EXEMPLARITY

No matter how much identity relies on an individual's own memory and habits, it also relies on community, on the social relationships that stimulate people continually to define and adjust their sense of self. The previous chapter examined how identity derives from 'sameness', from the quality of being *idem*. This chapter discusses identity as the outcome of *identification*, that is, of people observing and appropriating each other's characteristics in order to define their own.[1] Self-development is a fundamentally mimetic project to which the selection and emulation of role models is essential. When people identify with others, or identify themselves *in* others, they gain a sense of their own being, its capacities and its boundaries. Negative identification achieves the same result from the opposite direction, as the self takes shape in contrast to or reaction against qualities it perceives as wrong. The entire process is so commonplace that it is easy to lose sight of its central paradox: we copy each other in order to achieve distinctiveness; our being unique is predicated largely upon our being similar. This aspect of personal identity entails perennial negotiation between the individual and the group, between the particular and the general – categories at once co-dependent and deeply antagonistic. We are *like* but not *identical* to our parents, friends, colleagues, and peers: it is from this intersection of singularity and absolute correspondence that the human self emerges.

For the Romans, this process takes the form of emulation and exemplarity, and its chief domain is the elite family. Offspring, especially but not exclusively male, are regarded as moral and physical replicas of their forebears, whose models they are encouraged to imitate in order to assert themselves. Being a Scipio, or a Cato, or a Piso – to name just a few – comes with the expectation that one will exhibit the talents, attitudes, and conduct typically

---

[1] On identification as an element of identity formation, see Wilshire (1982).

99

associated with one's family. It also comes with the expectation that one will employ these generic, replicable characteristics to achieve outstanding, individual greatness. As Catherine Baroin remarks, 'a young man belonging to a famous family has to make a first name for himself … and achieve distinctiveness' but, paradoxically, 'he only does so by being similar (*similis*) even identical to someone else'.[2] The exemplary individual is at once a copy and a singular instance of exceptional behaviour. The *exemplum*, as an intellectual tool, likewise mediates between the categories of particular and general: as a model, it must, by definition, be absolutely typical and imitable; but its being a model also means that it is set apart, excerpted, special.[3] Discourses of exemplarity function as a kind of social glue, granting individuals prominence and the opportunity for self-definition while at the same time confirming their ties to a specific community and set of traditions. In Roman culture, *exempla* constitute a cornerstone of pedagogy; a source of collective memory; a stimulus for elite competition; a mark of genealogical prestige – above all, they are a wellspring of familial and social continuity, of self-perpetuation and replication. Like the broader human activity of identifying the self in and through others, Roman exemplarity encourages self-development via assimilation and mimetic identification. A Scipio, or a Cato, or a Piso can be defined as such only in relation to the lineage from which he springs.

exempla pervade Senecan tragedy as well, where they likewise tend to be associated with ingrained patterns of family conduct. For instance: Phaedra interprets her errant passion for Hippolytus on the model of her mother's bovine lust (*fatale miserae matris agnosco malum: / peccare noster novit in silvis amor*; 'I recognise my wretched mother's fateful evil: our love knows how to sin in the woods' *Phaed.* 113–14); Atreus, too, cites familial precedent when contemplating revenge (*Tantalum et Pelopem aspice; / ad*

---

[2] Baroin (2010) 28.

[3] On the *exemplum*'s contradictory position both as an exception and a rule, see Lowrie (2007) esp. 97, and Agamben (1998) 22: 'What the example shows is its belonging to a class, but for this very reason the example steps out of its class in the very moment in which it exhibits and delimits it.' For the *exemplum*'s mediation between the particular and the general, Lowrie and Lüdemann (2015) is an invaluable resource.

haec manus exempla poscuuntur meae; 'look to Tantalus and Pelops; my hands are called to these examples' *Thy.* 242–3).[4] Here the pressure of exemplary emulation joins forces with biological inheritance to produce unavoidable, all but imperative templates for behaviour: Atreus' wickedness must live up to, by imitating, that of his predecessors; Phaedra's experience conforms, unwittingly, to the contours of her mother's. Biological and genealogical repetition combine with the *exemplum*'s innate capacity for replication. The consequences for identity are stark: Seneca's characters not only model themselves on their forebears, but even end up following them, on many occasions, against their better judgement. *exempla*, like blood, will out.

Following initial consideration of *exempla* in Roman culture, this chapter examines the interlinked themes of exemplarity and family relationships in two tragedies, *Troades* and *Hercules*. In the former play, the past maintains such an oppressive grip on the present that Pyrrhus can barely be dissociated from Achilles and Astyanax from Hector. The identity of the son is bound up with that of the father, whether through opposition or similarity. In his portraits of these two young men, Seneca explores the tensions underlying human, and specifically Roman, practices of mimetic and sympathetic identification. Where exactly does a person begin and end? Where do the boundaries of his or her attributes lie? And does the social pressure of *exempla* encourage self-improvement or foreclose it? *Troades* depicts a world dominated by paradigmatic precedents, a world in which the individual struggles to gain clear purchase and a clear outline. *Hercules*, by contrast, presents a hero so exceptional he follows no model but his own. Seneca's Hercules is detached from his family emotionally, morally, and physically. He displays commensurate detachment from any need to emulate his forebears and thereby integrate himself within a community. Having no-one to compete with, and no-one to copy, Hercules engages in the vertiginous pursuit of self-*aemulatio*, an activity that overrides the bonds of biology,

---

[4] Segal (1986) 115–29 and Kirichenko (2013) 44–59 examine the ominous presence of parental models in the *Phaedra*. Boyle (1983) argues for intergenerational repetition as a structuring motif in the *Thyestes* and the *Agamemnon*. For the broader use of precedents by Seneca's characters, see Garton (1972) 200–1, and Fitch and McElduff (2002).

genealogy, and eventually, society. Rather than ensure continuity and connectedness, Hercules' exemplarity leads only to alienation; his self-*aemulatio* both adopts and warps the *exemplum*'s standard purpose.

Inherited Models

Similitude and imitation are principles at the heart of Roman – indeed, of all – exemplary discourse.[5] By providing people with models to emulate or to avoid, *exempla* function analogically, so that their goal of moral transformation is achieved by duplicating and reproducing prototypical behaviour. In the words of Alexander Gelley, the *exemplum*'s purpose 'becomes that of propagating itself, creating multiples'; it perpetuates attitudes, values, and patterns of conduct in a manner reminiscent of artistic mimesis.[6] The Romans themselves were fully aware of the imitative impulses governing acts of exemplarity. To cite two disparate but representative instances: Horace, in the *Sermones*, has his father caution him against disgraceful love affairs by uttering the injunction, *Scetani dissimilis sis* ('don't be like Scetanus' *Ser.* 1.4.12); in an entirely different genre and tone, but nevertheless expressing the same sentiment, Livy introduces his historical work as a memorial source of examples *inde tibi tuaeque rei publicae quod imitere capias* ('from which you may choose what to imitate for yourself and for your state', *praef.* 1.10). Both authors acknowledge that the *exemplum*'s moral-didactic efficacy[7] – not to mention its potentially wayward influence – stems from its innate

---

[5] Langlands (2018) 86–111 is an acute study of imitation and replication in Roman exemplarity. Roller (2018) 1–31 is a similarly insightful overview, especially of the *exemplum*'s role in setting norms (and thus, inviting repetition). Other scholarly treatments of the issue include Lyons (1989) 26–8; Mayer (1991) 141–76 on Seneca; Hölkeskamp (1996) 312–15 on collective memory in ancient Rome; Feldherr (1998) on Livy; Chaplin (2000) on Livy; Roller (2004) 23–8 on Horatius Cocles; Barchiesi (2009) on the overlap between literary and cultural imitation in Roman exemplarity; Van Der Blom (2010) on Cicero; Goldschmidt (2013) 149–92 on Ennius.

[6] Gelley (1995) 3. On the topic of mimesis, Langlands (2018) 99 notes the Romans' tendency to conflate ethical with aesthetic forms of imitation.

[7] On the moral-didactic function of Roman *exempla*, useful studies include: Bloomer (1992); Skidmore (1996) esp. 13–82; Chaplin (2000); Wilcox (2006) and (2008); Morgan (2007) 122–57; Turpin (2008); Langlands (2008), (2011), (2015), (2018); and Van Der Blom (2010).

102

capacity for iteration. The example, by definition, demands to be copied.[8]

A conspicuous consequence of this iteration, in Roman culture at least, is the tendency for exemplary narratives to cluster around family groups, as though on the assumption that genetic inheritance and the bestowal of a family name bring with them a predisposition for specific activities, attitudes, and forms of behaviour. The phenomenon is particularly marked in the case of 'structurally' similar *exempla*, namely, deeds that reproduce in full the individual features and narrative contours of earlier models.[9] Matthew Roller remarks that this kind of exemplarity is apt to be associated with particular *gentes*: 'the idea that certain patterns of behaviour do or should run in families … is widespread in Roman culture'.[10] The habit develops not only because intra-familial models provide a convenient rubric for categorising exemplarity, but also because of a deep-seated conceptual link: the *exemplum*, like the parent, is an authoritative model that calls for imitation, and successful imitation, in turn, furnishes outward proof of hereditary character. Exemplary lineage and genealogical lineage function in equivalent ways, and frequently overlap.

To illustrate this point, we may review one of Rome's most celebrated *exempla*: the Decii Mures.[11] The sequence begins with the elder Publius Decius Mus sacrificing himself in an act of *devotio* against the Latins at Veseris in 340 BC (Livy 8.9); his son, also named Publius Decius Mus, follows suit with his own act of *devotio* at the battle of Sentinum in 295 BC (Livy 10.28.6–18); there is even a tradition – most likely spurious – that the third Publius Decius Mus, grandson of the first, dies by *devotio* at Ausculum in 279 BC (Dio fr. 43; Cic. *Fin.* 2.61; *Tusc.* 1.89;

---

[8] Thus, Lyons (1989) 26: 'Both in the form it takes in texts and in the view of the world it projects, the example depends upon repetition.'

[9] As opposed to 'categorically' similar *exempla*, which tend merely to be grouped under the same rubric, for example as instances of *virtus* or *fides*. The terminology comes from Roller (2004) 23–4.

[10] Roller (2004) 24–5, and n.54. See also Mayer (1991) 144.

[11] Fuller treatments of the Decii Mures can be found in Litchfield (1914) 46–8; Oakley (1998) *ad* Livy 8.9–11; Edwards (2007) 25–6; Goldschmidt (2013) 156–8. Quintilian *Inst.* 12.2.30 implies that the Decii Mures were some of the most well-known and frequently cited Roman *exempla*.

103

Ennius *Ann.* 6.191–4).[12] Repetition across generations creates and at the same time authorises the act's symbolic value: for the latter two Decii Mures, *devotio* is assumed to represent a key means of living up to one's name and of affirming one's lineage.[13] Tradition renders the name and the deed all but interchangeable, as illustrated most clearly by the last of these three *exempla*, where Roman authors are less concerned with the event's historicity than with its adherence to an established family model: Decius Mus the grandson is thought to have committed *devotio* because that is what Decii Mures typically do.

Thus, in Roman discourses of exemplarity, moral resemblance confirms genetics. Cicero (*Brut.* 133) declares that the oratorical talents of Catulus senior (consul 102) may be inferred from those of Catulus junior (Q. Lutatius Catulus Capitolinus). Ovid states the idea more openly still when he wishes of his anonymous, elite addressee, *sic iuvenis similisque tibi sit natus et illum / moribus agnoscat quilibet esse tuum!* ('may your son resemble you thus and may everyone recognise him as yours because of his conduct' *Trist.* 4.5.31–2). To underscore the hereditary nature of the son's *mores*, Ovid evokes in these lines the Roman ritual of a father acknowledging his paternity. In the same way that a Roman father would accept the child as his own (*agnoscere* cf. Chapter 1, 57–8 and 95.) and thereby facilitate its inclusion within the family unit, so, in Ovid's couplet, the son's behaviour is hoped to substantiate his biological origins (*illum … / agnoscat … esse tuum*) and guarantee his position within elite society. Naturally, the quality of such replication depends upon the *mores* themselves; it is

---

[12] Although certainty is beyond our grasp, suggestions that the third Decius Mus died in an act of *devotio* at Ausculum appear to hold little historical weight: the evidence of Cic. *Fin.* 2.61 and *Tusc.* 1.89 is inconclusive, while Dio fr. 43 states that Decius, after contemplating *devotio* at Ausculum, eventually decided against it. The passage from Ennius – *Ann.* 6.191–4 – while undoubtedly referring to a *devotio*, remains a matter of debate, with Cornell (1986) 248–9 and (1987) 514–16 asserting that it most likely refers to the second Decius Mus consecrating himself at Sentinum in 295 BC, while Skutsch (1987) 512–14 opts instead for the third Decius Mus, at Ausculum.

[13] Instructive in this regard is the speech Livy puts into the mouth of the second Decius Mus (10.28.13): *'quid ultra moror' inquit 'familiare fatum? datum hoc nostro generi est ut luendis periculis publicis piacula simus. iam ego mecum hostium legiones mactandas Telluri ac Dis Manibus dabo.'* Besides being the defining feature of the Decii as a *gens* (*familiare fatum*), the act of *devotio* also verges on being a genetic imperative (*datum hoc nostro generi est*), something imposed by nature as well as culture.

104

possible to reproduce bad examples as well as good ones. Of Verres' father, for instance, Cicero remarks tartly to the jury, *qualis fuerit ... ex eo quem sui simillimum produxit recognoscere potestis* ('what he was like you can infer from the faithful copy of himself that he has brought into the world' *Verr.* 2.1.32 trans. Greenwood).[14] Moral resemblance, like physical, can have its ugly side.

The pursuit of exemplary behaviour can also be seen to strengthen distant family ties or to formulate family connections where none may in fact exist. While the Decii Mures all belong to the one, immediate bloodline, adoptive relationships are likewise capable of fostering imitative conduct, as in the case of Scipio Aemilianus, whose decisive role in the Third Punic War mirrors that of his adoptive grandfather, Scipio Africanus, in the First.[15] The most telling example, though, is Marcus Junius Brutus, whose nominal (if not actual) relationship to the man responsible for ending Tarquin's tyranny is depicted as influencing – perhaps even providing crucial impetus for – his role in Caesar's assassination. Dio's account stresses this demand for continuity and duplication:

γράμματά τε γάρ, τῇ ὁμωνυμίᾳ αὐτοῦ τῇ πρὸς τὸν πάνυ Βροῦτον τὸν τοὺς Ταρκυνίους καταλύσαντα καταχρώμενοι, πολλὰ ἐξετίθεσαν, φημίζοντες αὐτὸν ψευδῶς ἀπόγονον ἐκείνου εἶναι· ἀμφοτέρους γὰρ τοὺς παῖδας, τοὺς μόνους οἱ γενομένους, μειράκια ἔτι ὄντας ἀπέκτεινε, καὶ οὐδὲ ἔγγονον ὑπελίπετο. οὐ μὴν ἀλλὰ τοῦτό τε οἱ πολλοί, ὅπως ὡς καὶ γένει προσήκων αὐτῷ ἐς ὁμοιότροπα ἔργα προαχθείη, ἐπλάττοντο, καὶ συνεχῶς ἀνεκάλουν αὐτόν, 'ὦ Βροῦτε Βροῦτε' ἐκβοῶντες, καὶ προσεπιλέγοντες ὅτι 'Βρούτου χρῄζομεν.' καὶ τέλος τῇ τε τοῦ παλαιοῦ Βρούτου εἰκόνι ἐπέγραψαν 'εἴθε ἔζης,' καὶ τῷ τούτου βήματι, ἐστρατήγει γὰρ καὶ βῆμα καὶ τὸ τοιοῦτο ὀνομάζεται ἐφ' οὗ τις ἱζόμενος δικάζει, ὅτι 'καθεύδεις, ὦ Βροῦτε' καὶ 'Βροῦτος οὐκ εἶ.'

Making the most of his having the same name as the great Brutus who overthrew the Tarquins, they distributed many pamphlets, declaring that he was not truly that man's descendant; for the older Brutus had put to death both his sons, the only ones he had, when they were mere lads, and left no offspring whatever.

---

[14] Further discussion of these three examples – Cic. *Brut.* 133 and *Verr.* 2.1.32, and Ov. *Trist.* 4.5.31–2 – can be found in Baroin (2010) 37–41.

[15] Family ties are still relevant in Scipio Aemilianus' case, since he is the cousin of the man who adopts him. But, in contrast to the Decii Mures, no direct line of biological descent links the exemplary grandfather to the exemplary grandson. On exemplarity as a trope in Scipio Aemilianus' life story, see Polybius 31.24.5, with Habinek (1998) 50–1; on his use as an *exemplum* for later Romans, see Van Der Blom (2010) 108, especially n.118.

Nevertheless, the majority pretended to accept such a relationship, in order that Brutus, as a relative of that famous man, might be induced to perform equivalent deeds. They kept continually calling upon him, shouting out 'Brutus, Brutus!' and adding further 'We need Brutus.' Finally on the statue of the early Brutus they wrote 'We wish you were alive!' and upon the tribunal of the living Brutus (for he was praetor at the time and this is the name given to the seat on which the praetor sits in judgment) 'Brutus, you're asleep,' and 'You are not Brutus.' (Dio Cassius 44.12 trans. Cary, lightly modified)[16]

As Dio presents it, the issue is not whether Brutus can claim a genuine family connection to his illustrious predecessor (and the Romans themselves may not have known either way); rather, the mere possibility of this relationship imposes upon Marcus Junius Brutus the need to replicate certain patterns of conduct (ὅπως ὡς καὶ γένει προσήκων αὐτῷ ἐς ὁμοιότροπα ἔργα προαχθείη).[17] In effect, it is the process of exemplarity that renders Brutus kinsman to his early republican counterpart. The *exemplum* is treated much like a set of inherited characteristics; it is both a source and confirmation of identity in ways similar to a parent. Brutus must live up to the promise implicit in this name because that name represents, simultaneously, a potential genealogical connection and a laudable instance of anti-tyrannical resistance. To be fully himself, he must adopt the normative actions of another; in order to be *a* Brutus, he must copy *the* Brutus.

So Roman discourses of exemplarity occupy a point of intersection between genetic replication and behavioural imitation.[18] Not only does the idea of family resemblance encompass a standard expectation that children will inherit their parents' features and bearing, but it also extends into full arcs of narrative action, where offspring reproduce their ancestors' deeds, and those deeds come to substantiate parentage. Understandably, this sort of cultural practice has a deep effect on how individuals shape and perceive their identities, and on how they evaluate the identities of others. In its most extreme form, Roman exemplarity demands that the

---

[16] A similar version of the story is reported by Plutarch *Brutus* 9.3–4.

[17] Thus Edwards (2007) 150 extrapolates from Marcus Brutus's story, 'in Roman political life, one could not escape the destiny of one's own name. A particular name might in itself provoke desire for external fame.'

[18] Wilcox (2006) 80–1 detects a similar play of literal versus metaphorical reproduction in Seneca's portrayal of female exemplarity.

106

individual subordinate his or her sense of personal discreteness to broader matrices of tradition and ancestry. Self-development, on this model, amounts to little more than selecting and recycling the activities of those who have gone before; Marcus Junius Brutus, for one, appears to exercise little choice in matters of self-determination.

Yet herein lies the complexity and richness of Rome's rubric of *exempla*, because selecting and recycling other people's activities is a fundamental means of human self-formation, no matter what its specific cultural grounding. To cite Bruce Wilshire:[19]

> mimesis of others must occur in that typification of the world essential to the emergence of any coherent experience of it. I become *a* human being only by learning to do the sorts of things *other* human beings do … I must mime what others do and say about thing, and so I must mime the others. I continually return to *myself* via the others, conditioned by the others.

Roman exemplarity is, among many other things, a culturally embedded expression of this basic human need, a need to imitate not just for the sake of learning, but also, more deeply, for the sake of formulating oneself via subjunctive possibilities of being. For instance: I see a man fighting with a sword and I decide to copy or abstain from this action only after engaging in a rapid process of imaginative substitution whereby I take this man's place ('is this the sort of thing I, too, should / could do?'). My identity, that is, my sense of myself-in-the-world, 'is structured and polarized by possibilities of kinds of existence largely set by others'.[20] Viewed from this angle, Marcus Brutus' imitation of Lucius falls fully within the bounds of regular human self-development: it is an action (like all actions) arrived at via the subjunctive substitution of oneself for another.

Hence, exemplary imitation does not so much preclude individualism as it highlights the fact that all individuals are assembled from pre-existing components. Brutus qua singular person is also, simultaneously, Brutus qua type; he is at once a unique instance of being and a version of things that have gone before him. Brutus' identity, like the *exemplum* itself, mediates between

---

[19] Wilshire (1977) 199.
[20] Wilshire (1977) 200.

the categories of particular and general. Popular identification of Marcus with Lucius Junius Brutus illustrates in condensed form a tug-of-war between two inseparable and conflicting forces: on the one side, individualism, ambition, and the sense of oneself as a discrete, autonomous unit; on the other, biological and genea-logical ties coupled with the pressures of tradition and exemplar-ity. Similitude leads paradoxically to uniqueness, and vice versa.

The Art of Exemplarity

Besides balancing the rival demands of uniqueness and typifica-tion, individuality and social relationships, Roman discourses of exemplarity also mediate between categories of actual and fic-tional selfhood. On the one hand, *exempla* are meant to guide and transform personal traits; they are supposed to orchestrate changes in the way people behave and think of themselves qua living beings. At a basic level, as we have seen, exemplary practice encapsulates the crucial mechanism of human self-formation and self-comprehension that is one's mimetic identification with others. It also performs the even more basic function of confirming genealogies and situating people within their specific biological lineages. Although it often blurs or exceeds the strict boundaries of the individual, Roman exemplarity nonetheless operates in the essentially human, personal, 'real' sphere of identity.

