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## TRADITION AND INNOVATION IN SENECA’S PLAYS FROM A GENOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE: TIME AND PLACE

ABSTRACT. Słomak Iwona, Tradition and Innovation in Seneca’s Plays from a Genological Perspective: Time and Place (*Tradycja i innowacja w sztukach Seneki z perspektywy genologicznej: czas i miejsce*).

This article aims to provide a systematic description of Seneca’s approach to the categories of time and place as potentially rooted in the Attic tradition. With regard to these categories, there is indeed a certain generic consistency within the set of preserved serious Greek and Roman plays. The perspective adopted here sheds also light on a number of innovations, which suggest that great caution should be taken when considering the Greek tragedy as a direct or indirect source of inspiration for Seneca.

Keywords: time and place in Seneca’s plays; tradition and innovation in Seneca’s plays

In the past few decades, a number of studies on the form- and content-related aspects of Seneca’s poetic works have repeatedly challenged the idea – both openly and implicitly – that the basic point of reference for such discussions should be the body of works of Greek tragedians from the classical era. Among them, Tarrant’s complementary works appear especially relevant and noteworthy for their open and systematic criticism of this assumption.<sup>1</sup> Tarrant<sup>2</sup> points out that in the past, treating Seneca’s plays as adaptations of models from the 5<sup>th</sup> c. BC had negative effects, such as underestimating both the work of the Roman playwright and its roots in the writings of Roman poets. At the same time, he notes that in the most recent commentary practice, this approach has largely been abandoned. It is worth noting, however, that this new perspective has been virtually ignored in some narrow-scope comments that question the manuscript readings of Seneca’s plays and attempt to correct them by aligning them with the Greek “model.”<sup>3</sup> Such improvements, however small, may considerably distort

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<sup>1</sup>Tarrant 1978; 1995. See also the bibliography there and more recent studies below.

<sup>2</sup>Tarrant 1995: 216–217.

<sup>3</sup>See, e.g., the rather commonly accepted conjectures to Sen. *Oed.* 825–827; 829–832; 835–836. The unanimous manuscript reading ascribes these lines to Old Man of Corinth, but publishers

the perception of important play components, such as the character structure, the scene, or the plot. Thus, it seems necessary to continue Tarrant's approach and systematically discuss the differences (as well as obvious similarities that point to generic continuity) between serious Greek and Roman plays, at the same time reflecting on the dynamics of the plot elements used by poets. This discussion is meant not only to systematise and extend knowledge, but also to justify the calls for more caution in accepting manuscript refinements. The focus of this article is on time and place, two categories not explored by Tarrant, who investigates elements that point to the most evident changes in the generic paradigm between the 5<sup>th</sup> c. BC and the 1<sup>st</sup> c., namely, the five-act structure<sup>4</sup> (the dominant but not the only type among the preserved serious Roman plays, cf. the possibly six-act structure of *Oedipus* and *Phaedra*,<sup>5</sup> the two-part composition of *Phoenissae*,<sup>6</sup> and the debatable arrangement of *Octavia*<sup>7</sup>), the autonomy of scenes, the suspension of time for longer and shorter asides (see below), selected motifs and stage solutions, and the use of the Chorus.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, some of his findings need revision in light of more recent studies; this concerns, among other things, the problem of Seneca's Choruses, potentially related to the categories under discussion and hence calling for a more detailed introduction.

Seneca's Choruses continue to be a subject of debate. Among other things, the arguments invoked refer to critical literary remarks by Aristotle, who argued for granting the chorus and actors the same status and integrating choral parts with the rest of the play (Arist. *Poet.* 1456a25–32; cf. also Hor. *Ars* 193–195),<sup>9</sup> and who was critical of the practice of violating these rules, thus confirming that this practice did take place, and of loosening the connection between various parts of the play in exchange for perfecting selected passages as show-off pieces (Arist. *Poet.* 1451b33–39). This latter habit might have been further encouraged by the practice of presenting plays or their parts outside regular

