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THE PATH OF PASSION IN SENECA'S *PHAEDRA*

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In this paper I try to understand Phaedra in its own terms but not as a literary critic. Starting from what Staley rightly confirms, that for the Stoics tragedy was not a form antithetical to philosophy,[1] I argue that philosophical concepts, such as passion, can be examined separately and ad hoc in each Senecan tragedy. This seems the only reliable method to distinguish whether they are employed as stoic concepts or not, despite Hine's thesis that instead it should be shown that these concepts are more Stoic than Epicurean, Peripatetic, or anything else. In my view, Phaedra stands out as a unique demonstration of how Seneca comprehends passion in the form of love or desire.
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Who dares to speak of hell in the presence of love? / May he be cursed forever, that idle dreamer, / The first one who in his stupidity / Entranced by a sterile, insoluble problem / Wished to mix honesty with what belongs to love!

Charles Baudelaire, *Damned Women (Delphine and Hippolyta)*, 15-16.

Phaedra belongs to Seneca's early plays and was most probably written before 54 AD, after the *Consolations* and at least seven years before his *Moral Epistles to Lucilius.*[2] In this paper I will try to understand *Phaedra* in its own terms but not as a literary critic. Starting from what Staley rightly confirms, that for the Stoics tragedy was not a form antithetical to philosophy,[3] I will argue that philosophical concepts, such as passion, can be examined separately and *ad hoc* in each Senecan tragedy.

This seems the only reliable method to distinguish if they are employed as stoic concepts or not, despite Hine's thesis that instead it should be shown that these concepts are more Stoic than Epicurean, Peripatetic, or anything else. Comparison may lead to conceptual confusion, and showing directly the "essence" of the matter might be more helpful. In my view, *Phaedra* stands out as a unique demonstration of how Seneca comprehends passion in the form of love or desire. Also, I will make an effort to detect the specific characteristics of passion and to enumerate the ways it can be recognized in accordance with the Stoic tradition. Certainly, there lies a certain danger in the effort to use a philosophical oeuvre as a key to understanding drama, even if both works were written by the same person. Especially there lie even more critical implications when one tries to apply moral rules to a love affair. Philosophy takes a clear and systematic view of the world, while the dense universe of poetry is not constrained by clarity or system. Poetry attempts to describe or illuminate life, not explain it. Of course, a great artist's illuminations transcend description and sometimes provide philosophical insights.

I appreciate that philosophy, even Stoic philosophy, has found dealing with passions difficult. Passion seems too embedded in irrationality to yield philosophical insight. So, does Seneca have a perspicuous philosophical vision or is he perhaps confused and deluded by his poetic investigations? In the case of passion, I believe that his approach can be legitimate: passions are inherent and indispensable in the examination of human existence by the stringent canons of moral philosophy, while there is no drama without the delineation of their influence. That would be my answer to Hine who takes the reductive view that: "Stoic interpretations are inherently Procrustean, stretching features of the play that loosely resemble Stoicism till they fit the Stoic bed, and amputating or ignoring other features that do not fit."[4] While the danger that Hine brings forward is evident, it remains doubtful whether "other features" should be intended to fit. Precisely these other features are the essence of tragedy. If human life is a chaotic field of action, it is coherent that tragedy should be able to display the same pattern. It follows that passion is a principal subject in Stoic philosophy while it subsists as a key issue in drama. As a matter of fact, it is always passion which generates drama.[5] But drama does not intend to condemn passionate behavior (and of course, because of that, it

lacks a didactic purpose); what it does is to depict it clearly, illustrate it to its full complexity. However, the portrayal of passions in drama becomes a very intriguing initiation to the subject when the Stoic writings of Seneca are taken into consideration in parallel. And vice versa: Seneca's philosophy can provide the method to reach the meaning of his tragic poetry more meticulously and in greater depth.

Hine successfully shows that a play can receive diverse "truth values": an Epicurean can discern parts of his own doctrine in *Phaedra*, and so can a Stoic.[6] For Hine, such "confrontation" of principles within a text is characteristic of the absence of a concrete and secure philosophical message. Thus tragedy is left to explore the world by its own means, not by the readings of the Stoics or anyone else. I believe that Hine's position should be negotiable. While in some parts I am not sure that his interpretation of what could be taken as Stoic or Epicurean is to be considered as quite right, I think he exaggerates the point that Seneca could not sustain the occurrence of elements of Stoic dogma in his plays. Luque Moreno observes this in his comment on Hine's paper, concluding that that Seneca's theatre may be a kind of poetry with an evident doctrinal content but lacking the systematic presentation of a philosophical treatise.[7] I would add that Seneca's main virtue as a writer is by no means concrete systematization, not even in his philosophical prose. The question would actually be whether there is indeed any means of conveying an explicit philosophical message in drama while still retaining the virtues of theatre. I do not think that this is possible due to the fact that it would cause a generic problem, i.e. to distinguish whether this is philosophy or poetry, if not also a problem of content.