On the other hand, though, the *exemplum*'s iterative and imita-tive nature can also conjure a process of artistic representation, in which statues replicate their referents and images are reflected in mirrors. The person qua *exemplar* represents a timeless, replicable symbol, an identity template, as it were, capable of being trans-ferred to other individuals in other eras.[21] Via its memorialising and paradigmatic functions, exemplarity narrows personal identity from an endless range of contingent, indeterminate possibilities to a static, complete, and relatively limited set of characteristics. Being a role model entails also being a role. In this sense, an exemplary person approximates to a statue, a painted image, or even a fictional character; he or she moves into the realm of

---

[21] Roller (2018) 71–6 explores timelessness as a characteristic of Roman exemplarity.

108

representation, becomes a surrogate self.[22] The connection is closest in the case of deceased individuals whose identity necessarily endures in a fixed state, but neither did Roman culture shy away from associating living individuals with aesthetic objects.

To illustrate this idea, I return to Dio's account of Marcus Junius Brutus (cited in the preceding section). Here, anonymous protestors use the elder Brutus' statues as a means of urging the living Brutus to act: τῇ τε τοῦ παλαιοῦ Βρούτου εἰκόνι ἐπέγραψαν ʼεἴθε ἔζης,ʼ ('on the statue of the early Brutus they wrote 'We wish you were alive!'', 44.12). The exchange envisaged is one of man and monument.[23] Should the living Brutus opt to participate in Caesar's assassination, he will effectively reanimate his predecessor's statue by copying the deeds it represents and embodying all that it stands for. At the same time, he will liken himself to the statue by partaking in the memorialisation of his great predecessor and the symbolic replication of his qualities. Marcus Junius Brutus is at once his own fully realised self and the replication of another; the exchange goes both ways.[24]

Dio's anecdote is far from a lone instance of such exemplary exchange between person and effigy. Statues of exceptional historical figures were a common topographical feature in the city of Rome, their main purpose being to commemorate and perpetuate particularly laudable forms of behaviour. Augustus, notably, harnessed this custom to his own ends when he erected in the two colonnades of his forum sculptures of *summi viri* from Rome's past, dressed in triumphal regalia (Suet. *Aug.* 31.5).[25] Besides memorialising these individuals and their achievements, Augustus drew an explicit comparison with himself: he 'proclaimed by edict that this

---

[22] Nappa (2018) 82 formulates a similar concept in reference to *imagines* in Juv. *Sat.* 8: 'Surrogate bodies are representations of the individual [i.e. statues, paintings] and as such they bring the individual into the realm of the textual. Thus, once the body is given a surrogate, the individual becomes subject not only to those things that can be done to his actual body but to the way he can be coopted and manipulated in the sphere of representation.'

[23] Hölkeskamp (1996) 302–6 and Roller (2004) 10–23 discuss the close connection between monuments and *exempla*.

[24] On the frequent equivalence between imitator and imitated in Roman exemplarity, see Langlands (2018) 99–100.

[25] The *Forum Augustum*'s content and its commemoration of the exemplary past have been treated in detail by Flower (1996) 224–36, and Gowing (2005) 138–45.

[statue group] had been devised for citizens to demand that both he, while he lived, and his successors, matched <u>the example</u> set by those men' (*professus et edicto commentum id se ut ad illorum <u>velut exemplar</u> et ipse dum viveret et insequentium aetatium principes exigerentur a civibus,* Suet. *Aug.* 31.5). Veiled in this ostentatious display of false modesty is the claim that Augustus himself embodies a living *exemplum*;[26] he is the inevitable next figure in this procession of *summi viri*, simultaneously a live version of them and a statue of himself.[27] Such was the culture of exemplarity in ancient Rome that it envisaged a fluid relationship between reality and representation, human beings and reproducible symbols.

This fluid relationship is also articulated by metaphors of reflection, which Roman writers often employ to describe emulative aims and conduct.[28] Thus: Demea in Terence's *Adelphoe* counsels his son, Ctesipho, to 'look into others' lives as though into a mirror' (*introspicere, tamquam in speculum, in vitas omnium*, 415), which implies that the young man, beyond simply being guided by good models, will reproduce them *in extenso*.[29] Seneca, too, draws on this metaphor when he calls Cato a 'living image of virtue' (*virtutum viva imago, Tranq.* 16.1) and summarises a list of exemplary deeds from Roman history as 'offering to us the image of virtue' (*imaginem nobis ostendere virtutis*, *Ep.* 120.8). The idea, once again, is that exemplarity demands imitation and thereby generates copies in a manner analogous to artistic mimesis. Cato is both an embodiment of virtue and a symbolic instantiation of himself; being an *exemplar* fixes him in the perpetual, reproducible state of an image (*imago*) and more specifically, given the Roman context, of an ancestral wax mask (*imago*).[30] Like the

---

[26] On Augustus' self-exemplarity, see Lowrie (2007) 102–12.

[27] This statue group also evokes the genealogical aspect of exemplarity since, as Zanker (1990) 213–14 and Flower (1996) 224–36 both observe, the *summi viri* claim affinity with the *imagines* typically displayed in aristocratic *atria*. Augustus used this statue group to appropriate the *summi viri* of the Roman past as if they were his own family, in addition to the *imagines* he inherited upon his adoption into the Julii.

[28] See Gelley (1995) 3 on exemplarity's connection to pictorial realisation. Bartsch (2006) 125–7 and Baroin (2010) 37–47 discuss the term *imago* as a metaphor for exemplarity in Roman culture.

[29] Mayer (1991) 144–5 argues for the essentially Roman nature of this advice.

[30] Seneca plays with the idea more explicitly in *Ep.* 84.8: *etiam si cuius in te comparebit similtudo, quem admiratio tibi altius fixerit, similem esse te volo quomodo filium, non quomodo imaginem; imago res mortua est.* Here, the son is presented as the living (and

ancestral portraits that line elite *atria*, Cato's *imago* memorialises his deeds and functions as a spur to future emulation, effectively, to generating yet more copies.

A particularly rich instance of the *exemplum*'s mimetic impulses is Livy's story of the elder Publius Licinius Calvus, who persuades voters to elect his son to the tribunate in his stead, on the basis that the young man has been fashioned into 'the image and likeness' of his father (*effigiem atque imaginem*, 5.18.5). The story's events articulate issues of inheritance and family resemblance: Calvus is depicted as the physical reflection of his progenitor – a statue or portrait (*effigiem*) – and this bodily similarity is meant to corroborate a further moral and dispositional likeness.[31] Transfer of political office from father to son encapsulates processes of biological descent and genealogical preservation. The younger Calvus is at once a flesh-and-blood version of his father and an artificial replica of him. Biology, exemplarity, and artistic representation converge in this anecdote, with each engaging in an equivalent act of reproductive repetition.[32]

Crucially for Seneca, this nexus between art, *exempla*, and family traits claims a long history of association with theatrical performance, as the phrase 'role model' suggests even now.[33] Anyone who trains him- or herself to imitate another person's actions and qualities pursues an enterprise equivalent to that of the stage artist, who both copies and – so to speak – 'revivifies' the identities of dramatic characters.[34] Theatrical performance shares with exemplarity an impulse to re-embody established *personae*: there are deep and cogent similarities between reproducing Cato's conduct in life and Medea's conduct on stage. Like the individual

---

presumably, developing, changing) alternative to the changeless death-mask/mirror image. Affinity between ancestral *imagines* and exemplarity is explored by Baroin (2010) 23–5, and Uden (2010) 121–2.

[31] O'Sullivan (2009) 468 explains how this episode combines notions of patrilineal succession with the mimetic repetition of art objects.

[32] Bexley (2017) 167–70 explores the parallel qualities of biological reproduction and artistic production, both of which rely on generating copies.

[33] The caveats of Bell (2008) 2–6 notwithstanding, the modern term 'role model' seems to me entirely suitable for describing Roman exemplarity, especially given the latter's theatricalised qualities.

[34] The symbolic link between acting and resurrection has been theorised by Blau (1982/3); Rayner (2006) ix–xxxv; and Bassi (2017). See also Bexley (2017) 172–80 on death's association with performance in the pseudo-Senecan *Octavia*.

aspiring to embody a past *exemplum*, the actor's art requires him or her to identify with another self, to inhabit that self and assume its characteristics. The exemplary individual, in turn, resembles a fictional character, a *dramatis persona* that may be adopted, adapted, and reperformed endlessly.

Roman practice brings the two realms of exemplarity and theatre into particularly close conjunction. The principal context for their meeting was the aristocratic funeral, at which professional performers were hired to don the wax masks (*imagines*) of the dead man's ancestors and to accompany the procession in a visually powerful display of upper-class lineage. The reanimation of past *exempla* becomes, on this model, an inherently dramatic activity, while the ancestors themselves become analogous to dramatic characters: they are identity templates, their selfhood already fully defined, unconditional, and capable of being transferred from person to person.

The Roman aristocratic funeral was designed chiefly to enact social and familial continuity. It bolstered collective memory and preserved the cultural values epitomised by Rome's *maiores*.[35] Once the cortège had reached the Rostra, a son or close male relative would deliver a eulogy celebrating the deceased's achievements, listing alongside those of his ancestors, the official posts he had held; the ancestors themselves, re-incarnated by actors, sat behind the speaker on the platform, and listened.[36] The custom was intended to spur emulative behaviour among the family's younger generations, and more generally, among the attending Roman populace.[37] As the representative of his family's future, the eulogist also aspired to be the physical and moral embodiment of its exemplary past. His need to imitate and thereby preserve dynastic traditions was symbolically and visually equivalent to the actors' assumption of ancestral forms: like a living monument, or the latest performer of a long-standing role, the deceased's heir was called upon to uphold the *exempla* of his progenitors. These converging lines of impersonation and

---

[35] Flower (1996) 91–127; Hölkeskamp (1996) 320–3; Dufallo (2007) 4–6.
[36] The principle ancient source for this information is Polybius 6.53–4.
[37] As implied by Polybius 6.54. Sallust *Iug.* 4.5–6 invests the *imagines* with an equivalent role in spurring emulative exemplarity.

inheritance articulated with striking economy the theatrical (and frequently biological) replication inherent in all acts of exemplarity.

Re-embodiment of exemplary individuals even occurred on the stage itself, via the Roman tradition of *fabulae praetextae*. Although it seems unlikely that these plays ever took place during actual funeral ceremonies,[38] they nonetheless developed from much the same constellation of moral and cultural attitudes: like the actors wearing *imagines* at an aristocratic funeral, the characters in an historical drama epitomised the ancestral ties that bound the exemplary past to its re-enactment, and therefore to its perpetuation, in the present. *Praetextae* such as Accius' *Decius* and *Brutus* may well have been commissioned to celebrate contemporary patrons through praise of their exceptional predecessors.[39] In this context, too, the discourse of exemplarity effects a fluid transition between the singular, self-contained person and the general, reproducible art object: the figure on stage is a real flesh-and-blood human impersonating and thereby becoming a copy of an historical *exemplar*. The *exemplar*, likewise, is reanimated as a living being *and* confirmed as a mimetic object. In the likely case that patrons attended the performances of such *praetextae*,[40] comparisons could easily be drawn between the actual descendant sitting in the audience and the representation of his ancestor on stage. Doubtless this was one of the reasons for Marcus Junius Brutus wanting to re-stage Accius' *Brutus* at the *Ludi Apollinares* of 44 BC, in the aftermath of Caesar's assassination: as the current liberator of the Republic, he would be visibly mirrored by the character embodied in the play; Marcus Brutus himself, and the actor playing Lucius Brutus would both be

---

[38] Flower (1995) 177–9, refuting claims by Dupont (1985) 218–24.
[39] Who commissioned *fabulae praetextae* and to what purpose, are questions addressed by Flower (1995); Manuwald (2001) 119–21; and Kragelund (2002) 25–7. Fuller assessment of Accius' *Decius* and *Brutus* is in Kragelund (2016) 46–57.
[40] It would certainly make sense for patrons to attend performances of the *praetextae* they had commissioned, especially if – as is thought – the plays took place at *ludi votivi* or to mark the dedications of temples: see Flower (1995) and Kragelund (2002). Cornelius Balbus is reported to have attended the performance of his *Iter* at the *ludi* he hosted in Gades in 43 BC – see Pollio's letter to Cicero, *Fam.* 10.32 – but this evidence should not be taken as representative, since Balbus is the only Roman aristocrat known to have penned his own *praetexta* featuring himself as the heroic protagonist.

exemplary copies of the actual, historical individual on whom the *praetexta* centred.[41] The imitation that underpins all acts of exemplarity would ensure Marcus Brutus' personal, biological identity at the same time as rendering him an artificial duplicate of an earlier model.

My reason for dwelling at such length on this issue is to show how easily the discourse and praxis of Roman exemplarity binds actual people to their fictional or plastic counterparts. Roman *exempla* cross and re-cross the boundary between person and character, especially in their more theatrical manifestations. By likening individuals to art objects and dramatic roles, exemplarity bestows an identity that is circumscribed, reproducible, and timeless, in comparison to the contingent, time-bound singularity that characterises human lives. Such circumscribed identity, admitting of minimal (if any) variation and capable of being repeated *ad infinitum*, a stable and complete set of traits, is precisely what characters possess. To a lesser degree, this is also true of statues, so that the relationship of person to effigy approaches even if it does not quite reach the character–person binary. Given the prevalence of such practices in ancient Rome, it is unsurprising to find in Senecan tragedy a similarly permeable boundary between fictional and actual modes of being.

Metapoetic Families

Before turning to Seneca, though, I consider one more matter: the relationship of exemplarity to literary allusion. In a wide-ranging 2009 article on the topic, Alessandro Barchiesi draws attention to 'the link in Roman letters between repetition of past *exempla* and textual self-reference'.[42] The *exemplum*, like the quotation to which it is closely related,[43] prompts intertextual associations,

---

[41] Brutus never realised these aims: he fled Italy prior to the *ludi Apollinares* taking place, and Gaius Antonius (brother of Marc Antony) in his role as the acting *praetor urbanus*, had Accius' *Tereus* staged instead of the *Brutus*, doubtless to avoid inspiring popular support for Caesar's assassin; see Cicero *Att.* 16.2.3; 16.5.1; *Phil* 1.36. Erasmo (2004) 96–9 explores this putative re-performance as a culminating example of metatheatre that blends historical with dramatised events.

[42] Barchiesi (2009) 59.

[43] As Lowrie (2007) 97 remarks, '*exempla* by definition occur in contexts of citation'. On the relationship between *exempla* and quotation, see also Agamben (1998) 21–2; Goldschmidt (2013) 152–3; and Waldenfels (2015) 37.

114

and opens a window onto the shadows and outlines of a given work's literary genealogy. Through the *exemplum*, the author can show, and the reader see, which texts are being imitated and enshrined as paradigms.

Instances of such self-reflexive literary exemplarity are not far to seek; certainly, they saturate Seneca's drama, but first it will be profitable to examine one example so apt and so popular that it could be said to occupy its own exemplary status within the scholarly literature on Roman exemplarity, namely, Aeneas' address to Ascanius at *Aeneid* 12.435–40:[44]

> disce, puer, virtutem ex me verumque laborem,
> fortunam ex aliis. nunc te mea dextera bello
> defensum dabit et magna inter praemia ducet.
> tu facito, mox cum matura adoleverit aetas,
> sis memor et te animo repetentem exempla tuorum
> et pater Aeneas et avunculus excitet Hector.
>
> Learn courage from me, boy, and true toil;
> learn fortune from others. Now my right hand
> will protect you in war and lead you to great prizes.
> When, in the near future, you reach maturity, make sure
> you remember, and as you recall the examples of your family
> may your father Aeneas, and uncle Hector inspire you.

As Goldschmidt remarks, the *exemplum* fulfils its moral-didactic function at both an intra- and extra-textual level in this passage: Ascanius must learn from Aeneas and Hector just as the generic Roman *puer* whom Ascanius represents, 'the boy reader of epic in future Rome', must learn from the models he encounters in the text itself.[45] Aeneas is a model for his son and for the audience of Vergil's epic. This double layer of exemplarity renders Aeneas at once a quasi-human and a fictional identity. Within the fictive world enclosed by the epic's narrative, Aeneas figures as an implied human personality, a father delivering precepts to his son, and a man whose valorous deeds (*virtutem ... verumque*

---

[44] Analysis of the passage can be found in Barchiesi (2009) 43, and Goldschmidt (2013) 149–50.

[45] Goldschmidt (2013) 149. Tarrant (2012) *ad Aen.* 12.435 notes the generalising force of *puer*: 'the individual addressee stands for the wider audience that is meant to hear and respond to the speaker's message'.

115

laborem, 435) will be emulated by and reproduced in future generations. Like countless other instances of exemplary discourse in Roman culture, this passage from the *Aeneid* connects moral paradigms with genealogical lineage, so that Ascanius' need to satisfy the demands of his parental model becomes, at the same time, his means of securing a place within an ancestral group (*exempla tuorum*, 439). *Pater Aeneas* likewise combines literal fatherhood with the fatherly authority of the *exemplum*.

At the extra-textual level, however, Aeneas' instruction signifies in a self-reflexive manner the poetic tradition of which he is a part. By citing himself and Hector as models, Aeneas – and Vergil behind him – looks forward to the work's reception by future Roman audiences, and at the same time, glances back to a long-established practice of readers extracting exemplary lessons from Homeric epic.[46] Ascanius is encouraged to treat his father as a textual construct from which he may learn the lessons customarily proffered by epic poetry. This discourse of exemplarity, in turn, draws attention to the *Iliad*'s pervasive presence as an intertext throughout the *Aeneid* – a presence that grows particularly acute in Book 12 – and to Hector's role as one of many literary models for the character of Aeneas himself.[47]

The passage's metapoetic connotations extend further still, because when Aeneas acknowledges his paternal status (*pater Aeneas*), he not only evokes his dynastic and didactic duties, but also alludes to Vergil's position as a literary son to Homer's towering father figure.[48] Vergil the poetic offspring hopes he can live up to the standards set by his great poetic progenitor. Paradigms pervade the passage at all levels, and, just as is the

---

[46] On Homer's role as a pedagogical text and source of moral guidance, see Skidmore (1996) 3–7, with references. For exemplarity within the *Iliad* itself: Willcock (1964) and Goldhill (1994) 60–6.

[47] In fact, Hector is a model for both Aeneas and Turnus in Book 12, as is Achilles: see West (1974) and Quint (1993) 65–83 for detailed discussion of these Iliadic intertexts. Barchiesi (2009) 43 notes that Aeneas' advice to Ascanius at *Aen.* 12.435–40 also draws on Sophocles' *Ajax* 548–51, and Tarrant (2012) *ad Aen.* 435–6 detects a further allusion to Accius' reworking of Sophocles (156 Ribbeck *TRF*²).

[48] Thus Hardie (1993) 102: 'Scenes of instruction and transmission feature prominently in the *Aeneid*, and in many cases a metapoetical symbolism lies close to the surface.' For the metapoetic function of parent–child relationships in the *Aeneid*, see also O'Sullivan (2009) and Rogerson (2017).

116

case in Roman society, the *exemplum* here combines moral with artistic *aemulatio*, biological inheritance with acts of imitative duplication, and textual with human (or, for Aeneas, implied human) identity. Exemplarity's imitative impulse enables both characters and people to be interpreted as actual individuals on the one hand, and on the other, as literary or plastic artefacts. As the preceding surveys demonstrate, these two categories often converge.

2.1 *Troades*

Achilles' Shadow

Imitative exemplarity is likewise a major theme in Seneca's *Troades*, where it acts as a spur to future accomplishments, and delineates characters' identities via a combination of ancestral and literary inheritance. The *exemplum*'s iterative qualities are matched, in this tragedy, by iteration at the level of dramatic action and mythological events: just as the past replays – or must be prevented from replaying – in the present, so characters must formulate their current selves by reproducing and referring to earlier behavioural models. As a result, identity is envisaged primarily in terms of copies, whether biological, moral, poetic, or artistic – and frequently several of those categories at once. In the *Troades* as in Roman culture more generally, exemplarity stands at the intersection of text and humanness, shaping individuals' conduct at the same time as – even by means of – compelling people to become duplicates.

Scholars of Senecan tragedy have, for a long time now, acknowledged and discussed the various motifs of repetition that form a crucial part of the *Troades*' thematic texture.[49] The mythological past furnishes paradigms for current events, and the *dramatis personae* invoke precedents at every turn: Agamemnon has previously sacrificed a virgin to the Trojan cause, so there is the expectation that he will do so again (246–9; 360–1); Hector once

---

[49] Schetter (1965); Owen (1970); Lawall (1982) 250–2; Wilson (1983); Colakis (1985); Boyle (1994) 23–6 and (1997) 59 and 70–3; Raby (2000); Volk (2000); Schiesaro (2003) 190–202; McAuley (2016) 282–94.

defended Troy, so both Andromache and Ulysses assume that Astyanax will do the same (469–74; 529–33; 550–1); just as Helen's marriage once brought grief to the Trojans, so – on a smaller scale – her announcement of Polyxena's 'marriage' will be greeted with mourning (861–3). The dead hand of the past maintains an iron grip over the present in this tragedy, with successive characters compelled to relive earlier occurrences or to re-embody earlier figures.

The play's action, too, is structured around duplicate scenes and duplicate *personae*: the *agon* between Andromache and Ulysses in Act 3 reprises that between Agamemnon and Pyrrhus in Act 2, with the former figure of each pair attempting to preserve the life of a Trojan child; Ulysses and Helen also perform parallel roles as the characters sent to find Astyanax and Polyxena, and to ensure preparations for their respective sacrifices; two ghosts appear; two children die; events centre upon two tombs, of Achilles and of Hector.[50] This pervasive doubling – at the level of the play's content and of its form – lends a paradigmatic quality to characters and their conduct, as if everything that someone does, and all that someone is, may be adopted and repeated by other people at other times. Virtually every deed and every person in this tragedy is ghosted by the memory of former events, and by the further possibility of those events re-occurring in the future.

Exemplarity looms large in such circumstances. Action in the *Troades* tends to be framed by the presence of parental models,[51] and especially by the father–son relationship that features so prominently in the literary and cultural discourses of Roman *exempla*. A clear instance of this dynamic is the protracted exchange between Pyrrhus and Agamemnon that occupies almost the whole of Act 2. Ostensibly a debate over whether the Greeks are justified in their plan to sacrifice Polyxena as an offering to Achilles' shade, the dialogue rapidly dissolves into an *altercatio* focused on Agamemnon's past and Pyrrhus' current

---

[50] Lawall (1982) 250 provides a comprehensive list of the *Troades*' doublets. Other studies of the play's parallel and/or cyclical sequences include: Schetter (1965); Owen (1970); Wilson (1983) 43; and Boyle (1997) 72–3. See Marshall (2000) on the prominence of the play's two tombs.

