

## NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

### THE SIZE OF THE CHORUS IN SENECA'S *AGAMEMNON*

Three views are possible concerning the question of the performance of Seneca's tragedies: (1) Seneca wrote the tragedies to be read or recited; (2) Seneca wrote the tragedies for performance, but they were not performed in antiquity; (3) Seneca wrote the tragedies for performance, and they were performed in antiquity. For purposes of criticism, there is no difference between (2) and (3). A distinction should be made from Athenian practice. Any performance would have been private, whether at Seneca's home or at Nero's palace.<sup>1</sup> No public or permanent record of performance would have existed. Wealthy Romans possessed troops of slave actors. Pliny (*Ep.* 1. 15. 2) reprimands a negligent guest who failed to appear for dinner because he missed the entertainment provided by, among others, comic actors. An elderly friend, Spurinna, regularly enlivened his banquets with comic performances ("frequenter comoedis cena distinguitur," *Ep.* 3. 1. 9). Menander was an especial favorite (Plut. *Mor.* 712B–D). Plutarch records (*Mor.* 711B–C) that slave actors performed Platonic dialogues at fashionable Roman dinner parties. Revivals since the Renaissance prove that Senecan tragedies can be staged. What could be less surprising than that Seneca intended his tragedies to be

performed privately for the edification of admiring guests?

If Seneca's tragedies were intended for performance, the size and handling of the chorus were problems to be considered. The Greater Dionysia was a government festival regulated by laws intended to insure fairness and uniformity. Presumably at the instigation of Sophocles (*Vit. Soph.* 4) the tragic chorus was increased to fifteen and held there (Pollux 4. 108) by law. The circumstances of Roman private production required no statutory number. But for the vestigial *piscatores* of the *Rudens*, the chorus had disappeared from Roman comedy. The Hellenistic tragic chorus had declined by ca. 200 B.C. (Diog. Babyl. Frag. 67 Von Arnim).<sup>2</sup> It survived in Roman Republican tragedy, where its size is not attested.<sup>3</sup> Its participation in the action was not decisive; and *cantica* may early have begun to intrude on lyric utterances (cf. Sen. *Phdr.* 1–89) as they surely did on dialogue.<sup>4</sup> Ribbeck reasonably but without evidence alleged, "Die Anzahl der Choreuten wechselte nach Bedürfniss."<sup>5</sup> The lost histrionic wall-painting from a grave at Cyrene,<sup>6</sup> whether late Hellenistic or Roman,<sup>7</sup> preserves a tragic chorus of seven, a precious and unique number. Dio Chrysostom (19. 5)<sup>8</sup> knew tragic revivals where lyric

1. Cf. Jason of Tralles' performance of Euripides' *Bacchae* in 53 B.C. at the Parthian Court, in the *andron*, after the banquet tables had been taken away (Plut. *Crass.* 33. 3). A chorus is attested. The company would have provided a portable stage (Plat. *Leg.* 7. 817C). For the Republican period see L. R. Taylor, "The Opportunities for Dramatic Performances in the Time of Plautus and Terence," *TAPA*, LXVIII (1937), 284–304. She treats the period 216–159 B.C. L. Varius Rufus staged his *Thyestes* in 29 B.C. at the request of Augustus after Actium and received one million sesterces: see Schanz-Hosius, *Gesch. röm. Lit.*, II<sup>4</sup> (Munich, 1935), 162–63; F. R. D. Goodyear and J. Diggle (eds.), *The Classical Papers of A. E. Housman*, III (Cambridge, 1972), 941–49.

2. I do not understand G. M. Sifakis, *Studies in the History of Hellenistic Drama* (London, 1967), p. 121, n. 1, who wishes to deny the fragment to Diogenes. In any case he errs to assail Reisch, who merely cites Wilamowitz, *Herakles*, I<sup>3</sup>, 132, n. 17.