The aim of this essay is to examine the catalytic ways in which passion is exhibited in Seneca's *Phaedra,* not to discuss the debate between what Staley calls "the moralistic school" (which upholds that the plays are a vehicle for Stoic teaching) and the "skeptical school" (which sees the plays as unconcerned about morality if not hostile to it).[8] If I had to take a position though, I would opt for the middle ground between the two, as Seneca himself never admits poetry to be antagonistic to philosophy. Even closer to the truth I find the position that the key to Senecan drama is the "image", not the "word",[9] and that tragedy could be seen a visualization of human experience. I take *Phaedra* to be a represen-

tative example of such a poetic agenda, in that it makes evident how passion works. That does not mean that *Phaedra* is a "single-issue" drama either, but rather that the examination of passion in this theatrical play is more vivid, therefore more helpful, even instrumental, to understanding Stoic dogma. Passion demonstrates a certain symptomatology, even in the case of a more inculpable[10] emotion such as love. It lies right in the nucleus of the problem to examine what taking the path of passion might mean in practice and what the main consequences and features of such a path are. It is also relevant to discern whether passion is brought upon us externally or originates from an internal source; even whether it is extricable from human nature or not. In this tragedy the Roman philosopher not only questions the extent of these hypotheses but also the profundity of man's ability to assess them and deal with them. These problems comprise the main focus of this paper that aims to explore the function and perspective of passion in the case of *Phaedra* as characteristic of a general problematic of passion in the Stoic tradition.

In his philosophy Seneca provides concrete answers to a number of ancient philosophical queries regarding the interconnection of passion and virtue. Following the doctrine of his school, he not only diagnoses passion as a disease that affects every aspect of human life, he also proposes certain remedies to this acknowledged pathology. Seneca elaborates a project of therapy that aspires to solve all those pathological conditions of the soul that commonly afflict people.[11] His moral theory is based on therapeutic approaches that connote the recognition of passions rather than on an inflexible philosophical method. However, his convictions refer directly to moral circumstances as well as social circumstances since passion is a pananthropic phenomenon.[12] In this approach there are principles according to which there can be a definite management of emotions before they evolve into passions, and a number of solutions that engage purely practical (rather than theoretical) parameters.

Passion stands out as the indubitable culprit for inauthentic and unhappy lives. Seneca, quite a typical Stoic in this respect, recognizes its patterns and devastating impact on the human race. He realizes that deciphering how passion affects humans can be critical in restoring right reason. Even though Seneca does not stay absorbed by the Stoic theory as he composes drama –, it underlies in his mind that the stoic teaching

can be adequately justified from the occurrence of false thinking and passionate behavior in the context of the tragedy. John Fitch has argued as follows: “The Senecan dramas are colored but not controlled by stoic teaching.”[13] I would rather differ on that: indeed, they are not controlled, but they are more than colored on the outside, they are imbued, deep under their surface, by the overwhelming moral theory of the Stoa.

Stoicism (especially in its imperial form) teaches self-sufficiency (*αὐτάρκεια*),[14] turning to the self as the most secure refuge of all: a refuge strong enough to withhold attacks from vices and from mighty *Fortuna*. This is not a barren affirmation of individualism but presupposes those energies of the individual that will enhance and ensure the highest quality of such a self: an *animus (“mind”* or “soul”*)* that is invulnerable to emotions and to the enchantment of external goods and therefore unaffected by internal and external influences altogether. The supreme good (*summum bonum*) is positioned in the upright human soul, in the *animus erectus*.[15] Only inside himself can man find what suffices for freedom and happiness. According to the above, command over oneself becomes the most decisive imperative.[16]

An important implication of this conception is that one is able to endure life and even enjoy happiness in circumstances which are considered to be subversive for the average person. *Virtus*, “virtue”, comes from the Latin word *vir*, “man”; it is a manly condition, a heroic approach to life and fate. The challenges that fate imposes (in the form of mishaps and adversities) are nothing more than a unique opportunity for the Stoic man to overcome such difficulties and appear as a winner of life, a champion of virtue. Even though Seneca conceives of virtue as a manly quality, it does not seem probable that he would like to show that Phaedra cannot resist passion as tenaciously as a man can, at least not directly. On this occasion, he does not tend to confine virtue to the condition of being a man. As a matter of fact, the men of the play are too enervated to be able to defend represent virtue effectively. This raises the question whether it is primarily their passions or Phaedra’s own failure to attain virtue that creates the tragedy. Nonetheless, the fact is that all the problematic areas regarding virtue seem to converge into a visible whole where passion is the most prominent issue and thus they confirm the original Stoic postulate. Passion, in the specific dramaturgical paradigm, overturns the person whose efforts for virtue remain incomplete.

To queen Phaedra's mind, her love for Hippolytus is a disease, a real curse from the gods.[17] The first ode of the tragedy comprises a very anti-Stoic hymn to love, where love is identified with the supremacy of Nature that asserts her power over all. As Seneca indicates: "Nothing is immune, and hatred vanishes when love commands."[18] The heroine rushes to define herself in terms of fate and family history.[19] Phaedra finds some form of identity in the love she suffers as she recognizes her mother's perverse passion inside her own self.[20] The urge of identity – along with that of passion – makes the oncoming disaster irresistible for her. Nonetheless, this is a misidentification since Phaedra identifies herself only in the narrow context of a distortion. One mere aspect of the self is designated while her true self is traumatized and fragmented. There is an alarming complication in her confession insofar as she seeks inside the fateful what she should be avoiding, when she accepts and submits to the Fate of her origin. She, the Cretan woman, sees herself as destined to repeat the self-destructive behavior of Pasiphae ("Meminimus matris"),[21] even though her nurse argues vigorously that reason and willpower can provide complete freedom from the past.

Apparently, there is an inauspicious fixation with the past on Phaedra's part, a fascination that is functional in creating and motivating drama.[22] The present becomes no more than the reflection of the past and reality is distorted by paradoxical and dangerous egocentricity.[23] This egocentricity is indeed individualistic in a negative sense although it must be noted that individualism is far from being negated in Seneca's philosophical writings. Individualism can serve either virtue or its direct opposite, vice. In the particular case of Phaedra there is a distinct turn to her own self while she gradually becomes psychologically isolated from the other heroes of the play, Theseus and Hippolytus. Her psychological "autism" is no other than the immediate result of her concentration on the passion for the young prince.

