

From Victor to Victim: Metadrama and Movement of Plot in Seneca's *Hercules Furens*

STAVROS FRANGOULIDIS
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
frangoulidis@gmail.com

Seneca's *Hercules Furens* dramatizes Juno's success in transforming Hercules into a criminal. This is set in direct contrast to her failed attempts in the dramatic past to bring about his demise, which only served to boost his renown as a benefactor of mankind. She achieves her success despite the existence of a competing authorial plan. Juno is bent on turning her stepson against his divine father and leading him to slaughter his family, so as to prevent him from attaining godhood; for his part, Hercules plans to implement his vision of a new Golden Age and gain immortality by styling himself as eradicator of evils¹. When the two plans collide, Hercules is unable to figure out the true meaning of events:

1 — The text of Seneca's *Hercules Furens* is from the Loeb edition by Fitch 2002. All English translations of Seneca's text are from the Chicago University works of Seneca in translation by Konstan 2017. I would like to thank David Konstan, Stephanie Winder, and Niki Ikonomaki for thoughtful comments on various stages in the development of this essay. I am also grateful to *EuGestA*'s editor Jacqueline Serris, the editorial assistant Florence Verecque and the three anonymous referees whose detailed comments improved the paper considerably. The remaining flaws are my own. On Hercules' vision of a new Golden Age, see Fitch 1987, 361; also Papadopoulou 2004, 270.

he believes himself to be eliminating the remaining harm in the world, whereas in reality he is acting as Juno's agent, directing his assault against heaven and exterminating his own *domus*. It is through the resulting upheaval that the plot is made to advance.

In the attack on heaven and slaughter of his family Hercules acquires the status of an intratextual double of the tyrant Lycus, who had previously attacked Thebes and intended to obliterate Hercules' family, had he not been killed by the hero upon his timely return to the upper world. The poetological dimension by which Hercules – in addition to Juno – guides events according to his plan, emphasizing not just the hero's madness, but also his active role in constructing the plot, underscores Seneca's originality in the handling of the mythical plot, when compared to the treatment of the same event in Euripides' *Ἡρακλῆς Μαινόμενος*. Juno effectively makes Hercules a destroyer of social values and, by extension, a living substitute for Lycus, putting a temporary halt to his aspirations to divinity.

Whereas Juno's assumption of an authorial role in the opening act of the play has been magisterially examined by Alessandro Schiesaro², almost no attention has been paid to Hercules' meta-dramatic endeavors as mover of the action, supplementing the narrative authored by Juno. The aim of this paper is to show that both plot forwarding and the eventual tragic resolution come about through the enactment of binary plot-lines of opposing objectives, enabling Juno to destroy Hercules' renown and temporarily prevent his apotheosis.

Juno as Mover of the Action

The play begins with a programmatic monologue by an earth-dwelling Juno that metapoetically dramatizes her search for a plan that will place her in control of the action³. Alluding to the deterioration of her status and a perceived loss of feminine appeal, the goddess identifies herself as Jupiter's sister rather than his wife, for her husband's concubines

2 — Schiesaro 2003, 181 and 183-6; Glinski 2017, 215; on the rich intertextual texture of Juno's prologue and the dramatic design of *Hercules Furens* and the *Aeneid* see the superb analysis in Trinacty 2015, 130-8; also Bernstein 2017, 22 and Littlewood 2018, 158. On Juno and revenge see Li Causi 2006, 118-37.

3 — As a divine prologue speaker, Juno calls to mind the supernatural characters who open other plays, always dooming the protagonists, especially the ghosts of Tantalus and the Furia in the *Thyestes*, and of Thyestes in the *Agamemnon*. Indeed these figures share with Juno the capacity to predict the future, evil habits, cthonian links and a literary function as prologue speaker. Yet in contrast to all these other figures, Juno also participates as actor in the play. For a thorough study of the prologues in *Hercules Furens*, *Agamemnon* and *Thyestes* see Lavesa 2010, 1-29. On the prologue to Thyestes see the brilliant discussion in Schiesaro 2003, passim; also Frangoulidis 2017, 179-90.

fill the sky⁴. The likely deification of Alcmena and her son has stirred her wrath. This situation has forced Juno to abandon the king of gods to his mistresses and dwell on earth. Her appearance in Thebes, a town she despises for swarming with Jupiter's adulteresses, signals her entrance into the play as a dramatic character⁵.

The rest of her narrative is in fact a dramatization of the goddess' agonizing efforts to devise a completely new strategy against Hercules, thus signifying in poetological terms the novelty of the play's plot construction. As a prerequisite for the composition of dramatic poetry, she vows to maintain her everlasting wrath and wage war on her opponent (27-8): *vivaces aget / violentus iras animus* ("my furious mind will drive my lively rage").