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– following Weil (1908: 318–322) – usually attribute them to Jocasta (cf., e.g., Zwierlein 1986; Chaumartin 1999; Fitch 2004; Boyle 2011: 299–300; Giardina 2009 accepts the manuscript reading), thus making the text similar to Soph. *OT*, even though the character of Jocasta and, in particular, the circumstances of her death differ considerably in the two plays. In the Greek tragedy, the queen discourages Oedipus from seeking the truth and, guessing it herself, leaves and commits suicide (cf. Soph. *OT* 1056–1057; 1060–1061; 1064; 1066; 1068; 1071–1075; 1241–1264). In Seneca, Jocasta does not take her own life until Oedipus declares his guilt and blinds himself; her commotion (*Oed.* 1004–1009) also suggests that she did not witness the conversation between Oedipus and Old Man and probably left the scene after *Oed.* 783. See also a similar problem with the attribution of Sen. *Phoen.* 651b–653a, 654–659, 661–662, 664 (Sapota, Słomak 2021: 86–88) and with the title of the play (Sapota, Słomak 2020: 88–95).

<sup>4</sup> See Tarrant 1978: 218–221.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Tarrant 1978: 219–220; Boyle 2011: 98–99, 335; Boyle 1987: 134.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Sapota, Słomak 2021: 77–89.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Ferri 2003: 65–69; Boyle 2013: LIX–LXI; cf. bibliography there.

<sup>8</sup> See Tarrant 1978: 221–254.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Davis 1993: 13; Zwierlein 1966: 76–77 and n. 19; Tarrant 1978: 221.

theatre performances.<sup>10</sup> Reflections on a different function of Seneca's Chorus compared to the choruses of the Attic tragedy also invoke the Aristotelian concept of the purpose of tragedy and the categories of ἔλεος, φόβος and κάθαρσις (Arist. *Poet.* 1449b27–28; cf. also 1452b30–1453a12; 1453b–1454a13).<sup>11</sup> From this standpoint, the analyses of Seneca's plays usually coincide in terms of the most general conclusions, namely, that the playwright did not follow Aristotelian and Horatian norms, nor did he comply with the model that dominated among the preserved Greek plays. The authors mention a departure from the strophic form characteristic of choral songs in the Attic tradition<sup>12</sup> and from the early introduction of the Chorus, mostly in πάροδος and πρόλογος, especially from the practice of revealing where its members live or come from, why they arrived at the place of action, and what gender and age they are (instances of postponed identification are rare; in such cases, the identifying elements are dispersed across the text or one of them is missing, as in Eur. *Hipp.* 130, 165, 710).<sup>13</sup> Emphasis is placed on the frequent lack of a connection between the plot and the song of the Chorus<sup>14</sup> (relative, as other scholars convincingly argue<sup>15</sup>) or on the function of the Chorus, limited to dividing the plot into episodes. In this way, the balance between the segmenting and cohesive function, noticeable in the preserved Greek plays, is abandoned (the Chorus sometimes announces the appearance of characters and takes on their role, participating in the dialogues; this, however, happens only if there is no third party on stage, just the Chorus and the interlocutor).<sup>16</sup> Another abandoned rule concerns the presence of the Chorus in the ὀρχήστρα from πάροδος to ἔξοδος, unless clearly indicated in the text that it is supposed to withdraw earlier, an important principle in the Greek tragedy, although with some exceptions (Aesch. *Eu.* 230–245; Soph. *Ai.* 813–866; Eur. *Al.* 739–872; *Hel.* 385–516; *Rh.* 563–675). The Chorus in Seneca (in principle, one Chorus; two Choruses would appear only in Sen. *Tro.*; *Ag.*; Ps.-Sen. *Her.O.* and *Oct.*) is also assumed to be mobile, that is, it enters the stage and leaves it without any additional indications in the text or any other clear justification.<sup>17</sup> This, however, does not mean that the presence or absence of the Chorus, or the moments when it enters or leaves the stage, are overly difficult to recognise by the director or receiver.<sup>18</sup> The specific nature of Seneca's Choruses is also

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Tarrant 1978: 230 and n. 91.

<sup>11</sup> See Stevens 1992: 63–139.

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., Tarrant 1998: 31; Slaney 2013: 108; cf. also Wiles 1997: 96–112.