To proceed with Phaedra's psychological profile and the particularities of her emotions, we must bear in mind the following clues: Theseus has murdered Antiope and has abandoned Ariadne who is the sister of Phaedra. Furthermore, he has been absent for four years since he was persuaded by his friend Pirithous to venture on an expedition in order to abduct Proserpine. Are these sufficient reasons for hatred? Or sufficient

perhaps for a new love to arise? Surprisingly, Phaedra hardly makes any noteworthy mention of her sister's mistreatment by Theseus. This woman's love can forgive a man for his injustice toward another person, even a person of her own blood, but not toward herself. However, she does not insist on that justification either. Phaedra seems lost within emotions that she cannot convincingly explain. All in all, her motivation remains rather obscure due to the fact that she never clearly names the reasons for the immoral end that she pursues, but this fact brings to surface what Seneca wants us to notice with the least possible doubt: every passion that is left to grow eventually devastates right reason and virtue.

There is an endless series of obsessive emotions that seize the main characters, emotions that become fiery passions in the frame of Senecan tragedy. In classical Stoic thought an emotion is considered to be destructive when it acquires the features of stability and persistence, i.e. when it is transformed into a passion. Thus it can start from a disorder, but when it persists it becomes a disease. In the case of Phaedra there is a conflict between two powerful emotional forces: desire and shame. Both are rooted deep in her soul. Phaedra faces a merciless dilemma: on the one hand, she needs to be the devoted wife, no matter how deleteriously she detests her husband, Theseus; on the other hand, she craves for Hippolytus, her stepson. The following is part of the perceptive description that her nurse gives, a depiction of the corporeal manifestations of Phaedra's passion and the signs of internal paranoia which is a result of the cessation of the functions of reason: [24]

There will be no end to the flames of insanity. The fever silently burns her, and her inner madness, however much concealed, is betrayed in her face. Fire bursts forth through her eyes; her weary sight cannot bear the daylight. Nothing pleases her fickle mind for long, and her restless pain disturbs her body in various ways […] her condition is always impatient with itself and changing.

The nurse notices the signs of this paranoia, but unlike the Stoic philosopher who would rush to offer comfort and therapy to the patient, she is overwhelmed by disappointment. From my perspective, her tactic to the confrontation of the problem has not been successful due to the main fact that Phaedra has given her consent to the commitment of this

action while the nurse does not insist on the pattern of a rational argumentation that could perhaps convince the ill queen. Claudia Wiener sheds enough light on the character of the nurse and follows her character carefully throughout the text.[25] I tend to keep a more critical eye to the gravity of the nurse's role in the play as well as to her importance in the moral influence that she may be able to exert on Phaedra. Phaedra and the nurse participate in a game of time: the nurse tries to save Phaedra "in time", before passion becomes a deep and catastrophic wound, while Phaedra has already used the time she had and now her passion has obsessed her. In my view, the nurse could principally serve the play to highlight a "silent" or "absent" role: that of the philosopher who would not be tempted to give in to his own emotions for a loved person who suffers in a moral and psychological level. The philosopher would not be inconsistent in his tactic, he would not attempt to affect Hippolytus in the manner that the nurse does.

This explosion of emotion and ill reason inside Phaedra's soul is made manifest in the symptoms that her nurse narrates. But corporal suffering is not the culmination of what passion produces. The need for power is a major feature of that newborn fervor. Phaedra understands the current situation as ground for a power struggle: she pursues to conquer completely or destroy the young man; that is how much she wishes to dominate him. Revenge is but the ultimate assertion of power over him and his father. Seneca takes this opportunity to exert criticism on royal courts and people of power: [26]

> Those who grow too extravagant through prosperity, overflowing with luxury, are always seeking out the unusual. Then lust steals in, that dire companion of great good fortune. Ordinary meals are not satisfactory, nor fabrics of a sane style or cheap drinking cups. Why does this infection choose pampered homes, and steal less often into humble families? Why is it that chaste love dwells beneath lowly roofs, that average folk have sane affections and modest status is self-controlled, while the rich and those who bolstered by royal status seek more than what is right? Excessive power wants power beyond its power.

The son of Theseus, on the face of it, is not afflicted by any passions. Hippolytus leads a retired life because of an instinctive abhorrence of

society and particularly women. He is the son of the Amazon Antiope; that is how he maintains Amazon character features, most notably chastity. His life is fully devoted to the outdoor life where he seeks to avoid passions and to maintain his innocence away from royal courts, away from women, who are both sources of evil. In this evil world the woman reigns:[27]

The leader in evil is woman. This artificer of crimes besets our minds… I detest them all, dread them, flee them, loathe them. Be it reason or nature or dire madness, I am set on hating them.

Despite his determination he does not become successful in his quest. His stepmother disrupts the ascetic serenity of his heart and then he is faced up with guilt, turning against himself:[28]

Look, am I suited to adulteries? … I am guilty, I deserve to die: I have attracted my stepmother.