As a way of directing attention to the novelty of the plan under construction, Juno voices her concern over the kind of strategy needed, given the fact that her previous plans have backfired: in assigning Hercules the twelve labors she ironically offered him an opportunity to prove his divine parentage by purging the world of the various *monstra* and earning κλέος as peacemaker and benefactor of mankind, to the extent that people worship him as god (39-40): *indomita virtus colitur et toto deus / narratur orbe* ("his dauntless courage is worshipped and he's called a god worldwide"). She is now left with no monsters, frustrated in her expectations, while the hero has succeeded in living up to his name, Ἡρακλῆς, a composite of Ἥρα and -κλῆς (*Ἥρας κλέος*), i.e. "Glory of Hera", referring to the fact that he has earned his fame through his labors defeating Juno's plans⁶. Amphitryon's ensuing prayer to Jupiter to put an end to his familial woes provides information about Juno as plot instigator in the dramatic past, as well as about the way Hercules has carried out her orders to defeat violent monsters and tyrants (205-48). In this way, the play emphasizes Juno's role in controlling Hercules' life since his birth.

Searching for an innovative poetic plot, Juno considers the kind of orders from a savage tyrant (i.e. Eurystheus, lord of Argos) that could possibly harm her opponent (43-4). Her search for new challenges is motivated by an awareness that Hercules has turned the battles with the *monstra* of the twelve labors to his own advantage, to the point where the earth is not enough for him. She dwells at length on the hero's descent into the underworld, his defeat of its king and his taking of the watchdog, as if she were not the one who had tasked him with bringing Cerberus up to earth (47-9). Hercules' resounding success is backed up by eyewitness testimony of him scattering the darkness, conquering Dis and showing

4 — On the presence of Gigantomachic themes in the prologues see Chaudhuri 2014, 120.

5 — Kohn 2016, 97.

6 — Gunderson 2015, 140.

his celestial father the spoils from the nether world (50-2). Juno views the parading of the hound through every Greek city as a personal triumph over her. Hercules' defeat of his uncle enables her to surmise that he could chain up Dis and rule over his kingdom (52-4).

The trouncing of Jupiter's equal leads Juno to conclude that in his unbounded ambition Hercules may soon storm heaven to dethrone his father and rule as a tyrant in an empty sky (63-5)⁷. In this reading, the earlier scene in which Hercules stood in for Atlas and held up the heavens is read as practice for conquering the universe. What we hear is not an actual plan, but Juno's own interpretation of events, which she projects onto her stepson so as to portray him as being power hungry and keen to depose his father in order to carry out his own agenda, repeating the primordial pattern of sons turning against their fathers.

Accordingly, as a prerequisite for poetic composition, Juno bids her rage advance (75): *Perge, ira, perge* ("Go, anger, go"). The thought that Hercules may launch an attack on heaven prompts the goddess to renew her narrative strategy and therefore her *ars poetica*, so as to achieve her poetological objectives. Rather than employing the tyrant of Argos as her intermediary (78), she resolves to enact her plot alone and have her opponent torn apart. The aim of this new *modus operandi* is to turn Hercules against the Titans and the giant Typhoeus, who dared to oppose the ruler of Mt. Olympus; but Juno abandons this idea on reflecting that in the past, as Jupiter's ally, Hercules defeated the very same forces of disorder. At this moment she hits upon a strikingly innovative idea, poetologically reflecting the newness of this plot narrative, namely to turn Hercules against himself, by transforming him into a *monstrum* par excellence (as is made clear later), and therefore frustrate his aspirations and values as patron of mankind (85)⁸. This idea is ingenious for another reason: Hercules is the monster killer par excellence and so will definitely defeat himself.

In concocting her plan, as a hellish poet Juno quite appropriately draws her frenzied inspiration from forces of the underworld, as it were her own cthonic Muses (100): *Incipite, famulae Ditis* ("Maids of Hades, start!"). The plan involves Juno summoning the hellish Furies associated with madness to inflict frenzy on her stepson so as to alienate his personality and turn him against himself. In this context she orders Hercules to despise humanity and storm heaven (89-90): *i nunc, superbe, caelitum sedes pete, / humana temne!* ("Go now, proud man, and seek the seat of gods"). Essentially speaking, the call to several personified deities such

7 — Chaudhuri 2014, 124.

8 — Papadopoulou 2004, 276-7 here notices an instance of double motivation, in the sense that the madness is divinely oriented, but is described as Hercules fighting against himself.

as Discordia, Scelus, Impietas, Error and Furor as her assistants defines what is to ensue as an act of *nefas*. When the Furies appear onstage, Juno orders them to whirl their burning torches and inflict insanity on her opponent as atonement for his desecrating the rites of the underworld and returning safe to the earth above, regardless of the fact that she herself had directed Hercules to the lower regions. In metaliterary terms, this madness must represent the alienation of the hero's character in order to override the filial piety of his plan and turn a son against a divine father. At this point Juno orders the Furies to send their madness onto her first in order to carry out some action worthy of a 'loving' *noverca* (110-12): *me me, sorores, mente deiectam mea / versate primam, facere si quicquam apparo / dignum noverca* ("My sisters, me! first whirl me, driven from my mind, if I plan to do something suited to a stepmother"). She thus calls to mind the titular character in Seneca's *Phaedra* in her loving devotion to, and care for, her stepson. In this role she announces her intention to assist her stepson in shooting arrows against his own family and ensuring they meet their mark, in contrast to the harsh labors she assigned Hercules in the dramatic past, which failed to bring about his end. Juno further sets a dramatic time for the enactment of her inset play (113-14): it is to take place when Hercules returns to the upper air strong in arms, and sees his children safe, thus prefiguring the events pertaining to the Lycus episode. With an innovative narrative corresponding to her plan, Juno intends to defend heaven, putting a halt to the hero's aspirations to divinity.