3. See O. Ribbeck, *Die römische Tragödie* (Leipzig, 1875), pp. 637–41.

4. See H. D. Jocelyn (ed.), *The Tragedies of Ennius* (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 29 ff.; and O. Skutsch, *Studia Enniana* (London, 1968), p. 164.

5. Ribbeck, *op. cit.* (n. 3), p. 640; see L. Hermann, *Le théâtre de Sénèque* (Paris, 1924), p. 217, n. 1: "On n'est pas fixé sur le nombre des choristes romains." For the Hellenistic chorus: Wilamowitz, *Herakles*, I<sup>3</sup>, 132: "Die Zahl der Tänzer war längst beschränkt." Wilamowitz cites no evidence.

6. For reproduction, see M. Bieber, *The History of the Greek and Roman Theater*<sup>2</sup> (Princeton, 1961), p. 238, Fig. 787; and A. C. Pickard-Cambridge, *The Theatre of Dionysus in Athens* (Oxford, 1946), Fig. 120.

7. See W. Dörpfeld and E. Reisch, *Das griechische Theater*<sup>2</sup> (Aalen, 1966), p. 261.

8. See Wilamowitz, *Herakles*, I<sup>3</sup>, 132, n. 18.

parts were omitted entirely. Diminution in size signaled diminution in importance. The unfinished *Phoenissae* indicates that Seneca wrote choral passages last, as an afterthought.<sup>9</sup>

Let us assume as a working hypothesis a Senecan chorus of between three and seven members. Apart from Hellenistic and Republican precedent, there was the *Nebenchor*<sup>10</sup> of Euripidean drama (the *Nebenchor* at Eur. *Hipp.* 62 ff. need be but two hunters and Hippolytus; for three is a crowd). A suggestion, therefore, lay in the *exemplaria graeca*. How would a small chorus fit the action of *Agamemnon*? The chorus enter with anapaests unannounced<sup>11</sup> at line 57. After a Horatio-Ovidian ode<sup>12</sup> on *aurea mediocritas*, do they remain on stage silent throughout the first *epeisodion* (108–309)? The text does not say that they exit. There are reasons to believe they do.<sup>13</sup> The chorus do not announce Clytemnestra's entrance (contrast Sen. *Ag.* 408–11, 778–81; Aesch. *Ag.* 258–63). Clytemnestra takes no notice of them (contrast Aesch. *Ag.* 266) but addresses her soul (*segnis anime*, 108). She does not hesitate to speak aloud of regicide (*ferrum, venena*, 121). The nurse enters (125) after the queen's first speech is completed. Because she has not heard Clytemnestra, she thinks her mistress is silently pondering (*tacita*, 126; *sileas*, 128), an improbable assumption if the Argive women were on stage. In the dialogue that follows<sup>14</sup> the nurse elicits information from Clytemnestra in the manner of a classical *koryphaios*. The discussion of suicide, adultery (175 ff. expands Aesch. *Ag.* 1439,

delivered *after* the crime), treason, and murder implies privacy and trust. After urging Stoic restraint, the nurse exits at 225 and Aegisthus enters. A scene between the two conspirators before the crime, without exacting an oath of complicity from the chorus,<sup>15</sup> assumes the actors are alone. Clytemnestra's denial of public knowledge of her adultery confirms this. Only Aegisthus knows: "delicta novit nemo nisi fidus mea" (284) is a verse not intended for delivery before a crowd. The pair exit into the central door of the palace to further their plots: "secede mecum potius, ut rerum statum / dubium ac minacem iuncta consilia explicent" (308–309). The chorus re-enter (310) onto an empty stage. The cheerful, holiday *hyporchema* (310–411), invoking gods who pay no attention,<sup>16</sup> would be ridiculous if the chorus had heard the sinister scene just concluded. We must believe, therefore, that the chorus are not on stage during the first *epeisodion*.