<sup>13</sup> See Davis 1993, 39–63; cf. Zwierlein 1966: 72–76.

<sup>14</sup> See Zwierlein 1966: 76–80 and bibliography there. See also Zanobi 2014: 53–69, 83.

<sup>15</sup> Cf., e.g., Boyle 2017: XC–XCII; see also below.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Tarrant 1978: 223; Zwierlein 1966: 49.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Tarrant 1978: 223–226.

<sup>18</sup> See Davis 1993: 11–63; cf. also bibliography there. For a similar view, see Boyle (2017: 149–152), who argues that the mobility of the Chorus might have been related to the reduced

attributed to inspiration by pantomime; namely, choral parts were designed to be presented solo by dancers accompanied by singing and music.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, it is worth mentioning the observation by Stevens that in Seneca, the function of the Chorus (which is not directly involved in the plot) consists in producing ironic effect and engaging the viewer intellectually and critically rather than evoking emotional response.<sup>20</sup> Still, the most ground-breaking and possibly most convincing approach is that taken by Hill, who calls into question the very practice of evaluating and interpreting Seneca's Choruses according to the principles that emerged much earlier and in different circumstances. Instead, Hill draws attention to the consistency in the structure of choral parts in Seneca, namely, the undetermined identity of the Chorus, which can be attributed some properties on an ad-hoc basis, with no relation to other Choruses in the same play; a temporary and strictly context-bound state of consciousness and memory of the Chorus, which precludes its role as a hero; and a tight connection between choral parts and a given scene or situation in a play, although rarely based on interaction. In fact, choral parts usually serve to bring out a certain mood, emotion, or thought which may trigger reflection or produce ironic effect. Taking into consideration these elements, Hill compares the function of Seneca's Chorus to the role of a movie soundtrack: its parts may emphasise or develop an idea or thought, sometimes providing additional information about or engaging the characters, but in principle, it does not belong to the represented world but to the commentary, without ceasing to be an integral part of the whole.<sup>21</sup> In light of this perspective, it seems pointless to include choral parts in the discussion of Seneca's conceptualisation of the temporal and spatial frames of the dramatic action (see also below).

## 1. TIME

The rule according to which the dramatic action should cover a period of no more than 24 hours seems well established in the ancient tragedy. The corpus of preserved serious plays contains only occasional instances where this principle is violated, including the most obvious one: the long trip of Orestes from Delphi to Athens (Aesch. *Eu.* 75–241).<sup>22</sup> There are also controversies regarding the lapse of time between the scene where the message arrives that Troy has been captured and the arrival of Herald, who recalls a night tempest that harassed Agamemnon's

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number of members of Roman choruses and the fact that they were moved from the ὀρχήστρα to the *pulpitum*.

<sup>19</sup> See Slaney 2013: 99–116. Cf. also Zanobi 2014: 83–87.

<sup>20</sup> See Stevens 1992: 126–139; 332–335.

<sup>21</sup> Hill 2000: 561–587.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Sommerstein 1989: 124–125; Taplin 1977, 377–379, 291–294.

fleet on their way back (Aesch. *Ag.* 278–279; 636–680).<sup>23</sup> Perhaps these are the plays that Aristotle has in mind when he notes that in the past, the length of the tragedy was not prescribed, just as in the case of epic poems.<sup>24</sup> According to some scholars, this principle is the result of the (generally) constant presence of the chorus in the ὀρχήστρα, which gives credibility to the continuity of time and unity of place in the Attic tragedy.<sup>25</sup> However, this kind of relationship is absent from the preserved Roman plays (see above), and still, among the preserved texts, it is only in Ps.-Sen. *Oct.* that the dramatic action exceeds this time frame (it covers three days<sup>26</sup>).