As a matter of fact, every single one of the main characters is found guilty in this drama: Phaedra is guilty of her inappropriate emotion, Theseus is guilty of the murder of Antiope, the abandonment of Ariadne, and of his own inadequacy as a husband (including his absence from home for too long), Hippolytus is guilty of not following the right path of Nature but a path of isolation inside Nature,[29] and the nurse is guilty of trying to convince Hippolytus into that lustful affair, guilty of being volatile, of changing her mind about what is right and what is wrong, and of not managing eventually to assist Phaedra in her moral madness but aiding considerably in her destruction. Although she asks for the assistance of the goddess of the forests, and although her primary motive is her love for Phaedra, her act is morally tainted as impious.[30] Moreover, while being an inferior, the nurse initially attempts to restrain the passion of a superior: “Check these flames of unnatural love.”[31] This is how pragmatically Seneca illustrates social ranking in the circumstance of the emergence of passions: those who belong to a low social class can become guides or even superiors, since passions abolish all nobility. However, it is important to remember that according to the Stoics and Seneca, a sin is not a sin on a normative basis. In their view, guilt is determined by the right motive, not the action per se. What initiates the actions of the nurse,

that is her love for the libidinous queen, does not mean that her action is morally good. The wise person differs from the unwise in only that the former can tell when and how each action is most appropriately performed and that is because he is governed by right reason, not by emotion.[32] Therefore what matters is the intrinsic reason for performing a particular action, the moral responsibility of the one who proceeds to the deed.

It is rather on this basis that John Fitch claims that this is a tragedy of three people who all share a large part of responsibility. But I wish to point towards another direction: I would say that this is the unexposed tragedy of one person, the tragedy of Hippolytus, as it was originally conceived by Euripides, since he is the most innocent of all or, to put it more precisely, the least guilty. I use the term "unexposed" due to the fact that Seneca apparently sheds more theatrical light on the face of Phaedra, he even names his tragedy after her, whereas Euripides does not. Yet, in my view, this portrait of Hippolytus shows that he could be the concealed protagonist. His attitude does not violate Nature in a vulgar manner: still he is young and later on in the future he may come to desire the affection of a woman. But now, due to Phaedra's insatiable lust and her psychological labyrinthical divergences, wherein she is utterly lost and disorientated,[33] Hippolytus does not get his chance. However, this should be remarked: despite the inner energy that guides him towards the domination of the natural world by hunting and spending time with beasts, Hippolytus does not seem able to cope with the unanticipated love of Phaedra. When she confesses her passion he chooses to flee to the woods and the wilderness,[34] failing to assume moral responsibility. His innocence, his weakness of character under this prism, provides a fundamental revelation in senecan stoicism: it is not enough to adhere to restrictions or to be virtuous; even integrity or purity cannot suffice in a world of constant conflict and sin-instead, you had better be a master of yourself if you aspire to be successful on the route to wisdom. Hippolytus cannot be safe unless he is potent and virtuous simultaneously: this is what Seneca upholds. No god can save him (as the chorus presages in ode two), not even his own father or the customs of the city if he lacks the proper strength to defend his view and protect his quality. Despite his virile pursuits in the forest, the young prince is a weak man. That makes him incompetent, not as a lover in Phaedra's bed, but as a man and as a future king, as a "*σπουδαΐονἄνδρα*".

Nonetheless, as stated before, Hippolytus is ostensibly of less importance to Seneca than to Euripides. Phaedra is the uncontradictable leading figure of the tragedy,[35] the one at the center of the stage. Her moral degeneration was never apparent; it was rather latent till the exposure of her thrilling passion. As regards Theseus, he is not really a main character in the play. His psychological portrait remains narrow and obfuscated. He is the one who takes catalytic decisions but we cannot ever see in the depth of his soul. Thus he remains unknown and unreached by the audience, as he has been by his wife Phaedra. He wanders, traveling inside the land of eternal night, and when he comes home, still a deeper dark awaits for him.[36] Nevertheless, his evident lack of wisdom is a characteristic shared by the other two members of his family. Wisdom does not lie in anything else rather than in the mastery of the self according to nature, reason and virtue (*κατά φύσιν, κατά λόγον, κατ' ἀρετήν*).[37] That is the highest priority, to keep away from other influences. This does not imply a life of resignation but of utmost efficiency, so that the person becomes powerful and dominant over all exterior circumstances.

The story points out, at every scene, how emotional impulses can affect the right mind.[38] Just like Hippolytus, Phaedra is not a master of herself: passion overwhelms her and she loses all self control, finding there a sudden joy: "How good it was to escape from myself!"[39] Such passion is almost madness (*furor*) and really the Stoics call the man of passion a mad man.[40] Her lack of self control is the result of gigantic emotional forces while the one of Hippolytus is the outcome of a rigid, however incomprehensible (as he never accounts for his motives for misogyny), logical decision and of a disposition of character. Seneca depicts how self control can be overcome by either: emotion, decision or disposition. Phaedra, on the other hand, is faced up with three voluminous powers of control (self-control, discipline to her husband and to the duties of the married life, the ill control of passion), from which she negates the two and opts for the latter. Having chosen thus, she respectively refuses to support stoic freedom, marital life and the norms of the polis, which also ensure a type of "social" freedom, and she ends up with the realization of her destiny, the one inspired in the past of her mother. This construction of a tragic "*monstrum*"[41] does not illustrate another strike of Fortune, such as the Minotaur, but a result of free will due to the fact that the

action itself bears the traits of an ethical "monsterity". To create a monster, one must defy the laws of nature; similarly, Phaedra defies the laws of morality, those of the polis, of marital life, the desires of Hippolytus, in order to give birth to her own symbolical "monster", which is her denial of right reason, her self-abandonment to passion. It is noteworthy that, despite the loss of self control, the queen elaborates quite an intricate, vicious plan to help her save herself from the wrath of her husband, even though she does not use any kind of such plan in order to attract the young man.[42] Her incentives for losing self-mastery, as far as she allows us to see them, are that she has practically been left alone by Theseus,[43] and Hippolytus could represent a younger model of her once loved husband.[44] Hippolytus himself tragically fortifies that impression when he says:[45]

> Theseus's return will be granted by the just deities. But as long as god keeps our prayers in uncertainty, I shall cherish my dear brothers with proper affection, and behave so that you shall not think yourself widowed, and fill my father's place for you myself.