The chorus presumably deliver 408–11, verses that introduce Eurybates, who joyfully enters at a run (*vasto . . . gradu*, 408). Aeschylus' herald has been given a name,<sup>17</sup> in the Euripidean manner (e.g., Talthybius in Eur. *Hec.* and *Tro.*, a Senecan favorite). But the lines might also be assigned to Clytemnestra. Thus, e.g., the priest at Sophocles *Oedipus* 78–79 announces the approach of Kreon "crowned thickly with berry-laden bay" (*OT* 82–83; cf. *Trach.* 179). Eurybates wears no laurel but has decorated his spear-tip with it (410). The laurel crown is restricted to Agamemnon, the *triumphator* (356,

9. For the Senecan chorus in general, see F. Leo, "Die Composition der Chorlieder Senecas," *RhM*, LII (1897), 509–21; and W. Marx, *Funktion und Form der Chorlieder in den Seneca-Tragödien* (Cologne, 1932).

10. For examples see Wilamowitz, *Herakles*, II<sup>3</sup>, 116, n. 13.

11. O. Zwierlein, *Die Rezitationsdramen Senecas mit einem kritisch-exegetisch Anhang* (Meisenheim am Glan, 1966), pp. 72–74, naively argues this as proof against performance. But in this respect the Senecan chorus is Agathonian rather than Aeschylean: see P. Friedländer, *Zeitschrift für das Gymn. Wesen*, LXVI (1912), 806–809. For the limitations of Zwierlein, see the stern remarks of H. H. Janssen, *Mnemosyne*, N. S. IV (1968), 326–27.

12. For the content, see A. Cattin, *Les thèmes lyriques dans les tragédies de Sénèque* (Neuchâtel, 1963), pp. 21–22.

13. Without argument, R. Giomini, *L. Annaei Senecae*

*Agamemnone* (Rome, n.d.), p. 55, observes: "Seneca introduce sola sulla scena la protagonista."

14. For the gnomic *stichomythia*, see B. Seidensticker, *Die Gesprächsverdichtung in den Tragödien Senecas* (Heidelberg, 1969), pp. 180 ff.

15. See, e.g., Eur. *Med.* 259 ff. and Hor. *AP* 200; further examples at Zwierlein, *op. cit.* (n. 11), p. 80, n. 23.

16. Too much is said of Phoebus (310–47), a stranger to Thebes (316), presumably for Nero's benefit: see L. Hermann, *op. cit.* (n. 5), p. 95. On the other hand, stage time is early morning (56) and invocation of the morning sun would be natural: see Soph. *Ant.* 100, *Trach.* 94 ff.

17. The Greek tragedians generally avoided naming such minor characters: see Wilamowitz, *Analecta Euripidea* (Berlin, 1875), p. 185.

779).<sup>18</sup> The chorus withdraw at 396*a*. The sudden re-entry of Clytemnestra, who hears Eurybates' lines 395*a*–96*a* ("felix ad aures nuntius venit meas!" 397*a*), masks the artificiality of an unmotivated exit, a technique repeated at 781. Eurybates' *solvite* (394*a*) could be, therefore, addressed to the chorus. An address, however, to the audience would be paralleled in the *exemplaria graeca*,<sup>19</sup> if in fact the chorus exit at 411. That the long Vergilian recital of Eurybates (421–578)<sup>20</sup> provokes no choral comment indicates that they are no longer on stage. The view is confirmed by the need of Clytemnestra to announce the entrance of Cassandra and the Iliades (586–88).

An innovation of Seneca in the *Agamemnon* is the substitution of a chorus of Mycenaean women (310, 350–51)<sup>21</sup> for Aeschylus' old men. The obvious reason is to secure economy in staging. The actors playing the women of Mycenae *exeunt* into the *scaenae frons* at 396*a* and re-enter stage-right as captive Trojan Stoics at 589.<sup>22</sup> The idea of a captive female chorus in Greece may derive ultimately from Sophocles' *Aichmalotides* (Frgs. 34–59*P*; cf. the *parachoregemata* at Soph. *Trach.* 227). In a Roman theater they would enter not by a *parodos* into the orchestra but from the stage building onto a raised Vitruvian stage and would thus not have to circle the building. Can "turba tristis incomptae comas / Iliades" (586–87) yield any clue to the chorus' size? Probably not. The phrase is Vergilian (*Iliadum turba*, *Aen.* 2. 580) and chosen first for that. The degree of illusion can never be measured precisely. If three and Cassandra are called a *turba*, they are a *turba* for the audience who do not look for twelve more. In Aeschylus' *Supplices* twelve men are the fifty daughters of Danaus; in

Euripides' *Supplices* fifteen men are the mothers of six against Thebes.