In the context of the relative consistency in complying with the unity of time principle, it should be noted that it applies to dramatic time, irreducible to the realistic conception of time. Hence, it is useful to replace the category of time continuity with the category of the illusion of dramatic development continuity and of the illusion of compatibility between the dramatic time and the real performance time.<sup>27</sup> This illusion is produced by 1) a lack of explicit information about the fact that the dramatic action or events that form its immediate background cover a period longer than 24 hours; 2) the use of a characteristic element of the plot (as in the case of Medea, who has to leave Corinth and take her revenge before dawn; see Eur. *Med.* 352–355 and Sen. *Med.* 295–299; cf. also Ennius *Med.* fr. 108; Jocelyn: 120); 3) a suggestion that a given sequence of events takes place on a single day<sup>28</sup> (see Soph. *Ai.* 751–757; Eur. *Hipp.* 21–22; *Hec.* 43–46 and Sen. *Med.* 56–115; 299–300; Sen. *Ag.* 752–754); and 4) the location

<sup>23</sup> Critics point out that the 24-hour rule did not apply, or assume that this composition was not perceived as its violation by Aeschylus' contemporaries, who were not pedantic about the play's structure (this would suggest that the receivers were insensitive to selected problems of the construction of dramatic time and succumbed to the illusion of continuity imposed by the playwright). For an overview of approaches, see Fraenkel 1962: 254–256; Taplin 1977: 290–294.

<sup>24</sup> The laconic character of Aristotle's remark (*Poet.* 1449b12–16) – ἔτι δὲ τῷ μήκει· ἢ μὲν ὅτι μάλιστα πειρᾶται ὑπὸ μίαν περίοδον ἡλίου εἶναι ἢ μικρὸν ἐξαλλάττειν, ἢ δὲ ἐποποιία ἀόριστος τῷ χρόνῳ καὶ τούτῳ διαφέρει, καίτοι τὸ πρῶτον ὁμοίως ἐν ταῖς τραγῳδίαις τοῦτο ἐποίουν καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἔπεσιν – encouraged some scholars (see Else 1957: 208–219) to interpret μήκος as the physical length of the text or the duration of its performance. However, interpreting μήκος as the time span of the dramatic action seems more plausible; for arguments, see Lucas 1972: 93–94.

<sup>25</sup> See Taplin 1977: 291 on the basis of Flickinger 1918: 250–257.

<sup>26</sup> This is the only preserved instance of the Roman historical drama/praetexta, so it may only be hypothesised that the unity of time (and place, see below) did not apply in the case of this genre; see Herington 1961: 21–25; cf. also Ferri 2003: 61, 119; Boyle 2013: LXIII. On the other hand, the preserved fragments of Republican historical plays do not differ from the tragedies of this period with regard to the plot features, meter, style, or the choice of supporting characters (nurse, messenger, or prophet). In addition, on the basis of the preserved ancient sources, it cannot be concluded with certainty that tragedies and *praetexta*/historical plays of the imperial era differed substantially except with regard to the theme or Greek or Roman realia, and even such differences may sometimes appear blurred, see Ginsberg 2015: 223–237.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Taplin 1977: 291–294; cf. also Boyle 2017: 223–224.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Taplin 1977: 292.