Lycus' Plan

Exploiting Hercules' absence in the underworld, the exile Lycus seizes the Theban throne, killing king Creon, father of Megara and her brothers, who are heirs to the throne⁹. The profanity of Lycus' conduct becomes all the more evident in view of the fact that in lines 259-67 Amphitryon presents Thebes both as a land often visited by the gods and as a place that regularly supplies the heavens with new divinities, thus characterizing the city as the terrestrial equivalent of the heavenly abodes. To consolidate his power, the usurper reveals his evil plan either to wed Megara and thus minimize the risk of revolt (345-9) or to eliminate Hercules' family if she refuses to comply with his demands (350-2). Total failure to implement the first option leads Lycus to put the second option in train. To avoid pollution by witnessing the death of his family, Amphitryon begs to die first, but as a true tyrant Lycus refuses to grant his wish. Thus so far in the action Lycus appears as Hercules' distorted mirror image, just like other cruel tyrants, e.g. Eryx in Sicily, Antaeus of Libya, etc. (482-4).

9 — For a discussion of Lycus and other tyrants in the play see Lavesa 2008, 73-93.

Hercules as Plot Composer

In Act III, Hercules returns to the upper air at the height of his glory. In more ways than one, his victory speech on ascending (592-615) gains in meaning from resonances with key elements in Juno's opening programmatic speech. When bringing Cerberus to earth, Hercules explicitly mentions that he acted under orders (604-6), contradicting Juno's previous claim that his journey to Hades was undertaken on his own initiative (47-9). Reflection on this labor triggers the boast that he has conquered the infernal gods and that he could become ruler of the underworld if he so wished (609-12)¹⁰. His bragging calls to mind Juno, when she views the hero's victory over death as presaging an assault on heaven to dethrone his father (64-5). In retrospect such boasting offers support for Juno's view of Hercules and, by extension, her plan to bring about his demise. In his sense of invincibility, Hercules challenges Juno to assign him further labors, casting doubts on whether she has any left (614-15)¹¹. Powerful dramatic irony emerges in the audience awareness that Juno has already hatched her plan for his demise with the help of the Furies, who come from the same underworld that Hercules claims to have conquered. Upon learning of the injustices wrought in Thebes, he hastens off stage to eliminate the tyrant¹².

Hercules' hubris reaches new heights in the narrative of his thanksgiving sacrifice to Jupiter and the gods after his disposal of Lycus, confirming the claims made by the goddess about her opponent's arrogance. In the appeal to his father and the gods for help in establishing peace in both the upper and the lower regions, Hercules follows the order of a traditional appeal. This involves invoking a deity and the individual attributes of each other god mentioned¹³; but he deviates from the tradi-

10 — Fitch 1987, 279. See also Minerva's punishing Arachne for her boasts in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 6.1-145.

11 — Fitch 1987, 279.

12 — Between Hercules' exit to kill Lycus and his return, the intervening period is appropriately filled by Theseus' account of the descent to the Underworld, offering information on how Hercules played out Juno's order to fetch Cerberus to earth. The narrative consists of two parts consists of two parts. The first section offers an account of the journey of the souls to the lower region, the topography of the underworld and its ruler (658-759), while the second is devoted to Hercules' descent (760-827). The two parts are distinct from one another, with the second offering a correction of the first in several ways: unlike the souls who are dragged down through an irresistible pull (676-8) to a place from which there is no possibility of escape (681-2), Hercules descends of his own accord; and unlike the souls, who reach the ruler of the infernal abodes, portrayed as the most terrifying of all entities (726-7), Hercules subdues Charon (774-5) and Cerberus (803-4). The overpowering of the watchdog terrifies the rulers of the underworld, who eventually grant Hercules permission to leave, taking Cerberus and Theseus with him (805-6). On the hyper-epic elements in Theseus' recount of underworld topography see excellent discussion in Baertschi 2015, 189-91.

13 — On the format of prayer see Donovan 2019, 163. The sacrifice itself is replete with resonances of contemporary Rome: just as a military commander would offer a victory sacrifice to Jupiter,

tional pattern according to which all gods are included by invoking, after Jupiter, only his paternal step-brothers, explicitly excluding all those born to his *noverca*. The narrative of the sacrifice further stresses his irreverence. Scorning sacrificial etiquette, Hercules dismisses Amphitryon's advice to cleanse his hands from Lycus' slaughter. What is more, he even engages in sacrilegious thoughts because he wishes to throw the body of his enemy onto the pyre¹⁴. Amphitryon recommends that his son pray to his celestial father to put an end to his ordeals as a means of acknowledging subservience and, in metaliterary terms, terminating the play; but Hercules places himself on a par with his father since he opts to offer prayers worthy of Jupiter and himself, thus securing the continuation of the play.