The Trojan chorus sing the second *stasimon* (589–658), an ode that falls into two parts, Stoic approval of suicide (589–611) and an *Iliu persis* (612–658), based on *Aeneid* 2. This ode introduces climactic Act IV (third *epeisodion*)<sup>23</sup> and the principal character, the Stoic Cassandra, a slave who paradoxically has attained *libertas* (796) and looks cheerfully on death. In another departure from Aeschylus, the entrance of Agamemnon is delayed to stress the importance of Cassandra. A scene that is a debased *kommos* occurs between the chorus and Cassandra. This concludes with the swooning of Cassandra (*cadit*, 776). The chorus intend to assist her (*relevemus artus*, 778) but are distracted by the entrance of Agamemnon laureled and Clytemnestra, both of whom the chorus announce (778–81). This is the last statement of the Trojan chorus who enter the *scaenae frons* with Clytemnestra. The reasons for their exit are three. They must re-enter after a partial costume change as Argive women at 808. Agamemnon orders male slaves (*famuli*, 787) rather than the Iliades to assist and revive Cassandra with cold water. The slaves are left as a guard to preserve her from self-destruction and later (997) are used by Aegisthus to drag Electra off to prison. The entrance of the *triumphator* and queen distracts the audience's attention so that the chorus may withdraw unnoticed (cf. 396*a*). The technique is varied at 807 when Agamemnon exits through the royal door and masks the unmotivated entrance of the Argive chorus from a side door. They sing an *embolimon* on the labors of a Stoic saint (808–67); this choral interlude is required for the passage of dramatic time so that banquet and murder may be prepared.

18. For the Roman practice, Steier, *s.v.* "Lorbeer," *RE*, XII (1927), 1441. 18 ff.

19. See Eur. *Or.* 128 (plural verb before the chorus have entered); my discussion at *Phoenix*, XIII (1959), 121–29; and N. G. L. Hammond, *GRBS*, XIII (1972), 439, n. 95.

20. "Cette interminable narration," L. Hermann, *op. cit.* (n. 5), p. 456.

21. See F. Leo, *RhM*, LII (1897), 511, n. 3: "Den ersten Chor im Agamemnon scheinen mykenische Jungfrauen zu bilden."

22. Hypercriticism of the nineteenth century urged the

second chorus as evidence against authenticity: see Schanz-Hosius, *Gesch. röm. Lit.*, II<sup>4</sup> (Munich, 1935), 464. F. Leo, *De Senecae tragoediis: Observationes criticae* (Berlin, 1873), pp. 89 ff. (double chorus: p. 97), restored confidence but argued that the *Agamemnon* was Seneca's first play. The evidence is not compelling, and indeed the prologue may derive from the *Thyestes*.

23. For the Horatian five-act division in Seneca, see F. Leo, *Plautinische Forschungen*<sup>2</sup> (Berlin, 1912), p. 231; for *Oedipus* see W.-H. Friedrich, *Untersuchungen zu Senecas dramatischer Technik* (Borna-Leipzig, 1933), pp. 148–151.

The Argive chorus exit at the end of their ode (867) and, as often in Seneca, do not share in the action of the *exodos*. A choral *Schlusswort*, which became the rule in Euripides,<sup>24</sup> was required for Athenian tragedy to provide exit lines that would get fifteen men and the fluteplayer out of the orchestra and down the *parodos*. No Senecan tragedy (contrast *HOet.* and *Oct.*) ends with a choral utterance. That the chorus is not present in the *exodos* is indicated because (1) they provide no comment on Cassandra's description of the regicide (contrast Aesch. *Ag.* 1346–71); and (2) at 913–17 *Electra*, not the chorus, announces the entrance of Strophius. Indeed the kidnapping of Orestes is a criminal act which they ought not to witness.