[51] Colakis (1985); Volk (2000); McAuley (2016) 257–94.

118

behaviour.[52] Both characters have recourse to Achilles as a moral-didactic and genealogical paradigm for Pyrrhus, whose identity is governed almost entirely by 'the implications of heredity'.[53] Achilles in this exchange is held up as a model for Pyrrhus to follow, and at the same time, portrayed as the well-spring of Pyrrhus' present actions, reactions, and attitudes.

Pyrrhus himself is keen to forge strong links with his father, which he does first of all by listing Achilles' achievements and declaring that he 'enjoys tracing the celebrated deeds and great praise of [his] glorious parent' (*inclitas laudes iuvat / et clara magni facta genitoris sequi*, 236–7). Punctuating as it does two catalogues of Achilles' feats – his victories in Troy (238–43) and elsewhere (215–28) – the statement implies primarily that Pyrrhus takes pride in reciting his father's attainments. But beneath the immediate, rhetorical connotations of *sequi* ('to list', 237) is the suggestion that Pyrrhus will also follow and conform to (*sequi*) his illustrious parent's example.[54] The two catalogues are intended not only to exalt Achilles and thereby defend his ghost's request,[55] but also to stress continuity between father and son: Pyrrhus has inherited this record of achievement and hopes to be able to match it.

---

[52] Schiesaro (2003) 190–4 stresses the central role that precedents (and arguments from precedent) claim in this scene.

[53] Fantham (1982) *ad Tro.* 203–49.

[54] Translations in Fantham (1982) 142 and Fitch (2004) 193 give only the rhetorical sense of *sequi*, but Wilson (2010) 111 captures the ambiguity: 'I am happy to follow / my great father's glorious honours and his famous deeds.' Seneca also uses *sequor* to mean 'follow an example' at *Phoen.* 331–2, where Oedipus declares of his sons: *meorum facinorum exempla appetunt / me nunc secuntur.* On *sequor* as a key term in Roman exemplary discourse, see Baroin (2010) 32–6 and Langlands (2018) 95.

[55] It is not entirely clear whether Agamemnon and Pyrrhus know about the preceding appearance of Achilles' ghost, especially since neither character mentions the apparition, and since Agamemnon appeals to Calchas' authority – not the ghost's – as the only way of resolving the deadlock. Given these considerations, Owen (1970) 122, and Fantham (1982) 83, regard Agamemnon and Pyrrhus' debate as a discrete scene, unconnected to Talthybius' report (*Tro.* 164–202). However, I concur with Colakis (1985) 150, that Seneca's text assumes a connection between the two scenes because 'in the context of the play the ghost has supplied the motive for Agamemnon and Pyrrhus' dispute'. Seidensticker (1969) 164 n. 27 arrives at much the same conclusion: 'Der Agon setz Achilleus' Forderungen, die der Bote in direkter Rede wiedergibt (191–96), voraus' ('the confrontation presupposes Achilles' demands, which the messenger reports in direct speech (191–96)').

119

Achilles' status as a moral-didactic *exemplum* is further confirmed by the resemblance this speech bears to a *laudatio funebris*. Like the male scion of a prominent Roman family delivering a public eulogy in praise of his deceased (most likely male)[56] relative's accomplishments, Pyrrhus recites, commemorates, and celebrates his father's deeds in the context of a discussion about the rites owed to his shade; though not identical, the two scenarios are certainly analogous. And that analogy extends to the content and structure of the speeches themselves, because Roman funeral orations appear – from the minimal fragments that remain – to have included detailed accounts of the dead man's career accompanied by references to the careers of his most conspicuous ancestors. *Laudationes* typically took the form of catalogues that proceeded in chronological order from the recipient's initial accomplishments to his latest: Q. Caecilius Metellus' *laudatio* for his father, delivered in 221 BC and thus the oldest recorded specimen of that genre, seems to have listed in ascending sequence the posts of *pontifex maximus*, two consulships, and the dictatorship (*patris sui L. Metellis pontificis, bis consulis, dictatoris*, Pliny *Nat.* 7.130).[57] Epitaphic inscriptions, which exhibit many characteristics of the *laudatio* genre, also tend to catalogue achievements chronologically, either from first to last or vice versa: Cn. Cornelius Scipio Hispanus is commemorated for having filled the roles of praetor, curule aedile, quaestor, and military tribune (*ILS* 6), and L. Munatius Plancus for having held the consulship and censorship, in addition to having been hailed twice as *imperator* (*ILS* 886).[58] In a similar manner, the Pyrrhus of Seneca's *Troades* enumerates his father's youthful victories over Telephus (215); Cilician Thebes (219); Lyrnessos (221); Pedasus (222); Chryse (223); Tenedos (224); Lesbos (226); and Cilla (227),

---

[56] Although the exemplarity of Roman aristocratic funerals concentrated above all on the male line, there are recorded instances of *laudationes* being delivered in memory of prominent women, for example Caesar's eulogy for his aunt Julia in 69 BC (Suet. *Jul.* 6.1) and Augustus' for Caesar's sister in 51 BC (Suet. *Aug.* 8.1; Quint. *Inst.* 12.6.1).

[57] According to Flower (1996) 138–9, this summary of L. Metellus' career, reported by Pliny and preceding an actual fragment from the *laudatio* at *Nat.* 7.139, 'probably reflects the shape of … material in the oration'.

[58] Texts of these and other, similar inscriptions have been collected by Flower (1996) 326–30.

120

followed by his Trojan victories: Hector (238); Memnon (239); and Penthesilea (243).[59] When he sums up his father's youthful feats as a 'journey' (*iter est Achillis*, 232), the metaphor of the road all but evokes the *cursus honorum* around which so much of Roman elite life, and the funeral speech itself, was structured.[60] By celebrating Achilles' exemplarity, Pyrrhus implies that his own identity stems from the model of his father; this foremost Trojan hero will 'live on' through his son in much the same way that descendants at a Roman funeral were assumed to perpetuate a family line via the dual ties of biology and *exempla*.

Pyrrhus' desire to emulate his father is not just empty rhetoric, either. Seneca draws an implicit comparison between the young warrior's first martial feat, the slaughter of King Priam (*caede ... regia*, 309) and Achilles' first, the wounding of King Telephus (*cruore regio*, 217), where similar phrasing suggests the deeds' equivalence.[61] Pyrrhus also reproduces Achilles' paradigm in Act 2 simply by engaging in a quarrel with Agamemnon, an episode that will be discussed in detail below. Such imitation of Achilles' *exemplum* transforms Pyrrhus into a virtual *Achilles redivivus* who has already begun to be responsible for visiting a second round of grief upon the Trojans. Andromache acknowledges as much when, near the close of Act 3, she tasks Astyanax with delivering a reproachful message to Hector in Hades: *lentus et segnis iaces? / redit Achilles* ('do you lie there slow and sluggish? Achilles has returned' *Tro.* 805–6). In one regard, Andromache refers to Achilles' literal if insubstantial return in the form of a ghost, a spectral offstage presence reported by Talthybius in Act 2 (168–202); viewed from another angle, however, her phrase suggests Achilles' symbolic resurrection in the person of his son, Pyrrhus, who even now perpetuates his father's hostility towards the Trojans. Besides living in Achilles' shadow, Pyrrhus *becomes*

---

[59] As noted by Fantham (1982) *ad Tro.* 215ff, Seneca's catalogue bears close resemblance to Odysseus' list of Achilles' deeds in Ovid *Met.* 13.171–8, though Seneca's version, partly by virtue of being put into Pyrrhus' mouth, is far more evocative of a *laudatio*. On the *laudatio*'s presence in Latin literature more generally, see Dufallo (2007) 53–73 (Cicero *Philippic* 2) and 84–6 (Propertius 4.11), and Flower (1996) 110–12 (the parade of heroes at *Aeneid* 6.756–886).

[60] A metaphorical connection noted by Baroin (2010) 36.

[61] Fantham (1982) *ad Tro.* 217 calls it 'a cross-reference to Pyrrhus' own deeds'.

Achilles' shadow, imagined by himself and by others in the play as the living *exemplum* of his great progenitor.

Agamemnon likewise cites Achilles as both a source of and a paradigm for Pyrrhus' current behaviour. Emphasising the Iliadic hero's capacity for clemency over his capacity for violence, Agamemnon confronts Pyrrhus with his killing of Priam, the very man Achilles once chose to spare:

> haud equidem nego
> hoc esse Pyrrhi maximum in bello decus
> saevo peremptus ense quod Priamus iacet,
> supplex paternus

> I do not at all deny
> that this is Pyrrhus' most glorious deed in war:
> Priam, his father's suppliant, lies dead
> by his brutal sword

> (*Tro.* 310–13)

The sarcastic vocabulary of praise in this passage echoes only to refute Pyrrhus' preceding attempt to assume the mantle of his father's glorious deeds. Agamemnon both acknowledges and reinterprets the notion of 'incomparability' present in Pyrrhus' earlier *laudatio*: whereas Achilles' martial exploits surpass the title of *summum decus* (231), Pyrrhus' fall far below the level of *maximum* (311); the father's exceptional status has not been conferred on the son.[62] For Agamemnon, Priam's death, the old man's literal severance from life, symbolises Pyrrhus' severance from his father's model. This discontinuity comes through especially clearly in lines 312–13, where *iacet* is all but pressed into double service and prompts us to imagine Priam lying down in supplication (*iacet / supplex*) as well as lying down dead (*peremptus ... iacet*); what Achilles has done, Pyrrhus has undone.[63] Agamemnon reiterates the idea when he declares, a few lines further on, 'among those Thessalian vessels, there was deep peace for Hector's father' (*in istis Thessalis navalibus / pax alta*

---

[62] Flower (1996) 139 remarks that tropes of 'incomparability' typically featured at the climax of *laudationes*.

[63] Fantham (1982) *ad Tro.* 313 observes in addition that Pyrrhus violates an inherited obligation by killing his father's suppliant.

rursus Hectoris patris fuit, 325–6). Here the phrase *Hectoris patris* draws attention to the significance of father–son relationships and implies once again that Pyrrhus has not maintained his predecessor's *exemplum* because he has offered Priam only the *pax* of death whereas Achilles once offered the *pax* of clemency.

Agamemnon's criticism owes an oblique debt to the confrontation between Priam and Pyrrhus in *Aeneid* 2.526–58, where the Trojan king himself, having just witnessed Polites' death, accuses Pyrrhus of failing to follow Achilles' model:[64]

> at non ille, satum quo te mentiris, Achilles
> talis in hoste fuit Priamo; sed iura fidemque
> supplicis erubuit corpusque exsangue sepulcro
> reddidit Hectoreum meque in mea regna remisit
>
> But Achilles, from whom you falsely claim to descend, did not
> behave in this way towards Priam, his enemy; he respected the
>   rights and immunity
> of a suppliant, and gave back Hector's bloodless body
> for burial, and let me return to my kingdom

<div align="right">(Aen. 2.540–3)</div>

O'Sullivan observes of this passage: 'Priam refers to his Iliadic persona in the third person, thereby emphasising that we are in a post-Iliadic world, and highlighting how far removed Pyrrhus' blasphemy is from Achilles' behaviour.'[65] As happens frequently in Roman discourses of exemplarity, imitative conduct is imagined as a facet of biology, so that Pyrrhus' failure to uphold Achilles' *exemplum* also casts doubt on his parentage (*satum quo te mentiris, Achilles*, 2.540). Vergil's Pyrrhus draws on the same set of

---

[64] Although *Tro.* 310–13 and 325–6 exhibit only minimal verbal correspondence to *Aen.* 2.540–3, the passages are united by their articulation of the same broad idea – namely that Achilles' merciful treatment of Priam reproaches Pyrrhus' brutality – and by the simple fact that the *Aeneid* exercises such a pervasive influence over Seneca's *Troades*. As noted by Ahl (1986) 36–7, investigated more fully by Zissos (2009), and to a lesser extent, Putnam (1995) 258–61, Aeneas and his Roman future constitute a jarringly 'present absence' in this play. Other connections between Seneca's *Troades* and Vergil's epic are addressed by: Steele (1922) 15–18; Fantham (1982) *passim*, but especially 21–4; Lawall (1985) 245; Boyle (1994) *passim*; Schiesaro (2003) 195–9; Trinacty (2014) 40–3 and 168–9; Ker (2015) 116–17; McAuley (2016) 282–3.

[65] O'Sullivan (2009) 459, with the accompanying caveat that Priam's recollection is skewed: 'after all, Achilles *killed* Hector, and did even worse things to the body than Pyrrhus has done to Polites, and Priam witnessed it all'.

<div align="right">123</div>

associations when, unperturbed by Priam's reproach, he vaunts, *referes ergo haec et nuntius ibis /* <u>*Pelidae genitori*</u>*. illi mea tristia facta /* <u>*degenerem*</u>*que Neoptolemum narrare memento* ('all right, you will go as a messenger and report these things to <u>my father, Peleus' son</u>. Remember to recount these savage deeds of mine, and to say that Neoptolemus is <u>degenerate</u>' *Aen.* 2.547–9). In this context of fathers and patronymics, *degener* implies both Pyrrhus' moral unworthiness and his descent from Achilles, that is, his weakened embodiment of a once noble bloodline.[66] As in Seneca's *Troades*, the character and conduct of Vergil's Pyrrhus are judged according to the standards set by his famous forebear; Achilles qua parent merges with Achilles qua *exemplum*.

Achilles' paradigm, moreover, maintains concurrent influence over both the fictional and quasi-human aspects of Pyrrhus' identity. In *Aeneid* 2.526–58, Achilles represents a moral-didactic model for Pyrrhus' implied human personality, and, at the same time, symbolises the literary past of Vergil's epic.[67] His parental model is at once deeply personal – a father embodying moral guidance for his son – and essentially abstract: a character whose parent text, the *Iliad*, epitomises the aesthetic benchmark for Vergil and his readers.

The same applies to Agamemnon and Pyrrhus' dialogue in the *Troades*, where Achilles' exemplarity symbolises first of all the facts of biological inheritance, the behavioural characteristics that have or have not been passed down from Achilles to his son. Secondly, this paternal paradigm is meant to influence that conduct, while at the same time representing a literary model for Pyrrhus' characterisation. Agamemnon recalls Achilles' deeds primarily in the hope that Pyrrhus will learn from them, just as Agamemnon himself claims to have acquired greater wisdom from witnessing Troy's fall (*magna momento obrui / vincendo didici*; '<u>I have learnt</u> by conquering that greatness can be crushed

---

[66] Cf. the title of Val. Max. 3.5, *Qui a parentibus claris degeneraverunt*, and Tac. *Ann.* 1.53.8, where the verb is used of Sempronius Gracchus, with the same implication of genetic descent combined with moral degradation. Goldschmidt (2013) 158 remarks that narratives of exemplarity can be used to illustrate de- rather than (or as well as) regeneration.

[67] As explored by O'Sullivan (2009) 459–62.

124

in an instant', 263–4. Cf. *disce* at *Aen.* 12.435, above), and just as Troy, too, in this pervasive atmosphere of moral-didactic exemplarity, becomes a *documentum* (5) of power's ultimate fragility. How one approaches the past and which lessons one chooses to learn from it are major themes in this play; Achilles' *exemplum* adheres within this wider matrix, and Agamemnon wields it like a pedagogical tool intended to alter Pyrrhus's identity for the better.

In making the comparison, though, Seneca also implies that Achilles is a meta-literary symbol and Pyrrhus the poetic replica of his Iliadic forebear.[68] Recalling the quarrel from *Iliad* Book 1, Seneca's Agamemnon admits to a sense of déjà-vu that inevitably colours his impression of the young man's temperament:

> iuvenile vitium est regere non posse impetum;
> aetatis alios fervor hic primus rapit,
> Pyrrhum paternus. spiritus quondam truces
> minasque tumidi lentus Aeacidae tuli
>
> Being unable to govern one's anger is a young man's fault;
> for others, it is due to the first heat of youth,
> for Pyrrhus it is paternal. I once endured patiently
> the harsh arrogance and threats of raging Aeacides

(*Tro.* 250–3)

Here, Agamemnon blends literal with literary genealogies, parent with parent text, so that Pyrrhus is seen not only to exhibit character traits inherited from his father, but also to fulfil – by replaying it – a role established in and via an earlier poetic work. The *paternus fervor* displayed by Pyrrhus (251–2) recalls the μῆνιν … Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος ('the wrath of Achilles, Peleus' son' *Il.* 1.1) that drives the action of the *Iliad* and, more specifically, suffuses that epic's opening dispute: what Agamemnon has encountered before with Achilles (*quondam*), he now encounters all over again in the hero's son; the same goes for Seneca's readers. The *exemplum* that Agamemnon cites in this passage proves an occasion for literary self-reflexivity, and Pyrrhus' identity is

---

68 This change of tack is indicative of broader inconsistencies in Agamemnon's argument, where Achilles is deployed alternately as a positive paradigm, and as a negative one. Yet such inconsistencies are characteristic of the *exemplum*'s openness to appropriation: see in particular Lowrie (2007).

125

treated as something that derives as much from a textual as from a biological source. Exemplary imitation, which elsewhere in the exchange functions as a means of moral and personal self-fashioning, becomes in this instance an act of literary mimesis, with Pyrrhus reproducing his Iliadic father's paradigm, and Seneca, as we shall see, copying parts of Homer's paradigmatic text.

Parent and Parent Text

As Seidensticker recognises in his careful, pioneering study of the scene, Pyrrhus and Agamemnon's quarrel in *Troades* Act 2 recapitulates in a minor key the confrontation between Agamemnon and Achilles in *Iliad* 1.[69] Seneca's Agamemnon openly acknowledges the Homeric intertext at 252–3 (above), and Pyrrhus foreshadows its appearance when he describes Chryse – Chryseis' homeland, and one of the many locales conquered by Achilles – as 'the cause of strife for kings' (*causa litis regibus Chryse*, 223).[70] But most of the Homeric allusions in this scene comprise excerpts from Achilles' speeches in *Iliadi* 1, adapted and echoed by Seneca's Pyrrhus.

Thus: when Pyrrhus accuses Agamemnon of cowardice – *timide, cum increpuit metus* ('you are fearful when danger roars', 302) – he repeats in condensed form the same complaint voiced by Homer's Achilles: οὔτέ ποτ᾽ ἐς πόλεμον ἅμα λαῷ θωρηχθῆναι /οὔτε λόχονδ᾽ ἰέναι σὺν ἀριστήεσσιν Ἀχαιῶν / τέτληκας θυμῷ· τὸ δέ τοι κὴρ εἴδεται εἶναι ('Never / once have you taken courage in your heart to arm with your people / for battle, or to go into ambuscade with the best of the Achaians. / No, for in such things you see death.' *Il.* 1.226–8 trans. Lattimore). When Pyrrhus sneers at Agamemnon's power, the phrase *regum tyranne* ('tyrant over kings' 303) not only distorts the Homeric formula ἄναξ ἀνδρῶν, but also recalls Achilles' insinuations at *Iliad* 1.287–8: ἀλλ᾽ ὅδ᾽ἀνὴρ ἐθέλει περὶ πάντων ἔμμεναι ἄλλων, / πάντων μὲν κρατέειν ἐθέλει, πάντεσσι δ᾽ἀνάσσειν ('Yet here is a man who wishes to be above all others, / who wishes to hold power

over all, and to be lord of / all' trans. Lattimore).[71] Both the Homeric father and the Senecan son make threats against Agamemnon's life: Pyrrhus declares *nimium diu / a caede nostra regia cessat manus / paremque poscit Priamus* ('for too long now has my hand refrained from slaughtering kings, and Priam demands his equal' 308–10), while Achilles remarks darkly, ἧς ὑπεροπλίῃσι τάχ᾽ ἄν ποτε θυμὸν ὀλέσσῃ ('By such acts of arrogance he may even lose his own life' *Il.* 1.205 trans. Lattimore). When, in the *Troades*, Pyrrhus demands to know whether Agamemnon will continue depriving warriors of their prizes – *solusne totiens spolia de nobis feres?* ('will you alone, so often, bear away spoils at our expense?' 305) – he not only alludes to Agamemnon's forcible appropriation of Briseis in the *Iliad*, but also conjures Achilles' comments about Agamemnon receiving an unequal share of the plunder: ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν πλεῖον πολυάϊκος πολέμοιο / χεῖρες ἐμαὶ διέπουσ᾽· ἀτὰρ ἤν ποτε δασμὸς ἵκηται, / σοὶ τὸ γέρας πολὺ μεῖζον ('Always the greater part of the painful fighting is the work of / my hands; but when the time comes to distribute the booty / yours is the far greater reward' *Il.* 1.165–7 trans. Lattimore). Although relatively broad and loose, the allusions are also inescapable, clustered together in such a way as to make the Homeric intertext instantly apparent: Pyrrhus steps into his father's role and repeats his father's words.

This convergence of textual reiteration and reiterated behaviour points once again to the presence of exemplarity. The analogical force of the *exemplum* defines Pyrrhus' identity in terms of his biological, personal, and literary resemblance to his father: Pyrrhus adopts Achilles' model to the extent that he becomes a copy of it, a figure whose disposition and patterns of conduct appear to have been predetermined by a combination of genealogical and poetic fiat. Achilles' authority as a parent merges with Homer's authority as the wellspring of the debate with Agamemnon: both dictate how Seneca's Pyrrhus is meant to behave, and ultimately, who he is meant to be. Thus, Pyrrhus in the *Troades* is at once a quasi-human figure who has inherited his father's traits, and a textual construct whose inherited traits

[71] Fantham (1982) *ad loc.*

amount to little more than a pastiche of quotations. If exemplarity may be defined as a form of citation, that is, of referring to and reproducing extant paradigms in the field of human activity, then Seneca's Pyrrhus reinforces this definition literally, by citing Homer's *Iliad*; his personal emulation is mirrored in acts of literary allusion.