In his prayer Hercules clearly assumes the role of mover of the action¹⁵. He elucidates his vision of a world at peace, which is tantamount to the return of a new Golden Age¹⁶: he asks that the planets continue on their course unhindered, and that all manner of evils be eliminated, including wars, tempests, thunders, floods, poisonous herbs and savage tyrants (927-39). This vision can be seen as potentially threatening to his father, insofar as he opts for the return of an era terminated by Jupiter's reign¹⁷.

In setting out his ideals for the world, Hercules appears in the same position as Juno, who composes her plan to defend heaven against threats, although his prayer contradicts Juno's plan for achieving this goal. What is more, in compliance with his metapoetic program he also takes on the role of destroyer of any *monstrum* in the making that might put his vision at risk (937-9)¹⁸. He thus calls to mind Juno, who also assumes the role of the loving *noverca* in her narrative in order to thwart his aspirations to divinity. What Seneca seems to have added to the Euripidean *Ἡρακλῆς Μαινόμενος* is precisely the poetological dimension of Hercules' narrative, by which he too, like Juno, drives the plot forward. The audience are aware that Hercules has liberated mankind from fear of so many evil

so Hercules arranges to give thanks to his father and the gods; and as a general wears a laurel wreath, so Hercules crowns his hair with branches of his beloved poplar (894).

14 — Shelton 1977, 63; Papadopoulou 2004, 273-4, 276.

15 — The plot of *Hercules Furens* has a superficial parallel with that of the *Thyestes*, but in that play, Atrous activates the Fury's masterplot while his brother falls victim to his brother's plot. The same pattern is also seen in Seneca's *Agamemnon*, where the titular character falls prey to the deception hatched by Clytemestra and Aegisthus. A remote analogue could be seen in Seneca's *Oedipus*. The play contains two plotlines, one authored by Oedipus and one by Tiresias. The two narratives interact with one another and Tiresias discloses the murderer of Laius, a fact which makes the king furious. The continuation of Oedipus' narrative simply confirms the validity of Tiresias' narrative. For an excellent reading of the play from a metadramatic perspective see Schiesaro 1997, 93-8.

16 — For an excellent discussion of Hercules' vision of a new Golden Age see Fitch 1987, 361; Davis 1993, 128-9; Shelton 1977, 64.

17 — Davis 1993, 128-9.

18 — On Hercules' eagerness to undertake any labor left in the context of his ardent wish to attain divine status see Papadopoulou 2004, 274.

creatures that he is effectively the only *monstrum* left in the world. So, his eagerness to abolish any ill in the making in truth prefigures the enactment of Juno's plot, in which he is set to fight against himself in acts that detract from his role as cultural hero, as the goddess has clearly made the hero himself the *monstrum* in her plan.

The Plans Clash

In the play there are two distinct plans, corresponding to two narratives from alternative perspectives, one hatched by Juno and the other by Hercules. This bifocal technique, so to speak, shares with dramatic irony the notion that a text's message is perceived in different ways by its various intratextual recipients as to the true meaning of events¹⁹. Hercules believes that he is implementing his vision of a new age, whereas in truth Amphitryon recounts the horrific results of his madness, i.e. becoming a theomach²⁰ and destroyer of his family, which as the audience know point to the enactment of Juno's plan. Ambiguity is thus embedded in the fabric of the play, securing audience engagement and advancing the plot²¹.

The two narratives intersect when Hercules prays for the appearance of any remaining *monstrum*, and finds his sight reduced by darkness at midday (939-44)²². The abrupt onset of darkness signals here, as elsewhere in Seneca²³, divinely sent madness, in this case imposed by Juno with the aid of the Furies. In metapoetic terms, Hercules' madness functions as a mask, embodying the assumption of a tyrannical persona similar to that of Lycus, and therefore of the hero's role as a *monstrum*. Hallucination usually follows the blurring of vision. This is underlined when Hercules imagines seeing the Nemean lion about to destroy the rest of the planets. Amphitryon's confusion is stressed when he states his wonder at Hercules' distorted view of the world, which is not visible to others (952-4), intimating to the Juno-primed audience that he has been possessed by the Furies.

The parallel plotlines of opposing objectives continue to intersect as the play progresses. In the mistaken impression that he is implementing

19 — I thank David Konstan for discussion on the relationship between ambiguity and irony.

20 — The term theomach is from the detailed analysis by Chaudhuri 2014.

21 — For an excellent discussion of the ambivalence of Hercules' heroism oscillating between virtue and excess see Papadopoulou 2004, 268-80.

22 — Gunderson 2015, 138 makes the interesting observation that Hercules' madness contains a vision of the unwriting of his own story.

23 — E.g. in *Agamemnon*, the *vates* Cassandra sees the nourishing light disappearing and deep night darkening her eyes, as an indication of possession by Apollonian frenzy (726-7): *fugit lux alma et obscurat genas / nox alta et aether abditus tenebris latet* ("The life nourishing light has fled, a deep darkness covers my eyelids and heaven lies concealed in darkness").

his own ideals for peace in the world, Hercules intends to rise to heaven to remove the disturbance to the universe brought about by the lion, given his father's promise of godhood; but in truth he unwittingly becomes the instrument of Juno's narrative by turning against his father (65): *sceptra praeripiet patri!* ("he'll snatch his father's scepter"). The transition occurs when Hercules suddenly imagines that his father may block his ascent, perhaps accustomed as he is even in his madness to seeing obstacles everywhere. In any case, Hercules resolves to force his way into heaven as his power cannot be contained on earth (960-1)²⁴: *non capit terra Herculem / tandemque superis reddit* ("Earth can't hold Hercules, at last restores him to those above"). He imagines all the gods in heaven summoning him to their council, with the exception of one goddess, in all probability Juno²⁵. This objection determines his resort to violence, threatening to break the barred gates of the firmament²⁶, thus delivering on Juno's predictions that he will defy Jupiter and the gods to rule alone in an empty sky (67-8)²⁷.

