – if they are to be communicated in the theatre. Physiognomy and dramatic performance may even rely on much the same corporeal typologies: noble and pompous characters walk upright while crafty ones are bent over, or hook-nosed, and so forth. For Seneca, the corporeal semiotics of the theatre provided the perfect opportunity for examining the personal, somatic consequences of Stoic materialism.

These concerns manifest themselves differently in the *Phaedra* and the *Oedipus*. The former of these two tragedies returns obsessively to the revelation of internal states on the external, visible surfaces of the body. As spectatorial objects, the bodies and faces of Seneca's *Phaedra* both *perform* emotion and *communicate* it reliably to onlookers. As is the case with so many other aspects of Senecan drama, *corpora* in the *Phaedra* are simultaneously theatrical and genuine, fabricated and quasi-human. In the *Oedipus*,

¹⁴⁶ Conroy (2010) 23.

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however, the balance shifts more towards textual identity: the protagonist's body is imagined repeatedly as an assortment of legible symbols while his claim to supreme interpretive ability is turned back, cruelly, upon his own physique. Seneca's Oedipus is a man more known than knowing. While his body, like Phaedra's and Hippolytus', does on occasions communicate the intangible, internal facets of his being, it is more often treated as a semiotic surface and poetic creation, a fictional, signifying object that not only invites interpretation but requires it in order to be fully reified. Oedipus' body seems to be constructed almost entirely by others: by seers, and poet-figures, by Seneca, and by the play's audience. It is as much their creation and their possession as it is his.