As a specific consequence of Seneca's dramatic medium, Pyrrhus' exemplarity also evinces links to performance, both in a theatrical and in a more generic sense. The son's biological re-embodiment of his father is accompanied by performative re-embodiment, as Pyrrhus breathes new life into Achilles' words, and re-enacts Achilles' quarrel in updated form. Like an actor assuming a part, or the scion of an aristocratic family at a Roman funeral, Pyrrhus revivifies in his own flesh-and-blood presence the skeletal template of somebody else's identity. His status as a substitute equates to his status as a performer. And the performative qualities of exemplarity become all the more apparent if the scene is staged, because then Pyrrhus' assumption of his father's traits finds a parallel in the actor's assumption of Pyrrhus' character. In both instances, successful emulation reifies what would otherwise remain an abstract and largely textual model, and at the same time entails a diminution or even denial of the performer's individuality: exemplarity renders Pyrrhus, like the actor, a version, a copy, a type.[72]

Hector's Son

If there is one character in the *Troades* subject to greater exemplary pressure than Pyrrhus, that character is Astyanax, who can barely be said to exist beyond symbolising his father Hector's heroism. More so than Pyrrhus, Astyanax is defined exclusively via his patrimony: Calchas refers to him as *Priami nepos Hectoreus* ('Priam's grandson via Hector', 369), and Ulysses, in the space of just one Act, calls him *Hectorea suboles* ('Hector's scion', 528), *futurus Hector* ('a future Hector', 551), *Hectoris natum* ('Hector's son', 554), and *stirps Hectoris* ('Hector's

---

[72] On the similarity of *exempla* to typologies, see Kraus (2005) esp. 187 and 193.

128

stock', 605). Even Andromache, whose motherhood might otherwise be expected to endow her with a more nuanced perspective, struggles to see her son in any terms other than his illustrious parentage.[73] She refers to the child as *Hectoris proles* ('Hector's offspring', 597), and later apostrophises her absent husband: 'there is nothing in my son that pleases me apart from you' (*non aliud, Hector, in meo nato mihi / placere quam te*, 646–7). When faced with the choice of surrendering Astyanax or enduring the destruction of Hector's tomb, she rapidly concludes that this is a false dichotomy: both of them belong to and represent Hector; both preserve his memory (*utrimque est Hector*; 'Hector is on both sides', 559). From the Trojan viewpoint as much as from the Greek, Astyanax claims little or no identity independent of his father's.

Caution must be exercised here: Astyanax's name, which is solidly dactylic, cannot be accommodated within the iambic trimeter that forms the bulk of Seneca's tragic dialogues (in fact, the name appears only once in Senecan drama, at *Agamemnon* 639, a section of choral lyric). So there are practical, metrical reasons for the playwright of the *Troades* choosing to describe this boy in periphrastic ways.[74] Yet Seneca's interest in Astyanax's genealogy far exceeds the basic constraints of scansion: he is, rather, at pains to illustrate a relationship of exemplarity between father and son, hence the obsessive focus on Hector (as opposed to any other family member) and on the distant, yet constant possibility that Astyanax will resurrect Troy. It is by emphasising Astyanax's status as a copy that Seneca makes both Astyanax and Hector into *exempla*.

At the most literal level, Astyanax represents a version of Hector simply because he resembles him. Andromache sees in her son a direct reflection of her husband's face – *hos vultus meus / habebat Hector* ('my Hector used to have those features' 464–5) – and, in the description that follows, she portrays the boy as Hector's bodily copy: *talis incessu fuit / habituque talis, sic tulit*

---

[73] Andromache's obsession with Hector has been well noted by Fantham (1986) 275–8; Volk (2000); Raby (2000) 179–82; and McAuley (2016) 266–72 and 280–94.

[74] Something neither Wilson (1983) 45 nor Colakis (1985) 152 takes into account when stressing the significance of Astyanax's namelessness.

129

fortes manus, / sic celsus umeris, fronte sic torva minax / cervice fusam dissipans iacta comam ('he was like this in his gait, like this in his posture, thus he carried his brave hands, thus were his shoulders held high, thus he looked threatening with his grim brow, tossing back his neck and shaking his flowing hair' 465–8). In a move characteristic of exemplary narratives, Andromache conflates past and present in Astyanax's person: he *is* what Hector *was*.[75] The terms *talis* and *sic* function as implicit stage directions in this passage, with the performer of Andromache's role presumably gesturing towards her son, or even guiding him to adopt Hector's posture.[76] Attention is thereby focused upon Astyanax's immediate, tangible, bodily presence, which is subsequently elided with an absent, imagined body from the past (*fuit*; *tulit*). Of course, this resemblance may be partially a figment of Andromache's imagination, a delusory outcome of her obsessive love for Hector, especially since the Astyanax we meet elsewhere in Act 3 appears not *celsus* (467) but small (e.g. *parvulam stirpem*; 'tiniest offspring', 456, and *parvus comes*; 'little companion', 537). Essentially, what Andromache does at *Troades* 465–8 is envisage her son as a grown man, describing not (quite) the individual stood before her, but his anticipated resemblance to his now deceased father. This comparison is prompted by exemplarity as much as by nostalgia, since, besides being the physical embodiment of the past, Astyanax also represents the future of his *gens*; he is expected, simultaneously, to perpetuate his father's memory and to surpass it.

This motif of bodily resemblance recurs at 647–8 when Andromache, apostrophising Hector, utters a distraught prayer for their son's life: *vivat ut possit tuos / referre vultus* ('let him live so that he can revive your face'). From Andromache's perspective, this is Astyanax's sole purpose in living: his memorialisation of her deceased husband. The boy reiterates the past (*referre*) by calling Hector's lost visage to mind (*referre*); his

---

[75] Negotiating between past and present, and in many instances conflating the two, is a typical feature of exemplarity: see in particular Hölkeskamp (1996); Chaplin (2000) 198–202; and Roller (2004) 31–8.

[76] Boyle (1994) *ad Tro.* 466 notes that *talis* and *sic* could be stage directions. Another instance of *sic* potentially referring to stage action is *Med.* 1022, <u>*sic fugere soleo*</u>.

130

identity stretches beyond the present time and beyond the bounds of his own body.[77] Physical similarity indicates that Hector can be copied in precisely the same manner as an *exemplum*, so that his position as Astyanax's father also renders him Astyanax's prototype.

Yet Hector's *exemplum* goes beyond mere matters of bodily resemblance. When Andromache regrets that her son is 'too similar to his father' (*nimium … similis patri*, 464) she implies both that Astyanax reflects Hector's appearance and, by extension, that he will match Hector's achievements. Each of these propositions worries her (hence: *nimium*) because, on the one hand, Astyanax's presence reminds her constantly of Hector's loss, and on the other, because the likelihood of his inherited prowess in battle makes him a conspicuous target for the conquerors' pre-emptive killings. In Andromache's mind, physical mimesis cannot be uncoupled from behavioural mimesis, as indicated by her rapid transition from describing Astyanax's physique (464–8) to imagining his deeds:

> eritne tempus illud ac felix dies
> quo Troici defensor et vindex soli
> recidiva ponas Pergama et sparsos fuga
> cives reducas, nomen et patriae suum
> Phrygibusque reddas?

> Will it come, that time and fortunate day
> when, as defender and avenger of Trojan earth,
> you may establish renascent Pergamum, and lead back
> the citizens dispersed in flight, and restore their name
> to the Phrygians and to the fatherland?

> (*Tro.* 470–4)

Any reader with even a passing knowledge of Vergil will be alert to Seneca's trademark irony in this passage. The playwright undercuts Andromache's hopes via a 'future reflexive' evocation of the *Aeneid*: we know that Troy's future lies elsewhere, in Italy, and that it will be secured not by repeating the past, but by patiently, sometimes painfully renouncing it.[78] Yet the futility of

---

[77] Thus Hardie (1993) 89 on Roman discourses of intergenerational continuity: 'Identity is not limited to the present time or to the living body.'

[78] On repeating versus renouncing the past in the *Aeneid*, see in particular the masterful study by Quint (1993) 50–96. The term 'future reflexive' was coined by Barchiesi

131

Andromache's aspirations does not make them purely irrational.[79] Her reasoning, in fact, adheres closely to Roman discourses of exemplarity, employing as it does two core principles of iteration and resurrection. Like Astyanax's body, this vision of his achievements amalgamates several timeframes to the effect that the young boy's future consists in bringing back the past. Each individual act of repetition and return (*recidiva*; *reducas*; *reddas*) points to Astyanax's overall mimicry of his father's model, by which he restores Hector in all but the most literal sense. Heroic deeds, like Hector's body, can be copied, and Astyanax is assumed to arrogate his father's *exemplum* almost by virtue of his being 'the true offspring of a mighty sire' (*magni certa progenies patris*, 461). Ethical resemblance presupposes biological similitude.

Ulysses, too, regards Astyanax as a version of his father, and conversely, Hector as an *exemplum* for the boy. When he confesses that the Danaans fear a *futurus Hector* (551) not only does Ulysses conflate temporalities in the same way as Andromache, but he also assigns Hector to the category of repeatable paradigms. Like, for instance, the word *Caesar*, *Hector* moves from designating a unique, specific individual to signifying a title, a part (and in this case, a set of traits that others may adopt as required).[80] As discussed earlier in this chapter, exemplarity naturally produces such typologies, because commemoration of exceptional deeds/ people leads to their being enshrined not as isolated events, but as readily available templates.[81] The exemplarity of Lucius Junius Brutus transforms him from person into statue, from Brutus-as-individual to what that individual represents, in effect, to Brutus-as-symbol. Hector's *exemplum* has for Astyanax the same effect as Lucius Brutus' does on the late republican Marcus: to become fully himself, to grow into his heritage, Astyanax must adopt the

(1993) to define how later texts allude to preceding ones via visions of the future. Zissos (2009) 193–8 discusses in depth the 'intertextual irony' of 'Andromache's 'epic ambitions' in the *Troades*.

[79] Responding to the condemnatory judgements of, for example, Volk (2000) and Fantham (1986), McAuley (2016) 280–94 argues that Andromache's motivation actually obeys an inner logic.

[80] The analogy comes from Kraus (2005) 186 n.11: 'The shift from Caesar-as-person to Caesar-as-type is greatly facilitated by the development of *Caesar* as a title.'

[81] As discussed by Kraus (2005) 187, Barchiesi (2009) 46–7, and Roller (2015).

132

identity of another. Such exemplarity transforms Astyanax, too, into a symbol, as what would otherwise be an intimate, flesh-and-blood connection to his father becomes instead a relationship based on standardised, analogical qualities. The personal has become impersonal, or even supra-personal.

The Ghosts of Fathers Past

The motif of death and resurrection furnishes yet another point of contact between Astyanax and Hector's (or Pyrrhus and Achilles') relationship and Roman discourses of exemplarity. Despite the play's notoriously contradictory stance on the afterlife,[82] it is still the case that, in Mairéad McAuley's words, 'some of the dead … have real and *material* power over the living' in the *Troades*.[83] The appearance of Achilles' and then Hector's ghosts, whatever their respective levels of reality,[84] is responsible for setting in motion the majority of the tragedy's events. In addition, these ghosts have an equally substantial impact on the identities of their descendants, particularly on how those identities are perceived. Thus, as the moral and physical embodiment of his father, Astyanax is seen to continue his deceased parent's lineage in a manner analogous to resurrection, preserving Hector and, in a sense, returning him to life.[85] Like a Roman son or grandson delivering a funeral eulogy, Astyanax is his forebear's ghost at the same time as being his successor.

Astyanax acquires ghostlike qualities primarily through his role as Hector's replacement: the shadow of his father's features can be discerned in his face, and the purpose of his future is to take up

---

[82] A topic examined by: Cattin (1956); Owen (1970); Bishop (1972); Fantham (1982); Lawall (1982); and Colakis (1985).

[83] McAuley (2016) 281, emphasis original.

[84] Andromache certainly appears to hallucinate Hector's presence at *Troades* 683–5, while her earlier account of Hector's appearance in a dream (443–60) can be substantiated only through the subsequent accuracy of the ghost's warning. Owen (1970) 126 regards the tragedy's ghosts as symbolic manifestations of other characters' psychological states, and questions the reality not only of Hector's shade, but of Achilles' as well: 'Our ghosts manifest ourselves … Talthybius swears to an otherwise unverifiable supernatural event; Pyrrhus ignores it, Agamemnon discounts it, Andromache experiences a vain approximation to it.'

[85] Colakis (1985) makes this argument about the *Troades* as a whole: life after death is ensured through children.

Hector's past.[86] When Astyanax cringes at the prospect of entering Hector's tomb, Andromache chooses to interpret this reaction as evidence of the young boy's parentage: *turpesne latebras spernis? agnosco indolem: / pudet timere* ('do you scorn repulsive hiding places? I recognise your in-born nature: feeling fear is shameful' 504–5).[87] The child's ghostliness is further compounded by Andromache's desire to 'close [his] living eyes with her hand' (*ut mea condam manu / viventis oculos*, 788–9), and also by her recital of a formal, funereal lament for Astyanax while the boy is still standing beside her (766–85).[88]

Astyanax resembles a shadow even in terms of his literary character, because the future that Andromache had planned for her son – re-establishing Troy (470–4); ruling over the Trojans (771–3); avenging the Greek conquest (660, 774); and leading the *lusus Troiae* (777–9) – has already been claimed by Aeneas, Ascanius, and the *Aeneid*.[89] Seneca ensures that his audience is well aware of this last, cruel fact, for when Andromache enumerates her child's physical features at 467–8 (*sic tulit fortes manus, / sic celsus umeris, fronte sic torva minax*; 'thus he carried his brave hands, thus were his shoulders held high, thus he looked threatening with his grim brow'), she echoes her Vergilian counterpart in *Aeneid* 3, who sees in the young Ascanius a shadow of her own lost son: *o mihi sola super Astyanactis imago. / sic oculos, sic ille manus, sic ora ferebat* ('O the only image of Astyanax left to me. Thus were his eyes, thus his hands, thus his face' *Aen.* 3.489–90).[90] Astyanax's raw biological identification with his father is overlaid by the repetition of one poetic work within another. The effect of this clever intertext is to render Astyanax in the *Troades* not just the reflection of a past individual (his own father), but also the dim outline of a future figure (Aeneas' son), whose survival has

---

[86] Thus McAuley (2016) 284: 'For both Greeks and Trojans, he is – and is not quite – the living incarnation of his father. Neither just image nor just body, living or dead, original or copy, who is the real ghost here, Hector or his son?' See also Erasmo (2008) 44.

[87] Fantham (1986) 275; Volk (2000) 201.

[88] Fantham (1982) *ad Tro.* 766 and Wilson (1983) 42 identify the passage as a formal lament.

[89] Zissos (2009) examines how this Virgilian future supplants Seneca's Astyanax.

[90] A connection first noted by Steele (1922) 16.

134

already been confirmed in an earlier text. Caught between Hector and Ascanius, Andromache's son seems doubly a phantom.

The foremost focus of these spectral themes is Hector's tomb, which occupies the centre of the stage, and concomitantly, the centre of several characters' thoughts for most of Act 3. More than just a convenient hiding place for Astyanax, it symbolises the ghostly aspects of the boy's identity, and the exemplarity underpinning his relationship with his father. By disappearing into and later emerging from the tomb, Astyanax all but undergoes a process of death and rebirth, which corroborates at a visual level his perpetuation of Hector's *exemplum*. Astyanax is his father, resurrected, reinstated, recovered from the dead. Andromache alludes to precisely this duality when she declares of the child hidden inside the monument both that 'he lies among the dead' (*inter extinctos iacet*, 603) and that he will survive if only Hector protects him: *Hector … / … fideli cinere victurum excipe* ('Hector … receive with your faithful ashes one who is going to live' 501–2). The two states turn out to be symbolically equivalent, because Hector's *exemplum* makes Astyanax into a living image *and* a ghost, simultaneously the fleshly embodiment of his father and a mere trace of the deceased man's past existence. When Andromache calls upon Hector's shade to 'break fate's barrier' (*rumpe fatorum moras*, 681) and come to his family's rescue, it is the son, not the father, who actually emerges from the tomb (705). Thus Seneca's dramaturgy demonstrates for the audience what Andromache must learn the hard way: these two men are interchangeable.

Further highlighting this connection between exemplarity and death is the tight network of lexical correspondences that Seneca constructs throughout the play. Just as Astyanax experiences the 'vast <u>weight</u> of the tomb' (*immane busti <u>pondus</u>*, 689), so, likewise, the boy's 'great nobility presses upon him as a heavy <u>weight</u>' (*grave <u>pondus</u> illum magna nobilitas premit*, 491), and relatedly, 'Achilles' axle trembles under Hector's <u>weight</u>' (*Peliacus axis <u>pondere</u> Hectoreo tremens*, 415).[91] Literal pressure from the father's body, or from its resting place, is accompanied by the figurative pressure of an *exemplum* and the need to live up to one's

---

[91] McAuley (2016) 284 notes the first of these two parallels.

genealogy.[92] This metaphorical burden weighs down Astyanax (*premit*, 491) in the same way that Hector and his offspring are feared to crush each other should the tomb be razed: *ne pater natum obruat / prematque patrem natus* ('so that the father does not overwhelm the son nor the son press down on the father' 690–1). Like a similarly phrased statement at *Thyestes* 1050–1 (*genitor en natos premo / premorque natis*; 'look, I, the father, weigh down my sons and am weighed down by my sons'), the chiastic arrangement of *Troades* 690–1 implies a reciprocal relationship between *pater* and *natus*, in this case, an elision of identity brought about by Hector's *exemplum*.

Another thematic word is *iacere*, which refers, in turn, to Hector prostrated in death (*iacuit peremptus Hector*, 238); Astyanax lying hidden in the tomb (*inter extinctos iacet*, 603); Hector lying inactive in Hades (*lentus et segnis iaces?* 805); and finally, to Astyanax lying at the base of Troy's walls, 'a shapeless corpse' (*iacet / deforme corpus*, 1116–17). This sequence of lexical correspondences demonstrates just how closely Astyanax follows his father's model – sometimes willingly, sometimes under compulsion – and how the *exemplum*'s imitative impulse leads Astyanax from being his father's ghost to dying, like Hector, beneath the walls of Troy.

When Andromache hears that her son's body lies broken and disfigured, she concludes, *sic quoque est similis patri* ('in this way, too, he resembles his father' 1117). An expression of 'perverse satisfaction' and a notable instance of Seneca's grim humour,[93] Andromache's remark also encapsulates the analogical force of exemplarity that has oppressed Astyanax throughout his brief existence. Alive or dead, the son resembles the father physically, and that bodily likeness has been accompanied by moral emulation – or expectations of moral emulation – to the extent that his identity cannot be separated from Hector's. Andromache taps into a fundamental truth here, a truth no less significant for being wryly expressed: Hector's *exemplum* and Astyanax's need to duplicate it (hence: *similis patri*) are exactly what has led to the boy's death at

---

[92] A common metaphor of hereditary, according to Baroin (2010) 26.
[93] The quotation comes from Volk (2000) 200.

136

the hands of the Greeks. Elaine Fantham remarks that this final pronouncement serves as Astyanax's epitaph,[94] which means that it confirms his exemplary status by memorialising his lineage and celebrating the combined outcome of his biological and moral inheritance.

Despite all of these similarities, though, it is abundantly clear throughout the *Troades* that Astyanax is *not* a perfect replica of his father. His childish weakness stands in contrast to Hector's strength, his Trojan future has been foreclosed, even his broken, dead body, which Andromache likens to Hector's mutilated by Achilles, is arrived at not via heroic single combat, but via the very different fate of leaping from Troy's battlements as a sacrifice. The more characters in the *Troades* underscore Astyanax's potential to become Hector, the greater the present gulf that appears between these two figures. Yet this dynamic, too, is part of their exemplarity inasmuch as it straddles the polarities of unique and typical, particular and general, individual and community. Astyanax qua singular, self-contained being is a small, defenceless prisoner of war, while his currency as a type, as a representation of Hector, is enormous. It is through his relationship to Hector that Astyanax begins to acquire his own, unique outlines at the same time as his identity seems to be engulfed by his father's towering reputation. The possibility of his future heroism, desired by the Trojans and feared by the Greeks, marks him out simultaneously as a copy of Hector and as a potentially powerful individual in his own right. Thus, mimetic identification between Hector and Astyanax absorbs the latter into the Trojan community, reduces him to a link in a genealogical line, as well as granting him a small measure of independent existence. In both a positive and a negative sense, Astyanax's identity depends on his descent from Hector.

It is ironic that exemplarity in Astyanax's case brings about annihilation rather than the continuity and perpetuity it is so often assumed to ensure.[95] The boy's inheritance of his father's paradigm does not, ultimately, guarantee the future of his *gens*, an

---

[94] Fantham (1982) *ad Tro.* 1110b–1117. Erasmo (2008) 49 likewise notes that the vocabulary of *Troades* 1117 – *iacet, similis, pater* – evokes the language of epitaphs.

[95] Schiesaro (2003) 201 pursues a similar argument, maintaining that 'circularity and repression pose [a threat] to the norms of continuity and linear progress' in the *Troades*.

outcome that contradicts standard Roman thinking about the *exemplum*. Indeed, it is Astyanax's very urge to repeat the past that precipitates the past's – and his own – eradication. Seneca draws attention to this topic via another set of lexical correspondences, echoing Andromache's call for Astyanax to 'restore the Phrygians' name' (*nomen ... suum / Phrygibus ... reddas*, 473–4) with her subsequent 'bestowal of final rites on [her] son' (*officium ... / nato supremum reddo*, 761).[96] Likewise, Andromache's hope that Astyanax 'may lead back [Troy's] citizens dispersed by flight' (*sparsos fuga / cives reducas*, 472–3) is undercut by the enemy's more forceful need to return to Greece, and therefore, to sacrifice Polyxena and Astyanax so that the gods will open up 'passages leading back home' (*reduces ... vias*, 167). Just as Astyanax both is and is not his father, so his role as *Hector redux* paradoxically ensures that Troy does not survive.