Hercules' attempt to insert himself among the gods quite appropriately takes on the colors of the primordial struggles between the Olympians and the Titans/Giants for control of the universe. This view is backed up by the threat to liberate his grandfather Saturn from his bonds and set him against the impious reign of his father (965-7). In this context, Hercules also calls the Titans, allies of Saturn, into action, under his leadership (967-8). That the rebellion calls to mind the Titanomachy emerges in two further ways: as the Titans throw rocks from Mt. Orthys against the gods, so Hercules intends to throw clifftops and mountains full of Centaurs against them; and as the two giants, Otus and Ephialtes, attempted to storm the abode of gods by piling up three mountains – Pelion, Ossa and Olympus – one on the top of the other, Hercules declares his intent to place Olympus on top of both Ossa and Pelion as a pathway to heaven, or else tear it down.

In his limited perception of events Amphitryon takes on the function of a blocking character as he exhorts his son to restrain his insane impulses (973-5); but the extra-textual audience are well positioned to envisage his failure to alter the course of the plot given that Hercules is acting in a plan far removed from his own. This view is confirmed as Hercules imagines the Giants rising, either for or against him. His latest image recasts his planned attack on heaven as an echo of the Gigantomachy. The hero's vision of the Fury brandishing her torch in his face foreshadows the lethal

24 — The same could be said about the underworld: Charon's bark, capable of carrying huge crowds, sank under his weight (775-6).

25 — See Chaudhuri 2014, 132.

26 — On the image of the gates/doorway as a mark of transgression and its Lucretian resonances see the excellent analysis in Littlewood 2018, 163-5.

27 — Chaudhuri 2014, 133.

course of his madness when compared to his attack on heaven, which was only a figment of imagination in his fit of madness.

The unfolding of Juno's narrative continues unabated. The critical point at which it directly intersects with the ambitious plan drawn up by Hercules is the moment when he turns his gaze towards the temple that forms the central part of the stage scenery. In the mistaken belief that it is the palace in which his enemy's children are hiding²⁸, he resolves to kill them and implement his ideal of a new Golden Age in the universe (989). Amphitryon is confined to the role of onstage spectator, commenting on the insanity that completely overcomes Hercules as he prepares his bow and kills his child, now acting solely as an instrument of a plan far removed from his own.

Assessing the enacted events from the perspective of his own narrative, Hercules now imagines that Lycus' other children are also hiding in the temple. His haste to dispatch them is framed in terms of the greater battle against the lord of Argos supposedly awaiting him at Mycenae. The knocking down of the door posts makes light pour in, enabling Hercules to spot a second child. Amphitryon reports the lethal consequences of his madness which, as the audience know, point to his role as an unknowing agent in Juno's winning narrative: the child holds his father's knees in supplication, but Hercules whirls him in the air and scatters his brains all over the roof, while his wife flees from her hiding place clutching her baby.

Suggestive of his inability to comprehend his son's madness Amphitryon, once more, assumes the functions of a blocking character to prevent the movement of the inset plot: he exhorts Megara to calm her husband rather than look for a refuge, given the impossibility of any escape (1012-15). His daughter-in-law faithfully carries out these stage directions. The audience however are well positioned to envisage the horrific culmination of his orders. In what provides evidence that he is acting in a plan completely at odds with his own, Hercules mistakes his wife for his *noverca* and vows to kill the child in her presence. What is more, Amphitryon also engages directly in the events, calling attention to his son's mad assault on his own blood line. But his inability to influence events yet again becomes clear from the tragic conclusion to the slaughter in what serves as evidence of Hercules' acting as an unwitting agent in Juno's winning narrative: in shock at his father's blazing face, the infant loses his life (1022-3), while Hercules bludgeons his wife to death with his club (1024-6). The metatheatrical impact of *cernere* (1026) is hard to overlook when Amphitryon, unable to watch the unfolding horrors, calls upon his son

28 — Kohn 2013, 104.

to kill him; but the chorus forestalls such a development by exhorting the old man to spare his son's hands from at least one crime, that of patricide.

The intersection of binary plotlines is also to be seen following the perpetration of the crime. In the belief he has implemented part of his plan to impose his own ideals in the world, Hercules expresses satisfaction at having eliminated the tyrant's family, and consecrates his victims to Juno. He also promises her more victims at Argos, meaning Eurystheus, in what serves as an indication of moving forward his plan of eliminating tyrants from the world. In truly tragic fashion he consecrates his dead wife and children to Juno as unknowing agent in her narrative plan for his attack on heaven and the extinction of his family. This changes the scope of his initial sacrifice that had intended to honor Jupiter and the gods for their help in establishing peace in both the lower and the upper regions. Indicative of his inability to bear his grief from watching the enacted horrors, Amphitryon, once more, offers himself as sacrificial victim; but Hercules' collapse onstage hinders such an outcome, as the old man's death is not included in Juno's script.