In this multileveled plot, nature, one of the many participant notions of the tragedy, can be comprehended in two ways, depending on the reflection of the relevant passion on the characters' reality. To Hippolytus's mind, nature is the place where he can constantly recover innocence, a place unreached by people and their civilization, that allows him the solitude that his soul needs. Phaedra, on the other hand, associates it with sexuality, force and passion, a place where her wildest fantasies may be fulfilled. In this way, she overturns nature and scorns its laws blasphemously.[46] To her mind, the passion of her mother Pasiphae -a passion which produced a monster[47] such as the Minotaur- is a perverse emotion born inside the realm of nature, inside the nature of the beasts. At once nature appears horrendous and fascinating, monstrous and erotic,[48] same as her emotion for Hippolytus is. That allows her to treat him as a potential sexual prey.[49] In this context Phaedra is the one who has the unbounded impulses and freedom of the hunter.

In the horrific dichognomy[50] that her passion creates she is challenged to find solutions. Her carnal passion is too intense, almost frenetic, beyond any restraint. Nevertheless, her role as a wife and a queen does not permit any desultory actions. So the only solution she sees possible

is to die by her stepson’s hand. This only can keep her honor safe, she admits.[51] But Hippolytus’s sword symbolically represents a violent and deep penetration into her being; one that almost resembles or borders with a sexual act. Thus Phaedra’s death can be transformed into an unconventional, still releasing for her, erotic action. This decision, however, seems to be the only feasible resolution of the moral problem that has emerged, an idea that abounds in Seneca’s philosophical prose: death can appease pain indeed, it does make right what was wrong,[52] it is a refuge to the weak, or to those who are becoming weak.[53] Her appeal emphasizes the belief that only death can save one from a passion, similarly from a promiscuous love affair: “O death, sole relief from evil love, o death, greatest glory for blighted honour, I flee to you: open wide your merciful arms.”[54] As Phaedra has warned before: “No consideration can prevent someone from dying, who has both the resolve and the duty to die.”[55] Death seems the only serious alternative since:[56]

> No nightly rest, no deep sleep releases me from my cares. My trouble feeds and grows and burns within me, like the heat that pours from Etna’s cavern.

At this point, Ortega y Gasset may shed more light on Phaedra’s feelings for Hippolytus. Ortega proposes a certain criterion of assessment regarding the place where desire is born in relation to love and he uses it in order to examine the quality of the feeling in question. According to the Spanish existentialist, in his *Estudios sobre el Amor*, desire is born after love, when love is true, whereas it is born before love, when love is not true.[57] When love is true, it signifies transition to some other place and level, as it cannot be static; therefore “I fall in love” means “I shift myself to another level and move inside a wider perspective”. Under this prism, love cannot bear any signs of egotism. In Phaedra’s case we are faced with desire, not love, according to Ortega’s method, hence she cannot be other than egotistic. She chooses to blame the prince falsely in order to save herself from the oncoming rage of her husband and in order to take bloody revenge. Love for someone, continues Ortega, means their right to exist, love is affirmative of existence.[58] But Phaedra abandons Hippolytus to his unfair death, although she suffers her own remorse later. For Ortega, like Seneca, love takes the form of an axiological issue,

a matter of innate value. The Roman thinker does not believe that there is any positive axiology in love itself (actually even the nurse's love for Phaedra becomes the second love that fails to bring virtue in this drama),[59] while the Spanish philosopher upholds that love actually may obscure one's judgment and dim the real light of things or, in contrast, see more light where there is none, therefore love can be a terrible and absolute illusion.[60]

Ortega's syllogism relates directly to what Seneca maintains and also elucidates the motives of Phaedra: desire is the cause of many systemic anomalies in the human reason and it enhances mental pathology. When desire exists before love – just as in the tragedy of Phaedra-, desire devastates one's personal opportunity of transition to the perspective of the other person. Love would not be the real culprit of the tragedy for Ortega; only desire could play that role.[61] For Seneca, nonetheless, love or desire are equally powerful emotions that destroy the beatitude and the reasoning ability of the erect soul. The person who gets trapped in these abysmal passions loses self-control and abolishes his right to an authentic existence due to the fact that he becomes a slave to pleasure. The mind which is prone to seeking pleasures of any kind (*voluptates*) is categorically pathological.[62] To preserve the mind in a healthy state, one must avoid all emotional extremities, all intensity and absurdity.