Exemplary Performances

Astyanax's exemplarity illustrates both his fictional and his implied human identity as a character within Seneca's drama. The young boy's relationship to Hector confirms his quasi-human status by drawing attention to physique, biology, and moral disposition. At the same time, this relationship can be seen to minimise Astyanax's 'humanness' in favour of his self-reflexively textual role in the play: like all fictional characters, Astyanax lays claim to an essentially typologised, restricted selfhood and has no recourse to self-determination. In the *Troades*, his behaviour also tends to be framed in specifically metatheatrical terms. His identity is a role both in the sense of its inherited transmission from another person (Hector) and in the sense of its being enacted, literally, in a play. Like Pyrrhus, whose assumption of Achilles' traits leads to dramatised re-enactment, Astyanax brings Hector back to life by performing his father's part, reproducing his visage, his gesture, his broken body.

---

[96] Pyrrhus' dark promise at *Tro* 306 – *hac dextra Achilli victimam reddam suam* – also belongs to this nexus. A reference to Polyxena this time rather than to Astyanax, it is yet another example of *reddo* being used to evoke the impossibility of Troy's *return*.

138

As discussed above, Andromache's description of her son's appearance (465–8) can also serve as a set of stage directions, with the person who plays Astyanax being asked to look 'thus' (*sic*, 466–7) or to pose or move in such a way (*talis*, 465–6) that replicates the deceased Hector's physique. Viewed from this self-consciously theatrical angle, Astyanax becomes an actor and Hector a part to be played. Nor is this the only occasion on which Astyanax is asked to perform: when Andromache, reluctantly, calls him from his hiding place towards the end of Act 3, she urges the boy, in a last, desperate bid for his salvation, to 'play the captive and, on bent knee … [to] copy [his] mother's tears' (*gere captivum positoque genu / … / matris fletus imitare tuae*, 715–17).[97] Although in this instance Astyanax's immediate model is Andromache herself, not Hector, intergenerational exemplarity can still be seen to underpin the performance, because the little boy's gesture is meant to remind Ulysses of the youthful Priam supplicating Hercules: *vidit pueri regis lacrimas / et Troia prior, parvusque minas / trucis Alcidae flexit Priamus* ('once before, Troy also witnessed the tears of a boy-king, and small Priam turned aside fierce Alcides' threats' 718–20). Just as Andromache hopes – in vain – that her son will one day surpass his grandfather's longevity (702) and live to wield his grandfather's sceptre (771–2), so she wills him to evoke Priam through his present supplicatory performance. Here, the expectation of ancestral exemplarity merges with the imitation practised by actors in the theatre; Astyanax must follow Priam both as a role model and more literally as a role.

To complement this theatrical display, Ulysses is urged to take up the position of spectator. Andromache continues to stage-manage the scene by establishing an implicit parallel between Troy witnessing Priam's tears (*vidit*, 718) and Ulysses watching Astyanax plead. As the object of Ulysses' evaluative gaze, Astyanax resembles not only an actor but also a character, a *dramatis persona* whose tragic performance will succeed only

---

[97] The self-conscious theatricality of *Troades* Act 3 has been noted especially by Boyle (1997) 76 ('a tragedy within a tragedy'), and Volk (2000) 202 ('a string of mini-dramas in which each protagonist tries to be the better actor'). For detailed analysis of Andromache's and Ulysses' respective performances, see Aygon (2016) 231–8.

139

if Ulysses responds with the requisite amount of pity. This patently metatheatrical encounter further highlights Astyanax's status as a fabricated identity, that is, as a figure constructed by Seneca for the express purpose of eliciting certain reactions from the play's external – as well as internal – audience.

Ulysses, too, is implicated in this nexus of acting and exemplarity, because besides being a spectator, he is also impelled to occupy Hercules' role and to play the merciful conqueror to Astyanax's Priam. Such enactment would, Andromache hopes, alter Ulysses' disposition, hence she exhorts him to 'learn Hercules' gentle anger' (*discite mites Herculis iras*, 730).[98] Here, the *exemplum*'s moral-didactic function – implied by *disco* – blends into an explicitly theatrical form of imitation, so that Hercules becomes simultaneously a paradigm for Ulysses' personal conduct and a paradigm for his dramatic performance. As in Astyanax's case, role and role model overlap.

The climax of this performative exemplarity comes in Act 5, when the messenger tells the assembled crowd of Trojan women how Astyanax died. As has often been noted, Seneca frames the dual sacrifice of Astyanax and Polyxena in theatrical terms: the Greeks are called spectators (*spectator*, 1087; *spectat*, 1129); the locale of Astyanax's death is surrounded by a hill (1078–9), a towering cliff (1080), and high ruins (1084–5) that make it resemble a theatre or amphitheatre; and the landscape bordering the site of Polyxena's sacrifice has hills that rise *theatri more* ('like a theatre', 1125).[99] Situated beside the sea and enclosed by a natural slope, the latter of these two locations actually approximates to a classical Greek theatre building, with Achilles' tomb as its central feature.[100] Moreover, since Achilles' tomb is mentioned in Talthybius' report in Act 2 of the *Troades*, and since Hector's definitely appears on stage in Act 3, the play's external audience can be said already to have experienced this location as a dramatic

---

[98] Andromache's plural verb, *discite*, is directed at all of the Greeks, but as their representative in this scene, Ulysses is the most immediate target.

[99] Ahl (1986) 22–3; Boyle (1997) 119–21; Shelton (2000); Benton (2002); Erasmo (2008) 47–9.

[100] Seneca's description recreates the conventions of the Greek tragic stage, where tombs were often treated as the equivalent of altars and occupied a correspondingly central position: see Arnott (1962) 60–2; Taplin (1977) 117; and Rehm (1988) 264–74 and n.6.

140

space: what the messenger asks the Trojan women to imagine in terms of a theatre, the audience of Seneca's *Troades* has already witnessed *in the theatre*.

As regards Astyanax's death, Seneca reverses the standard visual relationship of Trojan city versus Trojan plain, so that the victorious Greeks gaze upon Troy's battlements rather than being, as in Homer, the objects of Trojan *teichoskopia*. The city and its inhabitants are now *documenta … quam fragili loco / starent superbi* ('examples of how unstable is the place occupied by the proud', 5–6), as Hecuba remarks at the play's outset. Thus, a clear parallel is established between the Greeks and the *Troades*' external audience, with the former group pausing to witness Troy's death throes – this tragedy played out against the backdrop of the city – just as the latter group has done for the drama's entire duration. The setting alone is enough to emphasise Astyanax's fictional, performed identity: he is a character in a play, a part assumed by an actor to provoke emotional responses from internal and external audiences alike. His brave death impresses and saddens the Greeks, as it is meant to impress and sadden those watching the play: *moverat vulgum ac duces / ipsumque Ulixem. non flet e turba omnium / qui fletur* ('he moved the crowd and the leaders and Ulysses himself. He does not weep, though bewept by the whole throng', 1098–100).

The boy's pursuit of exemplarity contributes further to this climate of self-conscious enactment, partly because his death, like Polyxena's, is itself portrayed as an *exemplum* of admirable behaviour,[101] and also because the specific manner of his dying enables him to achieve final, total identification with his paradigmatic father. Andromache anticipates just such an outcome when she laments, 'the walls will witness something more pitiable than great Hector's death' (*flebilius aliquid Hectoris magni nece / muri*

---

[101] Astyanax and Polyxena are clearly held up to other characters as laudable examples of courage and defiance in the face of enemy brutality, but their deeds may also be interpreted as instances of Stoic morality, that is, as paradigms for the *Troades*' external audience. Thus Pratt (1983) 111: 'the stance of equanimity and submission to what is to be is the ultimate Stoic shield against adversity. More than this, when Astyanax interrupts Ulysses' ritual and leaps, when the dying Polyxena assaults Achilles' grave, they are in effect committing legitimate Stoic suicide in the grandest manner, pitting their spirits against brute force.'

141

videbunt, 784–5), implying that Astyanax's end will both approximate to and exceed his father's model, and that it will do so in the presence of onlookers, like a performance. The messenger, too, alludes to exemplarity by pointing out that Astyanax leaps from the same tower where, as a baby in Priam's arms, he used to watch Hector fighting on the plain below (1071–4). Besides emphasising the bitterness of Troy's reversed fortunes, the image suggests a correlation between Hector's past and Astyanax's current achievements, with the young boy's death matching the level of his father's heroism. A fearless end is now the only way for Astyanax to assert his glorious parentage, and although the fall damages his visage to the extent that it removes individual traces of his resemblance to Hector (*illas nobiles patris notas*; 'those noble marks of his father' 1113), it does so in the name of consolidating a broader, more significant resemblance of behaviour and disposition. Both father and son prove their heroism by dying bravely at the hands of the Greeks: this – not just bodily similarity – is what Andromache refers to when she concludes, in questionable taste, *sic quoque est similis patri* ('in this way, too, he is like his father', 1117). The overall effect, for Seneca's audience, is once again to have attention focused on Astyanax as a version of Hector, a version achieved specifically via enactment and validated by spectators. Even Andromache's response to the messenger at 1117, her final words in the play, serves to remind listeners that Astyanax's part is performed, because the adverb *sic* recalls her earlier evocation of the boy's appearance (*sic tulit … / sic celsus … sic … minax*, 466–7), a passage in which, as we have already seen, physical and moral similarity coincide with practised theatrical gesture. Just as Astyanax the actor/role reproduces Hector's distinguishing bodily features in Act 3, so in Act 5 he performs a death scene *sic*, to match his father's.

In fact, Astyanax's performance throughout the *Troades* rests on complex conceptual underpinnings. To the extent that he identifies with his father and assumes Hector's corporeal or dispositional characteristics, Astyanax does the work of an actor, whose profession requires precisely such identification of the self with another. In much the same way that Astyanax blends into Hector, stage artists blend into their roles, merging their bodies and thoughts

142

with those of an imaginary or absent other, so that the relationship of performer to character is not a simple case of 'either/or' but 'both/and'. Seneca's Astyanax cannot be separated from the exemplary part he undertakes (or is urged to undertake), and in this respect his performance may be seen as confirming his quasi-human status. By engaging in an act of mimetic identification, albeit under extreme duress, Astyanax shapes himself as an individual being. In equal degree, however, the young boy's performance of multiple roles in an explicitly theatricalised setting suggests that he has little or no identity apart from being a *dramatis persona*, a Hector-template, a Priam-template, even an Astyanax-template, whose brave response to Greek cruelty furnishes a model for others.

The *Troades*' theme of intergenerational exemplarity likewise promotes a fluid exchange between the implied human and fictional aspects of characters' identities. On the one hand, Achilles and Hector constitute moral-didactic models for their sons, models intended to influence Pyrrhus' and Astyanax's conduct as quasi-people within the world of the play. Emulation of a celebrated parental paradigm is meant to improve Pyrrhus' disposition either by fostering heroic valour or by dissuading him from cruelty. For Astyanax, Hector likewise represents heroism and bravery, and even though fate affords the boy scarcely any opportunity to pursue his parent's *exemplum*, the relationship nonetheless centres upon learning and self-improvement. It is implied that Astyanax will become the right kind of person principally by adopting Hector's model. The didactic and transformative effect of this *exemplum* can be seen in the simple fact that Astyanax grows up over the course of the play, changing from timid child in Act 3 to solemn, courageous youth in Act 5, seemingly as a result of Hector's paradigmatic authority.

On the other hand, Astyanax exhibits only the most minimal presence as an implied human figure in this tragedy, and more often than not, his emulation of Hector overrides his quasi-humanity in favour of producing a copy or a type. Exemplarity's analogical bent encourages the audience to regard Astyanax as just one instance of an infinitely repeatable, and therefore detachable, identity. The child is at once Hector's moral, physical, and biological

143

duplicate; his status as a representation is confirmed by his own ghostliness, and by the ghostly traces of other characters – Aeneas, Ascanius – discernible within his story. A similar situation applies for Seneca's Pyrrhus, who adopts his parent's moral model only to end up performing it as a dramatic role and quoting the 'parent' text from which it ultimately derives. Like Astyanax, Pyrrhus mimics an inherited paradigm to the point that he becomes a mimetic and literary artefact.

Bridge: Seneca

Seneca's Imago Vitae Suae

The exemplarity discussed so far in this chapter has been entwined with processes of genetic and dynastic replication. But not all Roman exemplarity is underpinned by family ties or guided by the notion that one's name or bloodline predisposes one to particular kinds of action. Pursuing paradigmatic status can also be a more self-directed and freely chosen enterprise, one that individuals undertake in the hope of themselves becoming future objects of emulation.[102] Barchiesi remarks that historical and fictive characters in early imperial literature 'increasingly anticipate their own future as *exempla*, and paradoxically imitate their future exemplarity – which is a rough and ready description for Lucan's Cato or even Caesar, and Seneca's tragic heroes and heroines'.[103] An equivalent phenomenon also occurs in Roman society: we have seen already how Augustus positions himself as the culminating point in a line of Rome's *summi viri*, thereby advertising himself as a living *exemplum* and also anticipating – even guaranteeing – post mortem conferral of paradigmatic status.[104] Seneca, too, appears to engage in exemplary self-fashioning in the later stages of his life, self-consciously pre-empting his posthumous reputation and viewing himself as a reproducible

---

[102] A practice that appears to have increased during the early principate, due possibly to the changing composition of the Roman elite, which now included more men from obscure backgrounds whose prominence was supposed less threatening to the emperor. Since these men did not belong to old, established families, the onus was on them alone to create and justify their renown; see Habinek (2000).

[103] Barchiesi (2009) 55.

[104] Above, 109–10.

type. While much of his overtly exemplary conduct still embeds itself within established traditions, it nonetheless stands out as being an expression of singular self-confidence performed more in anticipation of his becoming a future *exemplum* than in response to the inescapable pressures of the past.

The events leading up to Seneca's death epitomise such exemplarity.[105] According to Tacitus, Seneca was forbidden on Nero's orders from writing an actual will and bequeathed instead his *imago vitae suae*:

Ille interritus poscit testamenti tabulas; ac denegante centurione conversus ad amicos, quando meritis eorum referre gratiam prohiberetur, quod unum iam et tamen pulcherrimum habeat, imaginem vitae suae relinquere testatur, cuius si memores essent, bonarum artium famam fructum constantis amicitiae laturos.

He, not at all afraid, demanded the writing tablets for his will; when the centurion denied them, he turned to his friends and called them to witness that since he was prevented from expressing his thanks for their services, he was leaving to them the only and yet most beautiful thing he possessed, the image of his life, and if they bore it in mind, they would reap as the fruit of steadfast friendship the renown of virtuous pursuits. (*Ann.* 15.62.1–2)[106]

In a paradox worthy of Seneca's own writing, the *dying* philosopher is said to bestow his *life* upon his friends – not, admittedly, the physical existence of which he has very little left, but the identity and patterns of living that he has fashioned over the preceding sixty-odd years. By referring to this inheritance as an *imago*, Seneca adopts the discourse of exemplarity in which, as we have seen, metaphors of reflection often articulate the *exemplum*'s innate need to be copied. Seneca is at this moment both himself and an image of himself, a (still … just) living model ready to be duplicated by those who come after. Moreover, the friends present at this deathbed scene are invited to preserve and perpetuate this example, as the ambiguous referent of *bonarum artium famam*

---

[105] In addition to the death scene, there is also clear evidence that Seneca used his *Epistulae* to establish and promote his exemplarity. The idea has been noted by Misch (1950) 421; Mayer (1991) 168; and Edwards (1997a) 23, but awaits full exploration.

[106] Some scholars interpret the death scene as ironic: see, for example, Henry and Walker (1963) 109; Dyson (1970) 77–8; Erasmo (2008) 32–3. In contrast, I follow the majority view that Tacitus' commemoration is sincere.

145

suggests: are these Seneca's virtuous pursuits that bestow fame on his companions simply by association, or are these the companions' own virtuous pursuits, developed in accordance with Seneca's model? Does the *fama* belong to the leader, or to the disciples? That Tacitus does not care to clarify this distinction only emphasises further the repetition germane to Rome's culture of *exempla*: Seneca will, in effect, live on after himself in his friends' behaviour as well as in their memories.

It is significant in this regard that Seneca's *imago* takes the place of an actual, written will, because both the *exemplum* and the *testamentum* dictate equivalent forms of inheritance: Seneca's paradigm will be passed down and maintained in the manner of a precious physical possession; it is even referred to as something tangible, graspable (*habeat*). In fact, the deathbed context allows Tacitus to explore further links between exemplarity and inheritance, because the conjuring of an *imago* in this scene inevitably evokes the Roman funeral mask,[107] with its attendant connotations of family role models and specific forms of behaviour preserved across generations. Like the images of ancestors displayed in an aristocratic atrium or paraded prior to someone's burial, Seneca's *imago vitae suae* is designed to commemorate his life explicitly as a spur to future achievement and emulation.

At the same time, this comparison to aristocratic *imagines* also emphasises the somewhat self-generated nature of Seneca's model in contrast to more standard narratives of familial and biological exemplarity: in place of a family,[108] Seneca has his friends clustered around his deathbed; instead of handing down an *exemplum* exclusively suited to his own *gens*, Seneca propagates a philosophical model that aspires to universal applicability; and, as a member of equestrian stock, Seneca most likely lacks *imagines* of his own, which means that his *exemplum* does not result from the

---

[107] Mayer (1991) 169; Erasmo (2008) 30; Ker (2009) 288. Santoro L'Hoir (2006) 215 seems to stretch the point when she interprets the *imago vitae suae* as referring to the theatre.

[108] The only family member present in Tacitus' account is Seneca's wife, Paulina, who is later removed from the scene at Seneca's bidding. Her role in the narrative is examined by Erasmo (2008) 27–34 and Ker (2012) 324–7.

146

pressure of a family name.[109] In comparison to, say, Marcus Junius Brutus or the second or third Decius Mus, Seneca is not expected by those around him to pursue a specific, pre-established *exemplum* in order to achieve his identity. He is at greater liberty to self-invent, to insert himself into a tradition of his choice or, more boldly, to devise one of his own. His ambition to attain paradigmatic status indicates a highly self-reflexive and at the same time detached, almost third-personal approach to selfhood; Seneca thinks of himself as 'Seneca' and models his current conduct on what he thinks that future model should do. Arguably, Marcus Junius Brutus likewise thought of himself as 'Brutus', the main difference being that Brutus imitated predecessors while Seneca copies and perpetuates chiefly himself. To borrow a phrase from Roland Mayer: 'it is in death that Seneca crowned his lifelong practice of referring to *exempla* by himself becoming one'.[110]

This is not to say, however, that Seneca's *exemplum* is entirely his own invention, since the narrative of his death adheres to an established and explicitly philosophical pattern, which in turn enables Seneca to present himself as a Stoic opposing tyranny and as someone condemned unjustly.[111] The events recounted by Tacitus at *Annales* 15.60–4 form a series of unmistakable allusions to Socrates' execution and to the suicide of Cato the Younger: like Socrates, Seneca drinks hemlock (*Ann.* 15.64.3; cf. *Phaedo* 117c); discourses with friends on philosophical topics, and has his thoughts recorded (*Ann.* 15.62–3; cf. *Phaedo* 59a-c); excludes his wife from the scene (*Ann.* 15.63.3; cf. *Phaedo* 60a); and pours a libation to Jupiter Liberator (*Ann.* 15.64.4), which recalls Socrates' request for a cock to be sacrificed to Asclepius (*Phaedo* 118a). Like Cato, Seneca's suicide articulates his Stoic defiance of a regime he perceives to be tyrannical, and it is not a smooth process, but one that occurs in several stages (veins: *Ann.*

---

[109] Mayer (1991) 169 notes that Seneca, as a man who had held curule office, had the right to leave a death mask to his descendants. But it is unlikely that Seneca himself had inherited any *imagines*. On the vexed question of which Roman nobles were granted the right to display *imagines* and under what circumstances, see Flower (1996) 53–9.

[110] Mayer (1991) 142.

[111] For Seneca's death scene as a mimicry of other models, see Griffin (1976) 369–72; Geiger (1979) 63; Mayer (1991) 142; Connors (1994) 228; Edwards (2007) 156–7; Erasmo (2008) 32–3; Ker (2009) 55–6.

147

15.63.2–3; hemlock: *Ann.* 15.64.3; steam bath: *Ann.* 15.64.4; cf. Cato's first and second attempts in Plut. *Cato* 70; both authors emphasise the subjects' weakness: Tac. *Ann.* 15.63.3; Plut. *Cato* 70.5).

Further, Seneca's imitative bid for exemplarity mimics that of Cato himself, who was widely recognised as having modelled his own death on Socrates': Cicero aligns the two by claiming that both men received divine sanction for their deaths (*Tusc.* 1.74); Plutarch has Cato accompanied by a small group of friends, among whom are several philosophers (*Cato* 67–70); and Cato is said to have read, and presumably taken inspiration from, Plato's *Phaedo* prior to committing suicide (Plutarch *Cato* 68.2, 70.1; Sen. *Ep.* 24.6–8).[112] This last piece of evidence underscores Cato's self-conscious intent to follow and thereby become an *exemplum*. By reading the *Phaedo* and subsequently adapting elements of Socrates' paradigm, Cato envisages for himself a future exemplarity that will lead to his story likewise being enshrined in written accounts and held up as a model for others. In effect, the Cato in Plutarch's biography perceives himself as a type already, while he is still alive, and attempts to dictate in advance how later generations will regard him. Tacitus' Seneca exercises similar concern for his posthumous reputation, and in striving to ensure his exemplarity, he condenses his identity into something that may be copied: a *testamentum*, an *imago*.

We may wonder whether the historical Cato and Seneca actually took such care to ensure their deaths complied with a well-known philosophical model – was exemplarity really their first thought in those last moments? While it is difficult to gauge the accuracy of Tacitus' and Plutarch's accounts, it seems likely that they do rest on a solid foundation of fact albeit one that has acquired accretions and embellishments over time.[113] Yet the very question of

---

[112] On the exemplary nature of Cato's death, see in particular Geiger (1979) 62–3, and Edwards (2007) 155. The afterlife and influence of Socrates' death scene across the Roman imperial period is discussed by Wilson (2007) 119–40.