Seen in its entirety, Juno's narrative plan consists of two distinct parts: a) Hercules' rise against his celestial father and the gods (89-90); and b) the extinction of his family (117-21). At first glance, it is not at all obvious how the two sections are connected to each other; but on closer inspection there emerges a coherence between the two. In Juno's view, Hercules is aspiring to become ruler of heaven. She thus contrives her plan of his assault on heaven and the murder of his family as the means to deprive him, in Jupiter's eyes, of the right to deification. In fact, the severing of all human ties is often represented as a prerequisite for deification. For example, this precondition for elevation to the heavens can be seen in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, 9.250-4: as Hercules lies on his funerary pyre on Oeta, Jupiter assures the gods that Vulcan is only destroying the parts he owes to his human mother, whereas those deriving from him cannot perish because they are beyond the reach of death. On this reading, Juno may be viewed as unknowingly contributing to the eventual fulfillment of Jupiter's plan (and Hercules' goal) to grant immortality to his beloved son, insofar as her novel plan enables Hercules to cut all his ties to earth. In this context, it is worth noting that Hercules does not kill Amphitryon, despite the latter's pleas that he do so, because the old man is not his biological father. Thus Juno effects a devastating blow on her opponent with the help of forces from the underworld that in his arrogance Hercules claims to have defeated (610-12). What is more, in enacting her plan Juno also exacts sufficient revenge on Thebes for providing her husband with adulteresses (19-21), as Hercules kills his sons, leaving the city without successors.

Intratexts

The interaction between Hercules as Juno's agent and Lycus is such that in his madness Hercules becomes an ideal reflection of the monstrous tyrant. This serves to illuminate the kind of *monstrum* Juno had in mind for turning Hercules into so that he would defeat himself²⁹. This notion becomes clear in a number of ways. In his imaginary assault on heaven to eliminate the evils in the world, Hercules replicates the ambitious tyrant who usurps the throne of Thebes and murders King Creon along with his sons. The parallel is all the stronger as the city has been earlier presented as the remote equivalent of the heavenly abodes. Furthermore, Hercules' monstrous act of killing his wife and children derives from his monstrous Lycus-like arrogance and ambition; Hercules succeeds where Lycus failed due to the hero's timely return from the underworld. It is likewise noteworthy that Hercules does not acquiesce to his stepfather's plea to kill him along with the rest of the family, much as Lycus, true to his identity as a tyrant, refused to have him killed³⁰. Last but not least, having committed the murders Hercules collapses onstage, signaling the fulfilment of Juno's plan. This feature may serve as the figurative analogue to the death of Lycus, insofar as in his madness Hercules takes on the tyrant's persona. The dialogic interaction between the two episodes turns Hercules into a replay of and doublet for the hubristic and ambitious tyrant Lycus, and vice versa. Thus arrogant aspirations receive the kind of punishment typical of tragedy.

Variant Readings

The overlap of the two plotlines continues to be seen in the different readings of the enacted event by its various intratextual recipients³¹. Amphytrion is both aware of Juno's relentless pursuit of his son and acts as internal spectator (205-48). By a process of deduction he is eventually able to perceive Juno's involvement in the events, thus acquiring a perspective closer to the play's audience. On the other hand, Hercules reads events from the standpoint of his own narrative. Insofar as he recognizes his own responsibility, he feels guilty – wholly appropriately – not only for his error in mistaking the identity of his own family, but also for his

29 — This is set in sharp contrast to Lycus' portrayal as Hercules' ideal counterpoint before his ascent. The idea of Hercules as Lycus' double is also seen in Euripides' *Ἡρακλῆς Μαινόμενος*.

30 — Rose, 1979, 138; also Papadopoulou 2004, 272-3.

31 — A continual interaction between diverse viewpoints concerning the enacted events is also seen in Seneca's *Agamemnon*. Clytemnestra and Aegisthus understand Agamemnon's murder as a result of their desire to avenge the king's ill treatment of the royal *domus*. Cassandra, on the other hand, offers the Trojan view point: she reads Agamemnon's death and the earlier damage of the Argive fleet as re-enacting Priam's death and the fall of Troy. On this see Frangoulidis 2016, 395-409.

pride, which Juno exploited. However, his view is necessarily limited by his sudden fit of madness that prevents him from having a thorough grasp of events.

Hercules' awakening from sleep marks the gradual lifting of the illusion. A partial return to dramatic reality is seen when, still disoriented, he wonders at why he is surrounded by scenes of death, despite having returned from the infernal abodes, thus marking his return to the narrative reality at the point of his ascent from the underworld. His sense of might is stressed when he observes that his *arma* are missing and seeks to know his conqueror, who must be some new and mightier son sired by his divine father (1154-6). The audience are aware that Amphitryon has ordered that the weapons be removed lest he regain them while mad (1053).