In senecan thought the good deed is established by the combination of knowledge and will, while the bad deed results from their absence. One strives to know what is good and, subsequently, motivated by his will, one practices it. The cognitive element is particularly stressed by the Stoics of the imperial period (as a continuation of the Socratic teaching) while the part of will or volition bears even greater significance than in the times of the Ancient Stoa.[63] But this assumption does not imply any kind of dualism: rather than being opposing forces inside man's soul, reason and passion, there is the unitary model of the health or sickness of an individual, according to the orthodox stoic doctrine.[64] Knowledge and will are the sources of the efforts of a healthy and efficient individual. In the stoic view, for someone in a healthy condition, there is no contrast between reason and the emotions. Hence passions are not mere emotions but excessive and irrational impulses, violent flutterings of the soul.[65] Phaedra moves forward to disaster in full knowledge of what she is doing

although she is totally deprived of a strong will, as she is in an irrational state of mind. Consequently, her reason stands still while passion takes over.[66] That is exactly why I hesitate to accept David Block's interpretation that Phaedra is "not simply a manipulative, evil woman but a woman torn apart by love and fear". When reason is absent then it is only evil that prevails and the person loses his right identity. Evil is the product of the irrational state of the "*animus*" and what participates in evil is evil itself: "*κακόν πᾶν ἐστι κακία ἤ μετέχον κακίας.*"[67] If we mean to apply what the Stoics literally say then Phaedra irrefutably is a "manipulative, evil woman" and not a victim of her emotional state; any other approach would consist a contemporary exegesis. According to the Roman philosopher, part of health is precisely this, the powerful own volition to cure oneself from passions,[68] something which Phaedra lacks: "But I am powerless over myself… I throw myself down at your knees."[69] The nurse has advised her from the beginning:[70]

A person who resists and rejects love at the outset wins safety and victory; but one who nurtures the sweet evil by indulging it, protests too late at wearing the yoke he has put on.

Claudia Wiener rightly observes that the sooner the patient takes action the faster he can recover mastery over himself. At the same time, self- mastery and influence from outside sources can be difficult to achieve, especially when one is in a high social status.[71] In this case, it is impossible for the queen to be cured owing to influences from the outside, also equally difficult for her to be cured from the inside. Phaedra wishes to believe that what happens is the result of the actions of a mighty god who has taken over her, whereas her nurse brings her back to reality and Seneca indirectly answers to the young Phaedrus of the platonic *Symposium,*[72] who upholds that Eros is a great god, admirable to both humans and gods*:*[73]

The story that love is a god was invented by base lust, in the interests of its own depravity; to have greater scope, it gave its mad passion the pretext of a false divinity.

In this tragedy, no God intervenes to prevent an atrocity or to correct one.[74] Moral chaos seems more than inevitable since human inner forces

take over and do not allow redemption. The divinity resides far, in the distant heavens.[75] In his philosophical writings Seneca affirms that the cosmos is ruled by divine Providence, which is no other than Reason (*ratio*).[76] In his drama he partly distances himself from the stoic canon and he points at the human being as the sole responsible agent of moral assent and action. The metaphysical convenience of a god interfering in people's minds does not exist; so it cannot detach any hero or villain out of his pitiful maze. Accordingly, the queen's passion manages to exert a strong apocalyptic influence on her surroundings; not only does she trigger a series of dramatic events but her passion highlights the weaknesses and the moral misery of all the others who are present in this story.

The escapism of Hippolytus, the blinding emotion of Phaedra that guides to the total collapse of her moral personality, the thoughtlessness and emotional haste of Theseus, all these do not indicate forces greater than themselves but forces that lie within and need to be overcome. Everywhere there can be defilement and corruption unless right reason is not destroyed by the corrosive influence of passions. The human responsibility is the failure to discern how to live well, how to live virtuously. That is why the tragic heroes of this play are obliged to live in a dark world, where there is no order or compassion. Nobody remains innocent and nobody can intervene "*ex deus machina*" to draw them out of their inauthentic existence.

In conclusion, the path of their passion, as diagnosed in Seneca's *Phaedra*, consists in the following main features: a) bad individualism, b) identity disorientation, c) weak or no volition, d) thirst for power, e) negative influence on the others, f) death is delineated as the only solution, g) extreme desires, h) instability, i) extinction of the logical procedure, j) misinterpretation of what is natural, k) submission to Fate, l) corporal symptoms. All these can be synopsized as losing mastery over oneself, abrogating ontological self possession and authenticity. Phaedra's portrayal as a woman in love, as well as the portraits of the other characters, shows explicitly how cognizant of the human situation Seneca is. All her emotional states, all her psychological changes and fluctuations, are so vividly depicted that we, as people of today, cannot but notice them. The history of passions tends to repeat itself always, with no divergence.[77] As Seneca puts it in *De Beneficiis*: "wicked we are, wicked we have been

[...] and always shall be.”[78] But this is not a play merely to depict malice or vices. That brings the Roman Stoic in contrast with Hine’s admittance that: “the Stoic interpreter is essentially optimistic, claiming in effect – though never in these simplistic terms- that in another scenario a Phaedra could have resisted her passion.”[79] I think that Seneca does not want Phaedra to resist her passion; he wants her to exhibit it to its full, disastrous, dehumanizing extent;[80] that would invite the highest possible degree of ethical reflection. The play of *Phaedra* is even more than a tragic poem; containing a powerful depiction of human passion, it is also a guide about the inner forces that have to be tamed, avoided, predicted; forces which emerge when the self is ill. The sage is, under this scope, only the one who is competent in the deliberation of his evaluative judgments and in giving his assent. The sage is the successful man, whose success is the effective control in the course of his life; he is the one who beats Fate down with his will,[81] the one who cured himself from passion and trusted himself to reason so that his emotions do not contradict him anymore. I consider what Lord Alfred Tennyson writes in *Ulysses*:

That which we are, we are; / One equal temper of heroic hearts, / Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will / To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

Will (“voluntas” in Roman philosophy) can take man out of the trap of his passion and render him able to fully retrieve his moral responsibility. Moral responsibility is the fundamental criterion by which it is realized that what happens is, or ought to be, the result of human action. That is why for Seneca, the enemy is hardly ever the fellow human or the divinity. For Seneca, the principal enemy is the unsuccessful self, the ineffective innerness; therefore only by realizing the uniqueness and strengthening the power of that self can one live happily, can one be utterly free from passion and fortune, can one be great, noble and eudemonistic.