[113] The historical background of the Cato narrative has received thorough treatment from Geiger (1979). While not focused solely on Seneca's death scene, Turpin (2008) makes a strong case for seeing in Tacitus' portrait the influence of Stoic approaches to exemplarity, approaches championed by Seneca himself. Mayer (1991) 169 remarks that Tacitus' account of Seneca's death must, ultimately, derive from the secretaries/

148

historical veracity, the attempt, that is, to disentangle the actual person from his or her characterisation in a text, gains little purchase in these circumstances precisely because these death scenes represent such an inseparable blend of life and literature. Seneca reads about Socrates and replicates Socrates before having that replication commemorated in Tacitus. How is the 'actual person' to be separated from a representation when he or she is so intent upon becoming a textually inscribed *exemplum*? Catherine Connors rightly defines the process as a kind of inter-textuality whereby successive death scenes simultaneously evoke earlier people and earlier written accounts.[114] As in Seneca's tragedies, and in Roman culture more broadly, these exemplary suicides combine reiterated behaviour with textual reiteration.

In fact, this intertextual pattern reaches a pitch of *intra*textuality in Book 16 of Tacitus' *Annales*, with the deaths of Petronius (*Ann.* 16.19) and Thrasea Paetus (*Ann.* 16.34–5).[115] Thrasea, besides following the examples of Socrates and Cato, also re-enacts Tacitus' preceding portrayal of Seneca's death: he converses with a companion, Demetrius the Cynic, 'on the nature of the soul and its separation from mortal flesh' (*de natura animae et dissociatione spiritus corporisque*, *Ann.* 16.34.1); he dissuades his wife, Arria, from committing suicide with him (*Ann.* 16.34.2); he pours a libation to Jupiter Liberator (*Ann.* 16.35.1).[116] Just as Seneca bequeaths his *imago vitae suae* (*Ann.* 15.62), so the dying Thrasea implicitly offers himself as an *exemplum* when he tells the quaestor tasked with delivering the senate's decree, 'you have been born into an era when it may be helpful to fortify your morale with examples of constancy' (*in ea tempora natus es quibus firmare animum expediat constantibus exemplis*, *Ann.*

---

companions who were present at the scene and said to have recorded the event: *et novissimo quoque momento suppeditante eloquentia advocatis scriptoribus pleraque tradidit* (Tac. *Ann.* 15.63.3).

[114] Connors (1994) 228.

[115] On the intratextual repetition of death scenes in the later books of the *Annales*, see Ker (2009) 41–62.

[116] These are well-recognised parallels, discussed in varying degrees by Wirszubski (1968) 142; Griffin (1976) 370–1; Geiger (1979) 62–3; Mayer (1991) 142; Connors (1994) 228; Edwards (2007) 157–8; Ker (2009) 60–1. At *Ann.* 16.22.2, Thrasea's accusers, too, implicitly associate him with the younger Cato.

149

16.35.1–2). Clearly, the young quaestor is meant to learn something about virtue from witnessing Thrasea's death.

The suicide of Petronius (*Ann.* 16.19) also fits this established narrative arc, though it is clearly intended as a parody, with the dying man surrounded by friends; insisting on trivial conversation rather than philosophical discourse on the nature of the soul; letting his life ebb by degrees as he binds and unbinds his wrists; and leaving a list of Nero's crimes in place of a will.[117] In the simple act of copying (or satirising) a predecessor, each of these figures aspires to paradigmatic status, and in doing so, each merges his actual, human existence with a distinctly fictive identity: the dying Seneca is at once individual and inimitable, *and* a version of Socrates, *and* a version of Cato, *and* a version of himself, *and* an example of exemplary death preserved by Tacitus. Person, character, and type converge for the purpose of self-exemplification.

It is worth stressing once again the slight yet crucial difference between following a predominantly familial model because it is expected of one, or even regarded as the only means of proving one's inheritance, and opting to fashion oneself as a paradigm independent of any genealogical demands. Both scenarios negotiate a balance of individual versus society, particular versus general, but the latter grants the individual slightly sharper outlines. While familial exemplarity tends to focus on the past, self-directed exemplarity looks more fully to the future. The former embeds itself within extant traditions, while the latter often stands as a potential source of new traditions (influenced as Seneca is by Socrates and Cato, he also manages to inspire Thrasea and Petronius). Self-reflexive exemplification of the sort practised by Seneca further suggests an acute sense of one's uniqueness and importance: instead of dutifully preserving family customs and subordinating one's individuality to the broader demands of a *gens*, those who predict and strive after an *exemplum* of their own devising must assume in advance their singular ability to acquire a paradigmatic reputation and have it commemorated. This kind of exemplarity has a greater capacity to isolate the

---

[117] On Petronius' death as a parody of Seneca's, see Connors (1994) 228–9; Edwards (2007) 158–9; and Ker (2009) 67–8.

150

person in question from his or her immediate milieu, as opposed to familial patterns of *exempla*, which tend to integrate the individual within a wider social nexus.

A mild contrast between these two kinds of exemplarity may be found in Tacitus' vignettes of Seneca's and Thrasea's deaths. In each case, the wives of these men also aspire to attain paradigmatic status by dying alongside their husbands. For Arria, Thrasea's wife, the model is familial: she attempts 'to follow the *exemplum* of her own mother, Arria' (*temptantem ... exemplum Arriae matris sequi, Ann.* 16.34.2) and thus, to merge genealogical with exemplary reproduction. Like Brutus, Arria seems compelled to fulfil the expectations implicit in her name. Seneca's wife, Paulina, appears in contrast to be set on achieving her own exemplarity and on ensuring her posthumous fame, as Seneca himself acknowledges in his final address to her: 'I have shown you life's enticements, but you prefer death's glory: I will not begrudge you your *exemplum*. May the steadfastness of such a brave end be within our power equally, and may greater renown attend your departure' (*vitae ... delenimenta monstraveram tibi, tu mortis decus mavis: non invidebo exemplo. sit huius tam fortis exitus constantia penes utrosque par, claritudinis plus in tuo fine, Ann.* 15.63.2–3). While it could of course be argued that Paulina copies Seneca himself, her bid for exemplarity nonetheless appears fundamentally self-motivated and driven by a sense of her own specialness. Paulina hopes to claim individual *claritudo* (as implied by Tacitus' Seneca, at least), while Arria situates herself within a family context. One woman highlights her own singularity, the other her belonging to a group.

Such pursuit of exemplary death appears to have been particularly widespread during the early empire, when memorable departures from life were celebrated and circulated in published collections of *exitus illustrium virorum*.[118] Although none of

---

[118] Primary evidence for these publications comes from Pliny *Ep.* 8.12.4–5, where one Titinius Capito *scribit exitus inlustrium virorum*, and *Ep.* 5.5.3, about Caius Fannius: *scribebat ... exitus occisorum aut relegatorum a Nerone.* Detailed discussion of the genre can be found in Ronconi (1940).

these collections survives, they presumably resembled the compilations of protreptic and apotropaic *exempla* preserved in Valerius Maximus, whose own volume also has a section 'on extraordinary deaths' (*de mortibus non vulgaribus*, 9.12) though it has, unfortunately (ironically!), suffered severe truncation. There is good reason to believe that Tacitus drew on such compilations in order to compose the grim series of Neronian purges that occupies *Annales* 15 and 16.[119] There is equally good reason to believe that the historical Seneca, Thrasea, Petronius and others were well acquainted with the genre of *exitus illustrium virorum*, and may even have taken inspiration from it in a general way prior to preparing their own suicides.[120]

These anthologies of anecdotes served a purpose akin to martyrologies in that they commemorated individual deaths not just as praiseworthy events in themselves, but also as summative proof of a person's essential character. Gathered into handbooks, they provided guidance for those who, for whatever reason, found themselves in equivalent circumstances and needed to make a good end. As in other instances of Roman exemplarity, this tradition assumes a permeable boundary between the categories of person and typology, ethical improvement and artistic mimesis, living individual and textual representation: one reads these *exitus* not only for moral guidance, but also in order to reproduce such model behaviour in one's own life and thereby anticipate one's own commemoration. When the Seneca of *Annales* 15.60–4 constructs his own *exemplum*, he behaves as though he were already part of an anthology of *exitus illustrium virorum*. And in choosing to pursue such exemplarity in the first place, he betrays a self-centred impulse to be considered *illustris*: while friends, family, and society will undoubtedly derive some benefit from Seneca's *imago vitae suae*, the chief beneficiary in this instance is 'Seneca' himself.

---

[119] Demonstrated by Marx (1937) and Bellardi (1974). See also Edwards (2007) 132.

[120] A scenario made more likely by the fact that the genre enjoyed substantial popularity during Nero's reign, on which, see MacMullen (1966) 70–93.

152

2.2 *Hercules*

Hercules' Family

It is a short step from Seneca's semi-independent exemplarity to the fierce individualism of the protagonist in *Hercules*. Whereas Seneca's *exemplum* straddles two extremes, detached from family traditions yet still complying with some freely chosen models from the past, Hercules' is entirely self-generated and self-reliant. In contrast, too, to the suffocating father–son relationships portrayed in the *Troades*, Hercules' interaction with both his stepfather, Amphitryon, and his real father, Jupiter, is characterised by dissociation and dissonance. His *exemplum* represents the peak of self-reflexivity.

Rifts between Hercules and the rest of his family are most apparent in Act 5, when the hero regains consciousness following his attack of madness. The bodies of his slaughtered wife and children lie strewn around him (*Her.* 1143–4) and as he recovers from delirium to realise that he, not an external enemy, is responsible for this carnage, he resolves on suicide as the only solution to the problem of himself. A significant portion of Act 5 is occupied by Hercules searching for a means of death while Amphitryon counters and blocks these attempts to the best of his ability and with increasing levels of desperation. When Hercules demands the return of his confiscated weapons, Amphitryon responds with a formulaic but nonetheless heartfelt plea:

> per sancta generis sacra, per ius nominis
> utrumque nostri, sive me altorem vocas
> seu tu parentem …
> …
> temet reserva
>
> by the sanctity of family ties, by the rights
> of either of my names, whether you call me 'stepfather'
> or 'parent' …
> …
> keep yourself alive
>
> (*Her.* 1246–8; 1252)

That Amphitryon, in a moment of high emotion, asks Hercules to choose between two forms of nomenclature, *parens* or *altor*, may

153

seem like ill-timed pedantry on Seneca's part, but the distinction actually represents a deep, personal rift between these two characters.[121] *altor* is of course the correct term in the literal sense that Hercules is Jupiter's son, and Amphitryon the step- or foster-father.[122] Yet the choice also reflects broader themes of human closeness and the value – or hindrance – of family bonds: Amphitryon invites Hercules either to acknowledge the genealogical distance separating them, or to gloss over it in favour of an unbroken social unit. Hercules' immediate response is to ignore both the plea and the invitation (*Her.* 1258–62), demonstrating his disregard for Amphitryon and for the demands of family more generally. This attitude, moreover, has direct bearing on Hercules' identity and on his role as an *exemplum* throughout the play. His surrogate relationship to Amphitryon, which Seneca takes pains to emphasise, symbolises the isolated, solipsistic quality of his exemplary status.

To grasp what is distinctive about Seneca's treatment of Hercules we must first take a brief look at Euripides' version, not with a view to formulating unfair or anachronistic comparisons between the imperial Roman tragedian and his classical Athenian counterpart, but for the simple purpose of shedding clearer light on Seneca's dramatic choices.[123] In Euripides' *Heracles*, companionship and human closeness are major themes. Amphitryon and

---

[121] Fitch (1987) *ad Her.* 1246–8 is right to note the emotional rather than purely practical connotations of Amphitryon's statement: '*altor* would mean that [Hercules] regards [Amphitryon] simply as a foster-father, whereas *parens* would imply a closer relationship'.

[122] I raise here the caveat that *altorem* at *Her.* 1247 is a widely accepted renaissance conjecture replacing the manuscript reading *auctorem*, which makes no sense in the given context. Obviously, resting an argument on a conjecture – even one as established as this – is a tricky business, but my main point still stands, because it is clear from the context that Amphitryon gives Hercules the choice between two names and hence, two kinds of family relationship. For discussion of the emendation, see Fitch (1987) *ad Her.* 1246–8 and Billerbeck (1999) *ad Her.* 1247.

[123] Thus Braden (1990) 245: 'the Athenians, and especially Euripides, still belong in any serious assessment of Seneca as a tragedian, and not merely as intimidating guardians of some corruptible greatness. If we ask the right questions, the differences between their theatre and Seneca's can measure not loss of talent, but underlying changes of vision and intent. Those changes help define Seneca as an artist in his own right'. On the similarities of Seneca's *Hercules* to Euripides' *Heracles*, see the summaries by Fitch (1987) 44–7 and Billerbeck (1999) 11–24, and the insightful comparative analysis of Zintzen (1972) [1971].

154

Heracles address each other and apply to themselves affectionate terms such as πατήρ ('father'), τέκνον ('child'), and παῖς ('child'). Even though Amphitryon is not Heracles' biological father, Euripides observes no linguistic distinctions between this relationship and Heracles' to his own biological children; the same terminology is used throughout. On those occasions in the play when Amphitryon's surrogate status is evoked, emphasis falls on the connections and commonality that unite Heracles' foster-father with his real one: at 340 Amphitryon calls Zeus 'a partner in my son's begetting' (παιδὸς <u>κοινεῶν</u>' ἐκλήζομεν), and at 798–800, the chorus sings of 'the two related beds of the marriage, one with a mortal and one with Zeus' (ὦ λέκτρων δύο συγγενεῖς / εὐναί, θνατογενοῦς τε καὶ / Διός), with the adjective συγγενής evoking a tie so close it verges on being counted as family. Towards the tragedy's end, Heracles also reassures Amphitryon of his parental role: 'don't take any offence, old man, for I consider you my father instead of Zeus' (σὺ μέντοι μηδὲν ἀχθεσθῆς, γέρον· / πατέρα γὰρ ἀντὶ Ζηνὸς ἡγοῦμαί σ' ἐγώ 1264–5). Not once does Seneca's Hercules admit such emotional and psychological intimacy.[124]

Euripides' Heracles also cultivates a family relationship with Theseus, who is admittedly a distant relative but does not share any immediate blood or marriage ties with the hero. Their friendship becomes such a vital source of strength for Heracles in the aftermath of his attack that he goes as far as deeming Theseus a replacement for his children: 'having lost my sons, I consider you my son' (παίδων στερηθεὶς παῖδ' ὅπως ἔχω σ' ἐμόν, 1401). The closeness of this surrogate family bond is also affirmed by one of the play's most memorable similes: when Heracles returns from the Underworld, his frightened children cluster around him like little tow boats pulled along by a larger ship (631–2); later, when the same children lie dead by Heracles' unwitting hand, the hero declares that he will follow in Theseus' wake like a boat being towed (1424). Besides illustrating the absolute reversal of Heracles' fortunes, the latter of these two images equates the heroes' friendship with an actual, biological bond. Although his

---

[124] Fitch (1979) is an insightful study of Hercules' emotional limitations in the final Act of Seneca's play.

155

suffering is exceptional, Heracles is nonetheless not alone. Despite having killed his own wife and children, he achieves heroic stature in this play chiefly through his willingness to cultivate and to participate in the bonds of human society.[125]

Intergenerational and interpersonal relationships in Seneca's *Hercules* are not nearly so sympathetic. Although Seneca, like Euripides, uses equivalent terms such as *genitor*, *parens*, *pater*, and *natus* quite indiscriminately throughout the tragedy, he tends to concentrate on points of disjunction rather than union within Hercules' family group. When in Act 2, the tyrant Lycus appears on stage and undertakes to challenge claims regarding Hercules' divine ancestry (*Her.* 438–64 cf. Eur. *Her.* 148–9), Amphitryon does not gloss over the matter, or leave Zeus to answer for it, as he does in Euripides (*Her.* 170–3), but launches into a full and spirited defence of his step-son's descent from Jupiter, asserting that many gods owe their genesis to Jove's affairs with mortal women (*Her.* 449) and referring to Jove himself as 'Alcides' real father' (*Alcidae patrem ... / ... verum,* 440–1). The speech is meant to accentuate Hercules' semi-divine stature as a singular, exemplary hero, but its secondary effect is to acknowledge fissures within the family unit.[126] Whereas Euripides' Amphitryon refers to Zeus as a partner (340), Seneca's emphasises instead the gulf between his humbly ineffectual self and the potent king of the gods. Jupiter and Amphitryon claim no common ground in Seneca's play.

Acts 4 and 5 of the *Hercules* see the terms *genitor* and *pater* applied with increasing frequency both to Jupiter and to Amphitryon, but again without conveying any sense of shared enterprise. Rather than representing the united elements of a single family, Jupiter and Amphitryon appear in Seneca's version as disparate figures endowed with contrasting levels of authority and validity. For instance, following the death of Lycus,

---

[125] An argument pursued by Braden (1990) 246–9.

[126] Contra Bernstein (2017) 30, I do not see Amphitryon's speech at *Her.* 439–47 as exemplifying a 'relaxed attitude towards ancestry'. Granted, Amphitryon displays in this scene a willingness to accept and love Hercules despite the latter's illegitimacy, and to that extent, he also attempts to foster family bonds. But his far from 'relaxed' desire to prove Hercules' divine parentage also emphasises an unbridgeable division between himself and Jupiter.

156

Amphitryon advises Hercules to request from Jupiter a rest from his labours: 'ask that your father put an end to your toils' (*finiat genitor tuos / opta labores*, *Her.* 924–5). The two-stage process – Amphitryon asking Hercules to ask Jupiter – underscores Amphitryon's own powerlessness, his at best secondary influence over Hercules, and the enormous distance between the capacities of these two father figures, a distance only increased by the ineffectiveness of Amphitryon's request: Hercules does not in fact proceed to pray for the cessation of his work (*Her.* 937–9). Further divisions within Hercules' family are emphasised when the hero, in the process of offering sacrifice in gratitude for his recent victory over Lycus, calls upon Jupiter's other male offspring, but excludes any son born from Juno: 'may he be present … whichever brother of mine inhabits heaven, but not a brother born from my step-mother' (*adsit … / … / fraterque quisquis incolit caelum meus / non ex noverca frater*, 903; 907–8). Unlike Euripides' *Heracles*, who is willing to class even Theseus as an honorary family member, Seneca's maintains an attitude of exceptionalism and a readiness to foster estrangement in place of concord; possible sources of connection become instead irreparable divisions.

Similar family tensions simmer beneath Amphitryon's question to Theseus at 761: does Hercules bring Cerberus back from the Underworld 'as a gift from his willing uncle, or as spoils?' (*patrui volentis munus an spolium refert?* 761). Inclusion of *patruus* draws attention once again to Hercules' divine ancestry but also to the fact that his Underworld mission brings him into conflict with a member of his own kin. Theseus' response, which includes an animated account of the battle between Hercules and Cerberus (782–806) implies that while Hades gave nominal consent to the act, the three-headed hound really is more of a *spolium* than a *munus*.[127] Allegorically, Hercules' Underworld battle enables him

---

[127] I concur with Fitch (1987) *ad Her.* 761, against Lawall (1983) 12, that Seneca depicts Hercules' underworld labour as a violent, hard-won victory. Juno's comments in the prologue confirm the idea that Cerberus is a *spolium*: *effregit ecce limen inferni Iovis / et opima victi regis ad superos refert. / vidi … / … Dite domito spolia iactantem patri / fraterna* (*Her.* 47–8; 50–2). Hercules' own remarks, upon his return, also suggest his total conquest of Hades (and by implication, spoils): *si placerent tertiae sortis loca, / regnare potui* (*Her.* 609–10).

157

to achieve a (temporary) victory over death;[128] literally, it leads him to act in an aggressive, domineering manner towards a close relative.

Hercules' emotional distance from his family is thrown into even sharper relief by Amphitryon's persistently loving, paternal behaviour. The stepfather defends his stepson against Lycus' slander (439–89); is overjoyed at the latter's safe return from Hades (621); and more than once expresses his sadness at Hercules' frequent absence (249; 1256–7). Amphitryon stands out among Seneca's *dramatis personae* for being able to speak tenderly, not furiously, of another person; as John Fitch remarks, Seneca's Amphitryon 'values the natural affection between father and son'.[129] But Hercules, for his part, repeatedly pushes this affection aside, disregarding or overriding Amphitryon's gentle suggestions (e.g. at 918–22, when Hercules refuses to follow Amphitryon's advice about cleaning his bloodied hands before performing a sacrifice), even refusing the offer of his embrace: *differ amplexus, parens* ('postpone your embraces, father', 638).

Nor does Hercules achieve any closer relationship with his true progenitor, Jupiter, though his semi-divine qualities may induce the audience to expect otherwise. When, in Act 5, the recovering Hercules calls upon the king of the gods to wreak vengeance for his crime, the lack of divine response only increases our sense of the hero's isolation: 'now thunder angrily, father, from every part of the sky; forgetful of me, at least avenge your grandsons with your all-too-slow hand' (*nunc parte ab omni, genitor, iratus tona; / oblite nostri, vindica sera manu / saltem nepotes, Her.* 1202–4). Such requests for Jupiter's thunderous reaction are frequent and always unfulfilled in Senecan tragedy (*Phaed.* 671–4; *Med.* 531–7; *Thy.* 1077–85), but the trope acquires added poignancy here, because Jupiter *is* Hercules' *pater*, and because fathers typically wield a lot of influence over their offspring in Seneca's plays, even when they are not physically present. Jupiter's silence, at this moment, only serves to widen the existing chasm between Hercules and his immediate family members.

---

[128] On the allegorical role of the Underworld in this play, see Galinsky (1972) 171–2.
[129] Fitch (1979) 242.