On recognizing the corpses as belonging to his own family, Hercules concludes that some Lycus rules the kingdom, in what amounts to a reflection of his metapoetic role as agent in Juno's narrative, insofar as he is the king of Thebes following the murder of his father-in-law (1161-3). He further misconstrues the motives of his conqueror as someone bent on exacting retribution for the deaths of tyrants and monsters so as to annul his role as cultural hero (1169-71). Powerful dramatic irony is created when Hercules challenges his conqueror to a duel (1171-3), in what amounts to a repetition of his previous fight against himself, given that the alleged enemy is none other than his monster self. The fact that Hercules sees Amphitryon and Theseus hiding their faces and shedding tears allows him to understand their nonverbal gesture as pointing to some act of shame. He seeks to know whether the ruthless lord of Argos or Lycus' associates are responsible for the crime, reinforcing the sense that the persona he put on in his madness was that of a tyrant. From his vantage point over the events, Amphitryon discourages his son from action in what would serve as an intimation to the audience of Hercules' turning against himself; but Hercules demands retribution, in compliance with the poetics of his creation to impose his own ideals for peace in the world. His counter-response that nothing worse can occur prompts his father's comment on the limited knowledge of his ruin. This quite appropriately motivates Hercules to stretch forth his hand in supplication seeking an answer and to spot blood both on his hands and on his shafts, stained with Hydra's poison. It is at this point he fully recognizes, in a twist of dramatic irony, that he is the perpetrator of *scelus*, i.e. not some other ruthless tyrant, as imagined so far (1200).

The opposition of binary readings regarding the authorship of *nefas* continues to be seen in the sequence of the exchange between father and son. As spokesman for Juno's perspective, Amphitryon informs his son that the sorrow is his own as an unknowing instrument in her plan and

that authorial responsibility for the crime lies with the *noverca* (1201-2): *luctus est istic tuus, / crimen novercae, casus hic culpa caret* (“The grief is yours, / the crime’s your stepmother’s; this chance lacks guilt”). But viewing the same event from the standpoint of his own narrative plan, Hercules ascribes his crime to his own responsibility. This view becomes clear from his subsequent entreaties to his divine father to inflict on him savage punishments as befitting a criminal (1202-18). Amphitryon views the fact that Hercules ascribes his crime to his own authorial responsibility as an indication that his son is still under the influence of Juno’s madness (1219-21). That Hercules views himself as bearing authorial responsibility for the crime is further underscored by his ensuing appeal to Earth to hide him in the lower regions for his misdeed (1221-6). This calls to mind Juno’s prediction that on discovering what he has done as the victim of her narrative he will seek to return to the infernal abodes (116-17): *et cupiat mori / ab inferis reversus* (“and wish, returned from those below, to die”).

The dissonance arising from the variant readings, corresponding to opposing viewpoints of the same event, continues to be seen as the play progresses. Viewing events from the perspective of Juno’s plotline, Amphitryon considers his son to be an unwitting victim of error due to madness imposed by the Furies, and hence as blame-free (1237): *quis nomen usquam sceleris errori addidit?* (“Whoever’s given error the name of sin?”). Because Hercules assesses events from the authorial perspective of his own plotline he views his mistake as a crime (1238)³²: *saepe error ingens sceleris obtinuit locum* (“Huge error oft has earned the rank of sin”). Amphitryon once again exhorts his son to show fortitude as the only means of coping with divine wrath (1239); yet Hercules feels *pudor* (1240) and seeks to regain his arms, so as to find a path to death (1242-4) – in opposition to the earlier offering of his armor and hands to the pyre of the dead – and hence prevent a replay of a similar *scelus* in the future (1229-36). His urge to seek death motivates Amphitryon’s appeal to him to show concern for his father’s sorrows (1246-57)³³. In his strong sense of guilt, Hercules is impervious to his father’s pleas. Attempting to dissuade his son from killing himself, Amphitryon warns him that he will commit patricide, further tainting his *kleos* (1263); but Hercules naively

32 — On guilt based on the opposition between legalistic and moralistic perspectives in Seneca’s *Phoenissae* see the excellent discussion in Frank 1994, 135-6. What is more, the exchange between Hercules and Amphitryon in Seneca’s *HF* resembles that between Oedipus and Antigone in the *Phoenissae*. The connection is corroborated by the presence of the theme of suicide in both plays: Hercules and Oedipus wish to die; whereas Amphitryon and Antigone strive to persuade their respective interlocutors to follow the opposite course. The similarity, however, discloses a contrast: Hercules wishes to kill himself for a crime that he has already committed, whereas Oedipus seeks to end his life for the criminal acts his sons are expected to carry out. In Oedipus’ view the imminent *scelus* of his sons is based on his own criminal conduct in the past and in turn explains his present distress.

33 — Gunderson 2015, 140.

thinks that he can bypass this development via his own suicide, whereas the audience are aware that his action will only precipitate it (1263).