This concludes my discussion of the movements of the chorus in Seneca's *Agamemnon*. These movements illustrate an extraordinary divergence from classical Greek practice. The Senecan chorus here and elsewhere exits and re-enters far more often than a classical Greek chorus. Hence the lack of oaths of complicity and the opportunity to plot on stage. Internal exits of a Greek chorus were rare and noteworthy (Aesch. *Eum.*; Soph. *Aj.*; Eur. *Alc.*). Aeschylus' *Aitnai*,<sup>25</sup> with five scene changes and so presumably five choral exits, was renowned and extreme.<sup>26</sup> Could Sicilian production have allowed a smaller chorus? The Senecan chorus was confined

to the relatively small playing area of the raised Vitruvian stage. Exits were measured in feet rather than yards. If, as I suggest, the chorus were small, whether the seven of the Cyrene painting or better three (*tres faciunt chorum*), discreet withdrawal and re-entry became simple matters. Seneca could stage the *Agamemnon* at a dinner party with a cast of ten slaves.<sup>27</sup> Six speak (three actors and three choreuts). There are two *personae mutae* (*famuli*) and two children (Orestes and Pylades). With what degree of illusion Strophius' chariot was handled we can only conjecture.<sup>28</sup>

What we may call Zwierlein's fallacy,<sup>29</sup> the argument that Seneca's dramas were recited and not performed because there would be no room for two choruses (thirty men?) on the Vitruvian stage, loses any cogency. Zwierlein failed to ask how large the chorus was, and, by thinking in terms of Athenian practice, he failed to establish exits.<sup>30</sup> Phaedra can declare her love to Hippolytus without an oath because the chorus has gone: "en locus ab omni liber arbitrio vacat" (*Phdr.* 601; cf. *HOet.* 484). Thus the advantages of a small, mobile chorus and private stage; and, as Seneca himself reports (*QNat.* 7. 32. 3), "privatum urbe tota sonat pulpitem."

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24. See *CP*, LX (1965), 281.

25. "Wann werden die Leute lernen, dass der Titel so und nicht *Altraia* lautete?": Wilamowitz, *Kleine Schriften*, VI (Berlin, 1972), 246, n. 4; cf. *Aischylos Interpretationen* (Berlin, 1914), p. 242, n. 1; *Herakles*, I<sup>3</sup>, 56, n. 14.

26. See E. Fraenkel, *Kleine Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie*, I (Rome, 1964), 249–62; and H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus* (Berkeley, 1971), pp. 99–103.

27. Cost, therefore, would be minimal: see L. Hermann, *op. cit.* (n. 5), pp. 159–60.

28. For animals in the Greek theater, see P. D. Arnott,

*G and R*, N.S. VI (1959), 177–79. Euripidean horses are genuine; the donkey in *Ar. Vesp.* is "human": see further J. Vaio, *GRBS*, XII (1971), 342, n. 33.

29. See Zwierlein *op. cit.* (n. 11), pp. 80–81.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 81: "Aber kann sich in einem Bühnenspiel der Chor . . . einfach entfernen, ohne dass sein Weggehen motiviert wird, ja ohne dass wir den geringsten Hinweis erhalten? Dies ist ganz unglaublich . . ." The answer is "Yes, it can and does." As for *Hinweis*, we see the chorus leave and that is *Hinweis* enough that it is no longer there.

## TWO QUAESTORSHIPS

### I

C. Cassius Longinus, the tyrannicide, appears for the first time in the records of history in 53 B.C. as a gifted general immediately before and especially after the

catastrophe of Crassus' army at Carrhae. All the sources unanimously term him quaestor at that time.

According to Plutarch *Crassus* 18, the army commanded by Crassus was not pre-