158

Besides being isolated from his divine parent, Seneca's Hercules also cuts himself off from the family he himself has produced. John Fitch notes that in comparison to Euripides' hero, Seneca's protagonist spares no time upon his return from Hades to reconnect emotionally with his wife and children; as soon as he hears about Lycus, he rushes off.[130] Complementing this emotional isolation is the obvious fact that Hercules also kills Megara and their mutual offspring in the fit of insanity brought about by Juno, but here, too, Seneca makes an added effort to highlight Hercules' detachment. The moment comes when Megara, in a last, desperate attempt to save her youngest son, exhorts the raving father to recognise the boy's physical resemblance: 'this son reflects your face and bearing' (*natus hic vultus tuos / habitusque reddit*, *Her.* 1017–18). Once again, Seneca evokes potential communality only to reject it in favour of division: Hercules disregards all evidence of biological ties; he sees not his son, but a *monstrum* (1020), which he duly eradicates.

Megara's brief, fraught plea to her rampaging husband also hints at the discourse of exemplarity, especially in the terms explored by Seneca's *Troades*, where the physical similarity of sons to fathers anticipates similarity of temperament. Hercules' bloodline figures fleetingly as a possible source of exemplary repetition. But *exempla* in this play tend to discourage rather than foster mimetic identification between family members or, more broadly, members of the same society; the balance between particular and general, individual and group tips towards the former of each pair. Hercules' detachment from his family symbolises the correspondingly detached quality of his *exemplum*, which operates largely in a vacuum, self-regarding and self-sustained.

The closest Hercules himself ever comes to following a parental model is in his fit of madness, when he threatens to unseat Jove:

> vincla Saturno exuam,
> contraque patris impii regnum impotens
> avum resolvam. bella Titanes parent
> me duce furentes
>
> I'll set Saturn free from his chains
> and against my immoral father's unbridled rule

---

[130] Fitch (1979) 242.

159

> unleash my grandfather. Let the raging Titans
> prepare war; I'll lead them
>
> (*Her.* 965–8)

In one regard, Hercules' mad wish seems to epitomise the characteristics of exemplary *aemulatio*. Just as Jupiter once ousted Saturn in order to establish himself as ruler of the gods, so Hercules now hopes to oust Jupiter; like father, like son. Hercules' proposed enlistment of the Titans, however, indicates his divergence from and outright contesting of paternal exemplarity, since victory in the gigantomachy constitutes one of Jupiter's greatest and most definitive achievements. The son hopes to undo what the father has done. The competitive impulse inherent in all exemplary activity (to a greater or lesser degree) becomes, in this instance, overt conflict, and Hercules' rapport with this divine parental paradigm seems rocky at best.

Sole Exemplar

In place of expected ancestral precedent, Seneca's Hercules looks almost exclusively to himself for guidance, for evaluation of his conduct, and for formulating his identity. In one respect, this self-reliance is part and parcel of Hercules' established role as an *exemplar virtutis*: in mythology, in literature, in philosophy, Hercules embodies a model for others but does not himself appear to follow other people's paradigms.[131] In Seneca's *Hercules*, however, this exemplary exceptionalism approaches an extreme of self-reflexivity and self-implosion, because when Hercules finds himself needing moral guidance and needing to re-establish his identity in the wake of madness, he has no model to turn to apart from his own. As Juno remarks in the prologue, this Hercules is peerless: *quaeris Alcidae parem? / nemo est nisi ipse* ('You seek Alcides' equal? There's no-one, apart from himself' 84–5). Gordon Braden is surely right to detect in Juno's claim an allusion to Roman practices of self-*aemulatio*, like that pursued by Plutarch's Julius Caesar: τὸ μὲν πάθος οὐδὲν ἦν ἕτερον ἢ ζῆλος αὐτοῦ καθάπερ ἄλλου καὶ φιλονεικία τις ὑπὲρ τῶν μελλόντων πρὸς τὰ πεπραγμένα ('the feeling was nothing other than zealous emulation

---

[131] On Hercules' role as an exemplification of abstract values in ancient literature and philosophy, Galinsky (1972) 101–52 remains a useful summary. See also Billerbeck (1999) 25–9.

160

of himself as though he were another man, and rivalry between what he planned to do and what he had achieved' *Caesar* 58.5).[132] The contours and consequences of such self-exemplification are explored in full in a subsequent section of this chapter; for now, it suffices to affirm that whenever Seneca's Hercules cites the model of his own achievements, he does so in the implicit context of exemplarity. The protagonist of the *Hercules* is obsessed not just with himself,[133] but more precisely with his own *exemplum*.

One of the most telling instances of Hercules' solipsism comes in Act 5, when Amphitryon has exhausted all other arguments against the hero's intended suicide, and resorts instead to emotional blackmail:

> **Amph:** sic statue, quidquid statuis, ut causam tuam
> famamque in arto stare et ancipiti scias:
> aut vivis aut occidis. hanc animam levem
> fessamque senio nec minus fessam malis
> in ore primo teneo. tam tarde patri
> vitam dat aliquis? non feram ulterius moram,
> senile ferro pectus impresso induam:
> hic, hic iacebit Herculis sani scelus.
> **Herc:** iam parce, genitor, parce, iam revoca manum.
> succumbe, virtus, perfer imperium patris.
> eat ad labores hic quoque Herculeos labor:
> vivamus.

> **Amph:** Whatever you decide, decide on the understanding
> that your case and reputation stand in delicate, dubious balance:
> either you live or you kill me. I hold this frail spirit, tired out by age
> and no less by troubles, on the edge of my lips. Does anyone
> grant life to his father so slowly? I won't bear delay any more,
> I shall press the sword-point against my aged breast and plunge it in:
> here, here will lie the crime of Hercules sane.
> **Herc:** Stop now, father, stop, withdraw your hand.
> Submit, courage, endure your father's command.
> Let this task, too, be added to Hercules' labours:
> that we live.

(*Her.* 1306–17)

---

[132] Braden (1985) 13–14.

[133] This self-obsession is, in any case, remarkable, even against stiff competition from some of Seneca's other protagonists. Fitch and McElduff (2002) 25 note that Hercules cites his own name twelve times over the course of the tragedy, more than any other Senecan character does. Similarly, Fitch (1979) 243 n.10 observes that Seneca's Hercules uses the pronoun *ego* a staggering twenty-one times in Act 5 alone.

What is it in Amphitryon's speech that motivates Hercules' change of heart? The passage has received a lot of scholarly commentary, with Bernd Seidensticker and Gilbert Lawall asserting that Hercules' concedes his step-father's request out of a long-buried sense of *pietas*: the hero has spent most of the play disregarding his family's needs, but here he finally recalls and capitulates to the demands of filial duty.[134] Another, equally optimistic, interpretation maintains that Hercules comes to understand *virtus* as a moral rather than purely physical quality, and hence reframes his feats of brute strength in terms of peaceful, ethical principles.[135] In place of his victories over nature's monsters, Hercules now achieves a far superior moral victory over himself: he learns self-control; he learns to rein in his vicious impulses, and to brush them aside in favour of obeying *ratio* and *natura*. What Juno envisaged at the outset as a violent, physical form of self-defeat – *se vincat* ('let him conquer himself', 116) – becomes instead a moment of spiritual self-conquest and moral regeneration.[136] On this reading, Hercules ends his tragedy either a fully Stoic hero,[137] or at the very least an admirable man equipped with deeper knowledge of moral precepts and of his own, all-too-human fallibility.

Each of these theories, however, posits too radical a change in Hercules' disposition, especially as regards his attitude to those around him. John Fitch remarks that understanding of Act 5 'has often been distorted by presuppositions about what *ought* to take place' as scholars reach after the same dynamic of fellowship and redemption found in Euripides' version.[138] In response to such positive views, Fitch and Braden argue that Hercules remains self-centred and emotionally detached throughout the exchange and yields to Amphitryon not out of any newly found sense of *pietas* or *virtus*, but out of an over-riding, all-consuming regard for his own

---

[134] Seidensticker (1969) 118; Lawall (1983) 20–1. Galinsky (1972) 173 also leans towards this interpretation.

[135] A popular view: Zintzen (1972) 205–6; Shelton (1978) 67–73; Motto and Clark (1981) especially 112–13; Pratt (1983) 118; Okell (2005) 188–90. Contrastingly negative assessment of Hercules' *virtus*, even in Act 5, is presented by Henry and Walker (1965).

[136] Lawall (1983) 21–2.

[137] While currently unfashionable, arguments in favour of Hercules as a Stoic hero form a persistent strain in Senecan scholarship: see Egermann (1972) [1940], 47–8; Marti (1945) 224–5; Motto and Clark (1981); Lawall (1983); and Billerbeck (1999) 30–8.

[138] Fitch (1987) 35.

162

reputation.[139] When Amphitryon threatens suicide and declares the deed will be commemorated as *Herculis sani scelus* (1313), he finally lights upon the hero's true priorities. The point at issue is what it means to be 'Hercules' and how others will define or remember the hero in the future. If Amphitryon's life hangs in the balance at this moment, it does so only for the sake of making Hercules' *fama* hang in the balance as well. Hercules' response confirms where his interests lie: he will add the achievement of living to the list of his previous feats; to continue being Hercules is a Herculean task in itself. He even characterises his action as obedience to *imperium*, just as he has previously obeyed the *imperium* of Eurystheus (*Her.* 42: *laetus imperia excipit*; 398: *disce regum imperia ab Alcide pati*; 433: *imperia dura*). Hercules does here what he has done all along: behaves and thinks of himself solely as the hero of the labours.

The phrasing of Amphitryon's plea acquires particular significance in this regard because its third-personal construction encourages Hercules to view himself as a symbol, a reproducible *exemplum*, an instance of 'Hercules' and of all that name typically entails. Concomitantly, the expression *Herculis sani scelus* (1313), alludes darkly to the play's title, *Hercules Furens*, thereby inviting Hercules to adopt a detached, metatheatrical view of himself as a character within his own story. Whatever action the hero opts to pursue at this juncture, Amphitryon implies, may become the subject not only of future reputation, and so, possible emulation, but also of future literary works. Amphitryon catches Hercules' attention and manages to persuade him by citing the one thing that really matters to the hero: his future commemoration as an admirable paradigm.

Such self-reflexive exemplarity is a particularly crucial theme in Act 5 of the *Hercules* because it is at this point that the protagonist must reconcile his former with his current self.[140] Reeling from the

---

[139] Fitch (1979) and (1987) *ad Her.*1300–1313, and more fully, 35–8; Braden (1990) 249–57. A more recent proponent of the view is Mader (2014) 128–31.

[140] Crucially, Hercules himself does not experience his madness and sanity as contiguous states, so the fifth Act is largely occupied with issues of self-reconstruction. From the audience's perspective, however, there are manifest similarities between Hercules' behaviour while mad and while sane: see below, 174–6. On Hercules' mediation of past and present, Mader (2014) 129 makes some insightful remarks.

163

knowledge of his crime and fumbling to regain some form of mental equilibrium, Hercules relies on *exempla*, and specifically on their ability to mediate between past and present, in order to reassemble and to promote a clear sense of his identity. Hence, when he contemplates suicide as a first response to his crimes, he rouses himself to the deed by calling it *ingens opus, labore bis seno amplius* ('a huge enterprise, greater than the twelvefold labours' *Her.* 1282). He also pledges to rid the earth of his presence as though he were one of the monsters he has previously conquered: *purgare terras propero. iamdudum mihi / monstrum impium saevumque et immite ac ferum / oberrat* ('I hasten to cleanse the earth. For a long time now this wicked, cruel, pitiless, wild monster has roamed free before me' 1279–80). Similar obsession with his past achievements underpins his question to Amphitryon at 1301 – *pande, quid fieri iubes?* ('Speak, what do you command to occur?') – because obeying and fulfilling *iussa* is a key characteristic of the former Hercules (*Her.* 41–3; 211; 235; 596; 604; 831; and especially 1268: *laudanda feci iussus*, 'I did praiseworthy things under orders'). Amphitryon, for his part, attempts to dissuade the hero by citing his well-known capacity for endurance, once more framed in terms of a pre-established reputation: *nunc Hercule opus est: perfer hanc molem mali* ('now Hercules is needed: endure this mass of evil' 1239).[141] Who Hercules was dictates who Hercules should be now: the self-referentiality of this process is yet another factor highlighting Hercules' isolation in this play. He does not follow parental models, and he proves stubbornly unreceptive to his stepfather's pleas. The only family connection Hercules cultivates in this drama is that of himself to himself. The social and biological divide between Amphitryon and Hercules deepens into an emotional and psychological one as well: the protagonist does not

---

[141] Seidensticker (1969) 112 rightly compares this line to Theseus' exhortation in Euripides' *Heracles* 1250: ὁ πολλὰ δὴ τλὰς Ἡρακλῆς λέγει τάδε; ('does Heracles, having suffered so much, say these things?'). There is a difference between the two treatments, however, inasmuch as Euripides' Theseus cites Heracles' name and heroic stature as a way of underscoring the universality of human suffering, while Amphitryon uses Hercules' name to emphasise the hero's uniqueness, his solitary ability to bear the burden of this misfortune.

164

display any intrinsic care for family bonds when deciding how best to handle his wretched situation.

To some extent, Hercules' self-obsession resembles the *decorum* and *constantia* pursued by figures such as Atreus and Medea: it links past to present; it relies on repetitious behaviour; it fosters acute consciousness of the self qua reputation.[142] It is also inherently concerned with exemplarity, not least because of Hercules' pre-established role as a paradigmatic figure. Having no one to follow or copy, Seneca's Hercules hones his identity solely via reference to his own model. His sense of self relies not on his identification with others, but on solipsistic resurrection of his own past deeds. His isolated exemplarity is both a symptom and cause of his emotional and physical detachment from those around him, detachment that often spills over into outright aggression.

Hercules in Character

Hercules' preoccupation with what he symbolises, and with what it means to be 'Hercules' encourages the play's audience, too, to regard him as a symbol, a textual representation, and ultimately, a dramatic character. Just as the protagonist worries about his *fama* in Act 5, so the rest of the tragedy focuses attention on how that *fama* is created and sustained, and concomitantly, how its very existence influences our perception of Hercules' identity. Seneca achieves this end via a striking (and possibly, unique) form of dramaturgy that couples short bursts of Hercules' stage action with lengthy spoken accounts of the hero's accomplishments. Critics have not been slow to note that the *Hercules* exhibits a ponderously static quality, especially for a play that encompasses multiple murders and a scene of madness: Act 1 comprises Juno's aggrieved monologue (1–124); Amphitryon opens Act 2 with a protracted summary of his son's labours, and of the present, grim situation prevailing in Thebes (205–78); Theseus' *ekphrasis* of the

---

[142] Fitch and McElduff (2002) 29–30 link Hercules, Medea, and Atreus as three Senecan characters inclined to assess their actions according to their own past precedents.

165

underworld occupies the bulk of Act 3 (650–829).[143] Hercules himself does not appear on stage until 592, only to vanish again between 641 and 895; despite being the play's titular character, he is rarely present before the audience, and even more rarely engages in dialogue with the tragedy's other figures.[144]

In lieu of Hercules himself, Seneca has other characters talk about the hero, and particularly about his defining activity, the twelve labours: Juno mentions the Nemean lion and the hydra (46), Cerberus (46–63), and Hercules accepting the weight of the globe from Atlas (70–4); Amphitryon recites a full catalogue of the twelve tasks at 222–48, several items of which the chorus reprises at 529–49; Megara, Amphitryon, and Lycus pursue a three-way debate over whether Hercules' deeds merit the label of *virtus* (422–89); Theseus' description of the underworld features cameo appearances by some of Hercules' erstwhile monstrous opponents (778–81) and concludes with the hero himself defeating Cerberus (782–829). Seneca's audience spends most of the play encountering Hercules via other characters' narratives.[145]

The traditional view attributes these narrative passages to the demands of *Lese-* or *Rezitationsdrama* on the basis that an audience of listeners would require, and even enjoy, hearing descriptions of events they cannot see.[146] Composing for the recital hall rather than for the stage – if this really was Seneca's objective – is assumed to result in looser dramatic form and general disregard for the conventional restrictions pertaining to onstage action. A less charitable approach simply dismisses Seneca as an unskilled,

---

[143] Seneca's preference for narrative in the *Hercules* has been addressed piecemeal by Zwierlein (1966) 112–13 and 119–20, while fuller, more up-to-date treatment of the issue can be found in Von Glinski (2017). Of Theseus' *ekphrasis*, Fitch (1987) *ad Her.* 592–829 remarks that such scenes in Seneca 'displace, or at least overshadow, scenes of more traditional dramaturgy'. Tarrant (1976) *ad Ag.* 392a–588 voices a similar opinion.

[144] His frequent absence from the onstage world is well noted by Von Glinski (2017). On Hercules' inclination for monologic speech, see Fitch (1979) 243–4.

[145] A crucial yet seldom acknowledged point: see Seidensticker (1969) 113, and Lawall (1983) 10–11.

[146] In the words of Zwierlein (1966) 60: 'Die pedantische Beschreibung … mußte einem Zuschauer, der dies ja selbst sähe, albern erscheinen; dem Hörer kann sie helfen, sich das Bild plastisch vorzustellen' (The pedantic description … must appear silly to a viewer, who sees these things for him/herself; but it can help the listener imagine the physical representation'). Fantham (1975) 3 n.3 pursues a similar argument.

166

third-rate playwright.[147] But, whether performed or recited, the dramatic structure of the *Hercules* fulfils a distinct purpose in compelling the audience to contemplate Hercules chiefly in terms of his reputation, just as the protagonist himself does. How heroic is Hercules? Does he live up to the *exemplum* that precedes him? Can the figure that appears on stage be reconciled with the one we have – literally – *heard* so much about? The play's structure invites the audience to pose such questions in the same way that Hercules' misfortune pushes him to measure the distance between his past and current sense of self.

Seneca further implies that Hercules owes his exemplarity, and hence a significant aspect of his identity, to acts of narration. When Amphitryon punctuates a list of his son's labours with the rhetorical *quid memorem?* ('why should I speak of?' 226), he draws attention to the fact that he is currently celebrating Hercules' paradigm in speech, and by extension, that spoken and/or written records are the principal means of preserving – even of generating – such *exempla*. As a *rei gestae ... commemoratio*, a 'record of achievements', the definition proffered by Quint. *Inst.* 5.11.6, the *exemplum*'s existence depends upon its being talked about (*memorare*). Thus, Hercules' labours are twice referred to as *memoranda facta* ('memorable deeds / deeds worth speaking about', 442; 1265–6), and Theseus commences his account of Hercules' *katabasis* by protesting, *memorare cogis acta securae quoque / horrenda menti* ('you compel me to narrate deeds that make my mind shudder even now, in safety' 650–1). The narrative passages in this play repeatedly draw links between Hercules' paradigmatic feats and others' accounts of them. Even Juno, in the prologue, grudgingly admits that the hero *toto deus / narratur orbe* ('is talked about as a god throughout the entire world' 39–40), a claim we later see substantiated when Amphitryon invokes his son as though he were a deity (277; 519–20).[148]

As this last point demonstrates, Seneca also endeavours to link the play's various narrative accounts of Hercules to the

---

[147] Witness, for example, the perceptive but unnecessarily harsh judgements made about the *Hercules* by T. S. Eliot (1999) [1927] 69–70.

[148] Fitch (1987) *ad Her.* 520–2 notes in addition that the natural phenomena described by Amphitryon 'suggest the imminent epiphany of a *numen*'.

167

protagonist's subsequent activity on stage.[149] The effect once again is that Seneca induces his audience to compare the stage Hercules – bodily present, speaking and acting – with the reputation that surrounds and precedes him. Guided and informed by other characters' perspectives, the audience is able to see in this actual Hercules traces of his pre-established paradigm. Like the practice of exemplarity in Roman society and politics, Seneca's dramaturgical trick configures Hercules as simultaneously himself and a copy of himself, a unique individual and a reproducible type, Hercules the quasi-person and 'Hercules' the *exemplum*. Viewed from one angle, the protagonist's materialisation on stage asserts his personal, contingent singularity in contrast to the infinitely repeatable paradigm of 'Hercules' sustained in others' narratives. From another angle, the stage Hercules comes to seem an extension or even a replica of the one other characters talk about. Hercules the *dramatis persona* re-performs entire sequences of action in a manner reminiscent of a Brutus or a Decius Mus replaying the deeds of his ancestors. The crucial difference, of course, is that Seneca's Hercules only ever replays himself.

This theme of self-repetition is present from the very beginning of the play, in Juno's prologue. Here, the vengeful goddess relates in aggrieved detail how she watched Hercules emerge from the underworld with Cerberus cowering in tow (59–63). The event occurs again, this time on stage, when Hercules makes his first appearance at 592, dragging Cerberus behind him. Connections between the two passages are clear and strong: Juno affirms in the prologue that she has witnessed Hercules' conquest of Hades (*vidi ipsa*; 'I myself saw it', 50) and the capture of its canine guardian (*terna monstri colla devincti intuens*; 'looking upon the bound monster's triple neck', 62), while Hercules himself, at the opening of Act 3, asserts that only he and Juno may gaze upon the *nefas* that is Cerberus' presence in the upper world: *hoc nefas cernant duo / qui advexit et quae iussit* ('let two look upon this sacrilege: he who fetched the dog and she who ordered it', 603–4). Each speaker also alludes to the potentially polluting effect this sight has on the sun.

---

[149] Lawall (1983) 10–11 notes the technique, though he argues that Seneca employs it as a source of contrast, not comparison.

168

Juno declares, 'I saw the day sinking and the Sun frightened by the sight of Cerberus' (*viso labantem Cerbero vidi diem / pavidumque Solem*, 60–1), while Hercules begs, 'forgive me, Phoebus, if your visage has seen anything unlawful' (*da, Phoebe, veniam, si quid inlicitum tui / videre vultus*, 595–6). What Juno reports as happening in the time of the prologue happens again in the real time of the play.[150]

The result, for Hercules, is that he appears to be acting on cue, not just matching his conduct to the contours already outlined by Juno, but even repeating something he has already done, returning from the underworld while she watches and then doing it again while the audience looks on. Strictly speaking, of course, Hercules emerges from Hades only once over the course of his story, but the drama's temporal repetition gives the impression of the activity being infinitely reproducible, like all *exempla*. Furthermore, Juno's role as prologue speaker places her in a quasi-directorial position: she is the metatheatrical dramatist whose purpose it is to ensure that Hercules follows the script.[151] Thus, the structure of the *Hercules* draws attention to its protagonist as a fabricated dramatic *persona*, a character acting in character. In following his own paradigm, Hercules causes himself to become a version, a type, a detachable, imitable role. But in the *Hercules* this role is neither passed on to nor assumed by others; Hercules alone *resumes* it, repeatedly. He imitates himself, which only further underscores the selfishness of his exemplarity.