The overlap of distinct readings over the same event continues even further. Hercules is so convinced that his plan has led to the crime that he misconstrues what the audience know to be true. When Amphitryon exhorts him to keep in mind his noble achievements and seek pardon for his *crimen* (1265-6), he responds in a manner imbued with metapoetic traits: he claims that all of his heroic accomplishments should be credited to his *noverca*'s orders, whereas the heinous crime of slaughtering his own family was a product of his own creation (1268): *laudanda feci iussus; hoc unum meum est* ("On orders I did glorious deeds. This one is mine"). From a thematic point of view, Amphitryon's identification of Hercules' misdeed as *crimen* (1266) prepares for the dominance of the purification theme to follow more credibly at the play's end. Even though Amphitryon's pleas are seconded by Theseus, in his frenzy Hercules seeks to eliminate the *monstrum* in himself, faithful to the *ars poetica* of his earlier creation (1279-81):

purgare terras propero; iam dudum mihi
monstrum impium saevumque et immitte ac ferum
oberrat.

I rush to purge the world: long since a monster, evil,
savage, pitiless and wild's confronted me.

Here Hercules acknowledges his monstrosity and therefore his guilt, resulting from character flaws that this play has associated with tyranny and *ambitio*, which Juno masterfully exploited. The metapoetic nuance of his endeavor is stressed when he exhorts himself to undertake the task, using the term *opus*, the *terminus technicus* for a piece of literary and artistic workmanship (1282-3)³⁴: *agedum, dextra, conare aggredi / ingens opus, labore bis seno amplius* ("Come, hand, try and attempt this huge task, greater than twelve labors"). The hero's bow and club constitute essential props in the realization of this new aim. Therefore, Hercules threatens acts of sacrilege, if he is not given his arms: he resolves to tear down Thebes – the city has already been cast as the earthly analogue of heaven (259-67) – to bury himself under the rebels, and he further threatens to turn upon him the mass that sits mid-sky and keeps the gods separate (1293-4).

The tension arising from the conflicting responses to the same event is resolved in the closing sequence of the action. Amphitryon gives in to the threats and returns the arms to his son. On regaining his weapons, Hercules identifies his arrow as the one that killed his child (1296):

³⁴ — OLD, s.v. *opus* 3a.

hoc en peremptus spiculo cecidit puer (“Look, my boy fell by this shaft”). Amphitryon yet again illuminates Juno’s role as loving *noverca* in the enactment of her ruse, when he calls attention to the goddess having used his hands to shoot the arrow (1297): *hoc Iuno telum manibus emisit tuis* (“Juno shot this arrow with your hands”). However, Hercules assures his father that this time he alone will use his weapons (1297): *hoc nunc ego utar* (“I’ll use it now”).

The plan is put into action in what amounts to a replay of his plan to impose his ideals for peace in the world which never actually took place, in contrast to his own beliefs to the contrary. Hercules notches the shaft; but Amphitryon preempts his son’s move: he brings his sword to his chest (1300-1), redefining Hercules’ frenzied desire to seek death as one of patricide committed by a sane Hercules (1310-11), in sharp contrast to his previous *scelera* of filicide and uxoricide, carried out unawares as an unwitting agent in Juno’s narrative. The old man’s attempt to end his life produces results. Indicative of the triumph of reason over passion, Hercules eventually consents to abandon his urge to kill himself, eventually perceiving that his father needs him³⁵. His decision to go on with his life also marks the victory of Amphitryon’s vantage point regarding the enacted events, in alignment with the reading advanced by the play’s extra-textual audience as recipients of Juno’s programmatic speech.

As prefigured by the dominance of the theme of crime, Hercules’ decision to live on motivates his agonizing search for a remote terrain of exile in both the upper and the lower regions. Echoing the play’s earlier emphasis on the earth and underworld not being able to contain Hercules the hero, the polluted Hercules now reaches the painful realization that there is actually no place for him as he is known everywhere. Theseus presents a solution by offering absolution in Athens. The city is already practiced in removing pollution from gods, already having purged the hands of Gravidus/Mars from murder, thus also prefiguring Hercules’ future apotheosis³⁶. This indicates that Juno’s success in alienating Hercules’ persona has not closed off this outcome for Hercules, as she intended, notably different to that of his doublet Lycus. Thus, Seneca’s play ends by gesturing towards the possibility that Juno’s temporary narrative control has only had partial success and that Hercules’ goal of deification will extra-textually be achieved.

35 — See Mazzoli 2008, 193-207, who, in addition to offering a thorough analysis of the structure of the entire play, also focuses on the play’s final scene viewing the defeated Hercules as humiliated and as forced to recede from his views.

36 — Fitch 1979, 462.

Conclusion

Hercules Furens dramatizes Juno's success in tainting the renown of her opponent. The action is permeated by the intermingling of perspectives corresponding to two narratives with opposing goals: one hatched by Juno and the other by Hercules. The collision of the two generates confusion on the part of Hercules as to the true interpretation of events, all of which are witnessed by Amphitryon. In turning on his family, Hercules is rendered an intratextual double of the tyrant Lycus, who earlier expressed his intent to extirpate the royal line. Thus Juno takes advantage of the pride of her opponent and deals a devastating blow to his renown, turning him into a *monstrum* and in particular into a doublet for the ambitious and hubristic tyrant Lycus. Juno's success in this plan contrasts markedly with her metapoetic endeavors in the dramatic past, in which the series of labors she assigned to bring about Hercules' demise only served to elevate his status (at the cost of Juno's) and prove him worthy of his name.

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