NOTES

[1] Staley 2010, 9.

[2] It is important that Seneca has already composed part of his philosophical prose before he composed *Phaedra*. That is an additional hint that his thought had been preoccupied with philosophical matters before engaging into poetry.

[3] Staley 2010, 9.

[4] Hine 2004, 194.

[5] Schiesaro 1997, 89-90.

[6] Hine 2004, 173-209.

[7] Hine 2004, 216.

[8] Cf. Staley 2010, 5.

[9] Staley 2010, 7.

[10] At least according to the feelings of the general public and in comparison with other emotions that are clearly tainted as negative (such as anger, fear, etc).

[11] Cf. Wiener 2006, 76-80.

[12] The main question that Seneca repeatedly asks in the Stoic context is the following: Can humans be cured of such emotional turmoil? If the answer is affirmative, then how can this be done, what specific measures must be employed and, most importantly, how can this therapy be proliferated for the benefit of other people? Obviously this discussion faces moral aspects along with serious social repercussions, a fact that Seneca is completely aware of. For the procedure of therapy according to Stoic doctrine see Blakeley 1994, 30-41.

[13] Fitch 2002, 23. Cf. Brady 1968, passim.

[14] SVF 3.272 “αὐτάρκεια δὲ ἕξις ἀρκουμένη οϛς δεῖ καὶ δί αὐτῆς ποριστικὴ τῶν πρὸς τὸ ζῆν καθηκόντων”. Cf. Cic. *Div.* 2.2 and *Tusc.* 5.

[15] Sen. *Ep.* 59.14.

[16] Sen. *Ep.* 113.30.

[17] Passion will eventually guide the heroine to her personal extinction as she will not be able to find a way out of these dramatic circumstances.

[18] Sen. *Phaed.* 353-354, trans. Fitch. Attention must be paid to the other two odes as well: The second ode is about the beauty of young Hippolytus and about beauty and its dangers in more general terms. The third is an apocalypse of the blows of Fortune against the mighty. Theseus is a standard example of this.

[19] Sen. *Phaed.* 698-699.

[20] Sen. *Phaed.* 113.

[21] Sen. *Phaed.* 242-244, trans. Fitch: “I remember my mother.”

[22] As John Fitch remarks, there is a deep understanding of the psychology of the self on Seneca’s part, while his tragedies have a great inwardness and a great focus on the individual (Fitch 2002, 5). Cf. Littlewood 2004.

[23] John Fitch maintains that not only Phaedra but all the characters tend to think aloud and to reveal their inner thoughts. This increased introspection leads to an analogous isolation of the individual. Real interaction between the characters is lessened and as a result individuals stand aloof and distanced from each other (Fitch 2002, 6). See also Sen. *Phaed.* 85-128.

[24] Sen. *Phaed.* 360-383, trans. Fitch. Cf. Segal 1986.

[25] Cf. Wiener 2006, 60-68.

[26] Sen. *Phaed.* 204-205, trans. Fitch. For a thorough understanding of the relations of power in Rome cf. D. & E. Henry 1985.

[27] Sen. *Phaed.* 555-573, trans. Fitch.

[28] Sen. *Phaed*. 680-689, trans. Fitch.

[29] Which creates an ostensible paradox as nothing evil can come from Nature, according to the stoic doctrine. See Colish 1990, 42.

[30] Sen. *Phaed*. 406-430.

[31] Sen. *Phaed*. 165, trans. Fitch: "Compesce amoris impii flammas."

[32] Rist 1969, 81-96.

[33] Cf. Giomini 1955, 62-66.

[34] Sen. *Phaed.* 718.

[35] Coffey & Mayer 1999, 27-28.

[36] Cf. his tragic feeling of coming back to a world of light, but he is really fooled as it is different than he believes. Sen. *Phaed.* 835-836.

[37] Eliopoulos 2010, 45.

[38] Cf. Strange 2004, 32-51.

[39] Sen. *Phaed.* 590, trans. Fitch.

[40] There are times when the person who has subdued to passions is aware of his situation. Cf. Gill 1997, 218: "In Phaedra, akratic surrender to passion generates what the person concerned sees as a kind of madness".

[41] I agree with Staley (2010, 9) who argues that: "The unnatural events of tragedy are neither meaningless nor inexplicable; *monstra* in Senecan tragedy offer through their vivid images and emotional impact clues that guide an audience toward the kind of insight that Aristotle believed the best tragedies can foster".

[42] This is not because of the predominance of her instinct of self survival but, on the contrary, it is evidence of her unstoppable fluctuations and inconsistent decisions. At the end of the play, and after Hippolytus is dead, she will end her life too.

[43] Sen. *Phaed*. 89-98.

[44] Sen. *Phaed*. 646-666.

[45] Sen. *Phaed*. 633, trans. Fitch.

[46] Sen. *Phaed.* 176-177.

[47] Wiener (2006, 64) believes that Phaedra's shame will be worse that Pasiphae's due to the fact that the Minotaur is the result of a strike of Fortune (*Schicksalsschlag*), thus leaving Phaedra with the whole moral responsibility of her actions, which comes from her free will.