Besides seeking to reproduce the behaviour essential to his paradigm, Seneca's Hercules also displays concern for the items specific to it, namely his weaponry. When the hero sinks into a stupor at the close of Act 4, Amphitryon commands servants to confiscate his bow and arrows (1053). One of Hercules' first

---

[150] Shelton (1975) and (1978) 17–25 examines the temporal dislocation of the *Hercules* in considerable detail, though her conclusion, which attributes this dramatic structure to Seneca's interest in personal psychology, is unsatisfactory. Seneca's curious manipulation and/or repetition of stage time has also been noted by Owen (1970).

[151] Von Glinski (2017) 215. On prologue speakers as substitutes for the playwright/ *didaskalos*, see Easterling (1993) 80.

169

thoughts upon waking is to wonder what has become of his usual equipment and costume:

> cur latus laevum vacat
> spolio leonis? quonam abit tegimen meum
> idemque somno mollis Herculeo torus?
> ubi tela? ubi arcus? arma quis vivo mihi
> detrahere potuit?

> Why is my left side bare?
> Where is my lion skin? Where has it gone, that protection of mine,
> and soft bed for Hercules' sleep?
> Where are my weapons, my bow? Who could strip me of my arms
> while I'm alive?

> (*Her.* 1150–4)

Like his repeated citation of the labours, Hercules' search for his weaponry symbolises the painful process of self-reconstruction in the wake of madness. In Rosie Wyles' words, 'Seneca makes use of the idea that Heracles' iconic pieces of costume embody his identity.'[152] The passage has the metatheatrical effect of highlighting Hercules' status as a dramatic role generated through props and particular items of apparel.[153] Concomitantly, Hercules' costume also symbolises the exemplary status conferred upon him by his labours: the pelt of the Nemean lion is both a commemorative trophy (*spolio leonis*, 1151) and synecdoche for Hercules qua hero.[154] Implicit in Hercules' wondering who could possibly have stolen these items is the vague worry that another, more exemplary hero has managed to overpower him (cf. 1168: *victor Alcidae, lates?* 'Are you in hiding, conqueror of Alcides?') Hercules regards his weapons, like his deeds, as belonging to him alone; in the same way that nobody can live up to his *exemplum*, so nobody, Hercules feels, should expect to wield his bow

---

[152] Wyles (2013) 194. See also Bernstein (2017) 46–50.

[153] Thus Wyles (2013) 182: 'His costume is used to reflect on ancient theatre's dependence on costume for the construction of its stage characters.'

[154] Dionysus' assumption of the lion skin in Aristophanes' *Frogs* is an obvious example of the costume's ability to represent the hero. Another example comes from Theseus' *ekphrasis* in the *Hercules*, where the hero's fight with Cerberus is portrayed as an encounter between a dog and a lionskin: *solvit a laeva feros / tunc ipse rictus et Cleonaeum caput / opponit* (797–9). Fuller treatment of the costume's symbolism can be found in Wyles (2013).

170

and arrows. Of course, the only conqueror of Hercules in this play is Hercules himself, a self-reflexive feat that confirms the circularity of his *exemplum*. Despite his being a role and role model, Hercules emerges as the only figure able to undertake this part.

Self-aemulatio

As noted in a preceding section, Seneca's Hercules spends most of his eponymous tragedy in competition with himself. His feats of strength cannot be equalled let alone surpassed, and his exceptional heroism makes him the only man capable of overthrowing himself. While not categorically wrong, this activity threatens to unseat the *exemplum*'s primary purpose of fostering interpersonal and intergenerational emulation in the name of social and moral continuity. Despite the centuries separating Lucius from Marcus Junius Brutus, the former's model is maintained and perpetuated by the latter. But the exemplarity of Seneca's Hercules achieves the opposite effect inasmuch as it confirms his isolation from his surrounding community rather than enabling him to claim a place within it.

The phenomenon of self-*aemulatio* is a minor yet persistent theme in Roman letters, typically appearing in panegyric passages and, following the establishment of the principate, typically applied to emperors.[155] I have cited already, above, Plutarch's comments about Julius Caesar's ambition and energy reaching such heights that he had nobody to contend with apart from himself (Plut. *Caes.* 58.5). Pliny voices a comparable idea when praising Trajan's performance in battle:

Non tibi moris tua inire tentoria, nisi commilitonum ante lustrasses, nec requiem corpori nisi post omnes dare. Hac mihi admiratione dignus imperator ⟨vix⟩ videretur, si inter Fabricios et Scipiones et Camillos talis esset; tunc enim illum imitationis ardor semperque melior aliquis accenderet. Postquam vero studium armorum a manibus ad oculos, ad voluptatem a labore translatum est, postquam exercitationibus nostris non veteranorum aliquis cui decus muralis aut civica, sed Graeculus magister adsistit, quam magnum est unum ex omnibus patrio more

---

[155] For a full list of references to self-*aemulatio* in Latin literary sources, see Oakley (1997) *ad Liv.* 6.6.9.

patria virtute laetari, et sine aemulo [ac] sine exemplo secum certare, secum contendere ac, sicut imperet solus, solum ita esse qui debeat imperare!

it was your habit to inspect your comrades' tents before you retired to your own; the last man must go off duty before you would take a rest yourself. Such were the great generals of the past, bred in the homes of Fabricius, Scipio, and Camillus; if they have a lesser claim upon my admiration it is because in their day a man could be inspired by keen rivalry with his betters. But now that interest in arms is displayed in spectacle instead of personal skill, and has become an amusement instead of a discipline, when exercises are no longer directed by a veteran crowned by the mural or civic crown, but by some petty Greek trainer, it is good to find one single man to delight in the traditions and the valour of our fathers, who can strive with none but himself for rival, press on with only his own example before him, and since he is to wield authority alone, will prove that he alone is worthy. (*Pan.* 13.3–5 trans. Radice)

The passage describes a complex balance between the community of common soldiers and lesser commanders, and Trajan as their ultimate, outstanding leader. Pliny depicts the emperor as leading by example and, at the same time, as reviving exemplary practices from the republican past. Trajan features as the military heir of model commanders from the ranks of Fabricii, Scipiones, and Camilli. Up to this point, the emperor's exemplarity can be said to strengthen social bonds, both within the immediate context of his own army and within the broader context of social and historical continuity.

But Pliny also acknowledges a wide gap separating Trajan from his republican predecessors: they belonged to a time period (and implicitly, a social structure) in which it was possible for them to vie with and imitate each other (*tunc enim illum imitationis ardor semperque melior aliquis accenderet*, 13.4). Because Rome's republican oligarchy allotted governmental power to more than one individual, it cultivated an environment of elite *aemulatio* in which a host of aristocrats would jostle to claim the best places in the hierarchy. For all its manifest failings and restrictions, this political system entailed a degree of plurality, which in turn encouraged the competitive, interpersonal pursuit of *exempla*. In contrast, Trajan's position at the very peak of an autocratic hierarchy leaves him – at least in theory – without any superior

172

paradigms to emulate.[156] Since nobody, by definition, can be better than Trajan, Trajan has nobody to imitate aside from himself. The panegyric topos of incomparability merges with the cold, hard fact of Trajan's absolute power: he competes with himself because competing with anyone else would mean a diminution not just of his talents, but also of his political rank. The exemplarity of an autocrat spirals inwards and has the distinct potential to broaden rather than narrow the distances between ruler and ruled.

Self-*aemulatio* likewise appears as a topos in Seneca's exhortation of Nero in the *de Clementia*. Hoping to ensure his pupil's continued good behaviour, Seneca congratulates the young emperor on his exemplary style of government: *nemo iam divum Augustum nec Ti. Caesaris prima tempora loquitur nec, quod te imitari velit, exemplar extra te quaerit; principatus tuus ad gustum exigitur* ('nobody now speaks of the divine Augustus, nor the bygone times of Tiberius, nor seeks an example other than yourself for you to imitate; your principate is made to conform with the taste you have already given' *Clem.* 1.1.6). Like Pliny, Seneca articulates a delicate balance between the competing demands of dynastic tradition and autocratic self-sufficiency: Nero must remain aware of Augustus' good *exemplum* even though he is no longer required to follow it. As a persuasive tactic, Seneca's and Pliny's praise of self-*aemulatio* fulfils the dual purpose of encouraging their addressees to uphold good government by caring for their people's needs, and conversely, of admitting that their power makes them unanswerable to anyone apart from themselves. Their *exemplum* may be self-contained but, these texts imply, it should not also be self-serving. What better way to persuade Nero than to tell him that his good conduct is peerless?

While self-*aemulatio* is especially suited to autocratic contexts, it does also appear in republican ones. Livy, for instance, depicts Camillus as being 'in competition with himself' (*certantem secum ipsum*, 6.6.9), and Cicero confesses that he need not exhort Dolabella to follow the examples of famous men because

---

[156] The transition from pluralist republican *exempla* to the centralised, autocratic *exemplum* of the emperor has been ably studied by Kraus (2005).

Dolabella is already famous enough to be his own model and contend with himself (*te imitere oportet, tecum ipse certes, ad Fam.* 9.14.6). Cicero inverts the topos, too, when denouncing Verres for exceptional cruelty: *nam si cum aliorum improbitate certet, longe omnes multumque superabit: secum ipse certat, id agit ut semper superius suum facinus novo scelere vincat* ('in competition with other scoundrels he would easily leave them all far behind. But he is his own competitor; with each new crime his aim is to break his previous record.' *Verr.* 2.5.116 trans. Greenwood). Although none of these individuals is – strictly speaking – unanswerable to others in the same way as Nero or Trajan, the topos is nonetheless intended to evoke their potential separation from the surrounding community. Instead of modelling himself on other *clari viri*, presumably from the Roman past (*Fam.* 9.14.6), Dolabella is invited to cultivate a purely self-reflexive *exemplum*. Such exceptionalism can easily lead to tyrannous self-absorption.

In *Hercules*, Seneca illustrates the perils of the protagonist's self-*aemulatio* in two main ways. The first concerns the ambiguity of Hercules' heroism. As many scholars have remarked, Hercules' madness and sanity appear to exist on the same continuum; much of the behaviour he exhibits while hallucinating corresponds to the attitudes and conduct he displays before and after the attack.[157] Significantly, he frames his assault upon heaven as a logical extension of his earlier labours: *perdomita tellus, tumida cesserunt freta, / inferna nostros regna sensere impetus: / immune caelum est, dignus Alcidae labor* ('earth is conquered, the swollen seas have yielded, the kingdoms of the dead have felt our attack: heaven has escaped so far – a labour worthy of Alcides' *Her.* 955–7).[158] The same sequence of thought characterises his

---

[157] A line of argument pursued by: Henry and Walker (1965); Bishop (1966); Owen (1968) 303–4; Shelton (1978) 58–73; Fitch (1987) 24–33 and 35–8; Braden (1990) 249–52; Motto and Clark (1994) 269–72; Harrison (2014b) 623.

[158] Seneca's language creates additional links between Hercules' labours and his meditated conquest of heaven. His return from the Underworld is ambiguously described as a *viam ad superos* (318), which implies both that he will reach the upper world and that he will reach heaven. Megara then uses *supera* to mean 'the heavens' at 423, and Hercules uses *ad superos* with the same meaning at 970, in the midst of his madness. Metaphorically speaking, Hercules follows the same path from Hades, to earth, to his

174

sacrificial prayer to Jupiter (926–39), in which Hercules celebrates his civilising mission. Here, his initial, ambitious hopes for universal peace (927–31) rapidly devolve into an expansive vision of future tasks, where Hercules calls upon himself as much as upon Jove to ensure that 'no storm troubles the sea' (*nulla tempestas fretum / … turbet*, 931–2); that 'poisons may be eradicated' (*venena cessent*, 935); that 'tyrants may not hold sway' (*non … / regnant tyranni*, 936–7); and cheekily, that Jove himself may not hurl lightning bolts when angered (*nullus irato Iove / exiliat ignis*, 932–3).[159] As if to confirm that he is the ultimate recipient of his own prayers, Hercules concludes this catalogue with the ironically appropriate desire to oppose any of the world's remaining monsters: *si quod etiamnunc est scelus / latura tellus, properet, et si quod parat / monstrum, meum sit* ('if the earth is going to bring forth any wickedness even now, let it hurry, and if it is preparing some monster, let it be mine' 938–9). Though Hercules' megalomania and encroaching insanity blind him to the line's nuance, Seneca's audience comprehends that the protagonist himself has become this last *monstrum*,[160] his desire for conquest having spun out of control and reached a self-destructive extreme.

One effect of Hercules' mad scene, therefore, is to illustrate the destructive potential of a self-sufficient *exemplum*. Because Hercules imitates and vies with himself, there are no external moral checks placed upon his exemplarity; Hercules justifies his conduct solely with reference to Hercules. The self-*aemulatio* that encapsulates and celebrates his supreme heroism becomes, at the same time, a dangerous source of self-serving aggression.

It is of course possible to argue that Juno assumes full responsibility for Hercules' madness: as the one who brings destruction on the hero, she, not Hercules himself, is ultimately to blame for the perversion of his *virtus*. In contrast to the pessimistic scholarly view of Hercules' heroism inducing its own destruction, some take

---

final, imagined assault on the gods. Fuller discussion of this motif can be found in Henry and Walker (1965) 16–17.

[159] Shelton (1978) 64 remarks of this passage: 'Hercules … boasts that he shares Jupiter's role of maintaining universal peace'. See also Paratore (1966) 23–4 and n.29.

[160] An irony well noted by Shelton (1978) 65; Lawall (1983) 18; Fitch (1987) *ad Her.* 937–9; Motto and Clark (1994) 269–70.

the optimistic tack of exculpating the hero for crimes committed at Juno's vengeful behest.[161] Yet, Juno's involvement does not really lessen the ominous impact of Hercules' self-reflexive *exemplum*, because her revenge takes the form of causing Hercules to fight himself: *bella iam secum gerat* ('let him wage war with himself' 85); *se vincat et cupiat mori* ('let him defeat himself and long for death' 116). Like Seneca's Atreus, whose preferred method of vengeance is 'Thyestes himself' (*ipso Thyeste*, *Thy.* 259), Juno engineers her enemy's downfall by exploiting his chief weakness, in this case, the overweening power and loneliness generated by his heroism. If anything, Juno simply provides a catalyst for the already dark, destructive potential of Hercules' *exemplum*.

Seneca's second critique of self-*aemulatio* comes in the form of a striking parallel between Hercules and the tyrant Lycus. Although this usurper of the Theban throne plays a relatively minor role in the tragedy, Seneca makes a clear effort to depict him as the protagonist's *doppelgänger*.[162] A brief review will serve to demonstrate the points of correspondence: Lycus enters the stage in the aftermath of violence he has committed against Megara's family; his hands are described as 'spattered with blood' (*sanguine aspersam manum*, 372), though the comment is more metaphorical than literal at this point in the play; his proposals for peace and reconciliation are undercut by his propensity for physical aggression; he attributes *clara virtus* to himself (340) and identifies himself as *victor* (398–9; 409); he prepares to immolate Megara and her children as they take refuge in a shrine (514–15), an act that is planned to occur while Lycus himself offers votive sacrifice to Neptune (514–15); finally, he exempts Amphitryon from death, counting it a greater punishment to sentence the old man to life (509–13).

Lycus' resemblance to Hercules is not far to seek: Hercules, too, arrives on stage following deeds of violence, in the first instance

---

[161] Major proponents of the view include Motto and Clark (1981) and Lawall (1983). Bernstein (2017) 20–1 expresses a more balanced view that goes some way towards reconciling the two camps.

[162] Noted by Owen (1968) 304 and explored more fully by Rose (1979–80) and OKell (2005). Littlewood (2004) 33–6 pursues a similar idea by connecting Megara and Lycus, which likewise suggests the fallibility and agressiveness of Stoic values: 'we are encouraged to see her obduracy as the image of his'.

176

after abducting Cerberus from the underworld (592–612), and in the second, after murdering Lycus (895–9); his hands 'drip with the blood' of this recent slaughter (*manantes … / manus cruenta caede*, 918–19), but he ignores Amphitryon's plea for him to cleanse them prior to conducting sacrifice (920–4); like Lycus, he describes himself as a *victor* (898), and his aspirations for universal peace (927–30) are rapidly overthrown by his own brutality; *virtus* is his attribute *par excellence*; madness overtakes him as he performs a votive sacrifice to Jupiter (926–52), and while mad, he regards his killing of Megara and the children as an offering to Juno (1036–7); like Lycus, he refers to his children as a *grex* (1037 cf. 507); finally, Hercules, too, refrains from killing Amphitryon, if only because his fit of madness subsides just as the old man steps forward to present himself as the final victim (1039–52).[163]

It should be clear by now that aside from simply resembling Lycus, Hercules actually takes his place. In slaughtering his wife and offspring, Hercules completes in Act 4 the task Lycus commenced in Act 2. The association grows closer still when Hercules hallucinates that he is killing Lycus' children (in Euripides, by contrast, he thinks they belong to Eurystheus): *sed ecce proles regis inimici latet, / Lyci nefandum semen. inviso patri / haec dextra iam vos reddet* ('but look, here hide the children of a hostile ruler, / Lycus' wicked seed. This right hand will return you, now, to your hated father' 987–9). With this declaration, the roles of Lycus and Hercules eclipse into one, and Seneca implies that the latter is the real *invisus pater*. The implication is reiterated, with even more ironic force, just a few lines further down, when the mad Hercules remarks 'I see hidden here the son of a wicked father' (*hic video abditum / natum scelesti patris*, 1001–2). Where Hercules sees Lycus' child, the audience of course sees Hercules' child, and the hero becomes the *scelestus pater* he imagines himself as fighting. Of course, in the world outside Hercules' disordered brain, Lycus does not in fact have any children; he remarks in Act 2 that he plans to get them through forced union with Megara (494). But

---

[163] Many, though not all, of the parallels I list here have been ably traced by Rose (1979–80) 137–8.

such information points once again to the potential interchange-ability of Lycus and Hercules, since with this claim Lycus aims to occupy Hercules' role just as Hercules later occupies Lycus'.

The links connecting these two characters are crucial for under-standing, on a number of levels, how Seneca has chosen to repre-sent Hercules' exemplarity. Like the arbitrary power of an absolute ruler, Hercules' *exemplum* asserts the capacity to self-regulate, and that capacity, in turn, reinforces the hero's isolation. While he may feel responsible for his family, on occasions, he is nonetheless set apart from them; his example is an exception rather than a rule, a point of disjunction rather than union and tradition. Granted it is not identical to tyranny, but it certainly has the potential to foster tyrannical behaviour.

It is telling that Lycus, too, shares this quality of self-contained isolation. Immediately upon entering the stage, he boasts about his lack of family name and inherited wealth:

> non vetera patriae iura possideo domus
> ignavus heres; nobiles non sunt mihi
> avi nec altis inclitum titulis genus,
> sed clara virtus. qui genus iactat suum,
> aliena laudat

> I do not lay claim to the old laws of an ancestral home
> as a lazy heir; I do not have noble grandfathers
> nor a lineage distinguished by lofty titles,
> but illustrious courage. He who boasts about his lineage,
> praises others

(*Her.* 337–9)

The assertion has a distinctly Roman flavour to it, as though Lycus were a *novus homo* proudly proclaiming his ascent to the very top of the *cursus honorum*. But in a play so fixated upon family divisions and strained or estranged family relationships, Lycus' claim takes on other colouring as well. Like Hercules, Lycus rests a large part of his self-definition on being a solitary figure. Although his reference to a *genus* implies that he does have some family members somewhere, he appears in the context of this drama to be entirely a lone wolf: he never mentions any parents, and we gather from later comments that he does not have any children; he appears to be personally, socially, and

178

politically self-sufficient. While Lycus makes no explicit reference to intergenerational exemplarity in this passage, his proud independence from familial and dynastic tradition certainly taps into the tragedy's theme of self-*aemulatio*. Like Hercules, Lycus relies on himself instead of following an ancestral paradigm, and this sense of independence seems to find a parallel in the ruthlessly autocratic nature of his rule. The autonomous quality of his self-definition, figured as an absence of family members, slides into his desire for despotic hegemony. This is the mirror in which Seneca reflects the danger of Hercules' detached, self-reflexive *exemplum*.

Conclusion

The act of adopting and imitating role models entails a delicate balance between self-abnegation on the one hand, and self-assertion on the other. As Seneca's *Troades* shows all too brutally, exemplarity requires a degree of displacement in which children re-embody their parents and recapitulate past actions rather than develop independent identities. The self qua *exemplum* tends to be derivative, which explains in turn its close conceptual links to biology, family lineage, and literary tradition. Just like an unavoidable set of hostile genetic traits, or like an unalterable narrative detail, *exempla* in Senecan tragedy oppress characters under the weight of inherited precedent.

Yet to the extent that one *chooses* to follow an *exemplum*, the process can also be an affirmation of selfhood. Pyrrhus celebrates his descent from Achilles as the core of his identity; Marcus Junius Brutus imitates Lucius because he, too, wants to acquire the title of liberator; Seneca copies Socrates in order to gain an equally enduring posthumous reputation. Each of these figures employs the *exemplum* for the deliberate purpose of self-fashioning; by eliding or aligning their identity with someone else's, they also assert essential aspects of themselves. Who you are, in this regard, depends upon whom you duplicate.

With Seneca's Hercules, however, this delicate balance of self and other collapses as the *exemplum* fails to find a reference point

179

beyond its own exceptionalism. Whereas the traditional purpose of the *exemplum* in Roman society was to mediate between the individual and the community, the singular event and the general rule, the older and younger generations, Hercules' paradigm both stems from and ends with himself, and the only mediation it performs is between the Hercules we see on stage and the reputation he has so far accumulated. Hercules' *exemplum* is simultaneously vital to his sense of self, and responsible for his insurmountable isolation; the more he aspires to fulfil it, the more he cuts himself off from family and friends.

180