[48] Sen. *Phaed*. 111.

[49] Sen. *Phaed*. 233-241.

[50] As nature has a beautiful and an ugly face in the queen's mind, there is no wonder why then she stands on the horns of a pertinent dilemma: on the one hand, she craves erotically for Hippolytus. On the other hand, she is tortured by a second, very insistent sentiment: "*pudor*" or modesty, shame. Her alleged sense of honor, the one that should be worthy of a married woman and of a queen, is morally justified, no doubt. However, no matter how many her changes of heart, there is an objective difficulty with that penetrating passion of love which prevails over this modesty. Of course, her modesty does not seem to stand on any firm ground either since a) her devotion for Theseus has withered long ago and b) she has determined her future on the trail of her mother's decisions.

[51] Sen. *Phaed.* 712.

[52] Seneca produces more deaths than Euripides does in his respective version of this tragedy. Thus, his Hippolytus is torn apart in an accident, as a result of his father's curse, and it is also Phaedra who commits suicide after the truth has been revealed to Theseus and the news of the prince's death have reached her.

[53] Weakness can be caused by reasons such as passions or even old age. Cf. Morand 1992.

[54] Sen. *Phaed.* 1189-1190, trans. Fitch.

[55] Sen. *Phaed*. 265-266, trans. Fitch.

[56] Sen. *Phaed*. 99-103, trans. Fitch. Cf. Gérard 1993, 20-37.

[57] Ortega y Gasset 2000, 40-41.

[58] Ortega y Gasset 2000, 23.

[59] The first being the love of the main character, Phaedra, for her stepson Hippolytus.

[60] Ortega y Gasset 2000, 74-75.

[61] The distinction between desire and love, in the form of Eros, is also made in the Platonic *Phaedrus*. For Plato, Eros is a force that brings man to the divine, while base desire keeps people confined to their earthly bonds. This discussion is continued in the *Symposium*, where Eros is affirmed to be a daemon, intermediate between men and gods, and also, in the very words of Diotima, "birth inside the Beautiful" (Ἔστι γάρ τοῦτο τόκος ἐν καλῷ, καί κατά τό σώμα καί κατά τήν ψυχήν). Cf. Pl. *Phdr*. 255 a- 256 b and *Smp.* 202 a -211 d.

[62] Sen. *Epist.* 59. 14.

[63] Especially in the writings of Epictetus and Seneca. The former employs the concept of "*proairesis*" in a different way than Aristotle, while Seneca takes the term of "*voluntas*" from Cicero and gives it a further dynamic in his philosophical thought. About the "*proairesis*" of Epictetus see Dragona-Monachou 1978-79, 265-310. About the concept of "*voluntas*" cf. Gilbert 1963, 17-35. Also Voelke 1973.

[64] Rist 1969, 23-25.

[65] Stob. *Ecl.* ÉÉ. 39, 8 W. Cf. Schiesaro 1997, 89-111.

[66] Sen. *Phaed.* 178-179: “furor cogit sequi peiora”. Cf. Block 2007, 237-257.

[67] S.V.F. 1. 190. We should not forget, as well, the notion that Hippolytus attributes to any woman as he thinks of her as a source of evil.

[68] Sen. *Phaed.* 249: “pars sanitatis velle sanari fuit”.

[69] Sen. *Phaed.* 698-703, trans. Fitch.

[70] Sen. *Phaed.* 132-135, trans. Fitch. Cf. Inwood 1993, 170: “Seneca’s view is that our reason yields control and authority to the external enemy when it voluntarily accepts the stimulus to passion”. Also, Strange 2004, 32-51.

[71] Wiener 2006, 63: “Je früher du dich gegenüber deinen Affekten unnachgiebig zeigst, desto eher wirst du ihrer Herr werden… Selbststbeherrschung und Beeinflussung durch andere ist bei Hochgestellen schwer, sogar gefährlich”.

[72] Pl. *Smp.* 178 a: “μέγας θεός εἴη ὁ Ἔρως καί θαυμαστός ἐν ἀνθρώποις τε καί θεοῖς”.

[73] Sen. *Phaed.* 195-197, trans. Fitch.

[74] Sen. *Phaed.* 1242-1243.

[75] Sen. *Phaed.* 959-988.

[76] Kalokairinou 1996, 139-143. Cf. Rosenmeyer 1989, passim.

[77] Tejera 1997, 17-36.

[78] Sen. *Ben.* 1. 10. 3, trans. Basore: “malos esse nos, malos fuisse-[…] et futuros [malos] esse.”

[79] Cf. Hine 2004, 208.

[80] In *De Ira* (2.2-5), Seneca supports the idea that the sadness and fear we feel while watching a theatrical play are instinctive, natural reactions that do not need to be condemned. Therefore, I think that he would not oppose to the idea that a play could mobilize the spectator’s *phantasia* and through images to expose moral reality or circumstance.

[81] Voelke 1973, 177: “L’exaltation du vouloir peut aller jusqu’à l’affirmation de sa souveraineté totale : à en croire de nombreux passages de Sénèque, la volonté surmonte tous les obstacles, triomphe de toutes les épreuves”.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Plato = Pl.
Symposium = Smp.
Phaedrus = Phdr.
Seneca = Sen.
Phaedra = Phaed.
Epistulae Morales = Epist.

De Beneficiis = Ben.
Cicero = Cic.
De Divinatione = Div.
Tusculanae Disputationes = Tusc.
Stobaeus = Stob.
Eclogai = Ecl.
Stoicorum veterum fragmenta = S.V.F.

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