of time-consuming actions offstage, with choral parts used to symbolically fill the time needed for these actions to take place (without any correspondence with real time); a technique also noticed by scholiasts of Euripides and Sophocles.<sup>29</sup> The latter-mentioned strategy is rather commonly used. We find it, for instance, in Aesch. *Sept.* 714–819 (the defense of the Theban walls and the death of the brothers); Soph. *Ant.* 1100–1243 (the interment of Polynices, finding Antigone’s body, and the death of Haemon); Eur. *Phoen.* 1009–1258; 1279–1479 (the assault on the Theban walls, Jocasta and Antigone’s visit outside the walls, and the fight); Eur. *Supp.* 349–394 (the gathering of the Athenian army); 584–766 (the expedition to Thebes and the fight; interment, and the return to Attica); and Eur. *El.* 685–858 (the killing of Aegisthus); cf. also Aesch. *Supp.* 517–624; *Eum.* 487–573; Soph. *Ant.* 324–385; 577–700; *Trach.* 600–806; *Phil.* 1074–1221; Eur. *Heracl.* 335–409; 720–863; *Hipp.* 1098–1248; *Hec.* 432–509; *Supp.* 935–983; *Andr.* 993–1157; *Hel.* 1301–1384; 1451–1617; *Or.* 807–952; *Bacch.* 346–450; *IA* 1505–1603. In Seneca, it can be found in *Phaed.* 945–1114 (the death of Hippolytus); *Oed.* 401–658 (the expedition to the Theban woods and necromancy); *Tro.* 1003–1164 (the execution of Astyanax and Polyxena); *Med.* 845–890 (the expedition of Medea’s sons with gifts, the death of Creon and Creusa, and the fire of the palace); *Ag.* 802–866 (the offering); and *Thy.* 332–407 (the expedition of Agamemnon and Menelaus to Thyestes, persuading him to return, and the arrival of Thyestes with his children at Atreus’ house) and 545–782 (the killing of the nephews, *extispicia*, and the preparation of the feast). It is also present in Ps-Sen. *Her.O.* 1514–1757 (building the pyre, the death, and the burning of Hercules); in *Oct.*, this technique was used to connect scenes that cover a period of three days (cf. above). The illusion can also be reinforced by hints that place a selected scene in time (e.g., before dawn or in the morning) in the frequent absence of other signals that could help determine the passage of time between elements of the dramatic action;<sup>30</sup> cf. Aesch. *Ag.* 8–279; *Pers.* 176–180; Soph. *Ai.* 141–147; *El.* 17–19; *Ant.* 15–16; 100–104; 415–417; Eur. *El.* 78–79; *Tro.* 182–183; *IT* 42–43; *Ion* 82–85; *IA* 4–159; *Rh.* 4–6; 535–537; 541–545; 985; and Sen. *Her.F.* 123–136; 939–940; *Phae.* 41; *Oed.* 1–5; *Ag.* 53–56; *Thy.* 49–50; 120–121; cf. also *Tro.* 168–170<sup>b</sup>; 438–460; *Phoen.* 323–326, 387–393.

Thus, Seneca regularly makes use of the same devices for creating the illusion of the continuity of time that were used by the Attic playwrights. However, hints that in the preserved Greek tragedies seem first and foremost to introduce the context of the dramatic action serve a different function in Seneca. In contrast to his other dramas, the prologues of plays where a superhuman character appears on stage end with a formula that indicates the sunrise (*Her.F.* 123–124; *Ag.*

<sup>29</sup> See Nünlist 2009: 86–87.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Taplin 1977: 292.

53–56; *Thy.* 120–121; cf. 49–51). In the prologues of Greek tragedies with similar characters, no such consistency is present. Clytemnestra visits Erinyes at a time when people are active, and her ghost does not mention the sunrise (cf. Aesch. *Eu.* 1–139). The Ghost of Darius appears in similar circumstances (Aesch. *Pers.* 681–842). From Eur. *Hec.* 1–76, it follows that Polydorus appears before dawn<sup>31</sup>, but his words and Hecuba's turn are not separated by the delimiting formula. The formula does not end the conversation between Athena and Odysseus in Soph. *Ai.* 1–133, which takes place before dawn (Soph. *Ai.* 141–143), or Aphrodite's monologue in Eur. *Hipp.* 1–57, a play that also includes a dialogue with Artemis (cf. Eur. *Hipp.* 1283–1439). It does not occur in the monologue of Dionysus (cf. Eur. *Ba.* 1–64), who also speaks later in *Bacchae*; cf. also Eur. *Alc.* 1–76; *Tro.* 1–97; *Ion* 1–81. The formula that signals the sunrise marks the ending of the prologue in *Iphigenia in Aulide* (156–160), but here superhuman characters do not appear. Thus, although the paradigm followed by Seneca in *Her.F.*, *Ag.*, and *Thy.* may be rooted in tradition, it does not seem to derive from the Attic playwrights. This paradigm may serve to additionally delimit the prologue, with the status of characters justifying a different time perspective from that of human characters that appear in the play.<sup>32</sup> In view of Seneca's discursive remarks,

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Gregory 1999: 39, 52–53.

<sup>32</sup> Speaking characters in the prologues have knowledge of selected events which in the sequence of dramatic development will take place in future or will be planned later (cf., e.g., Sen. *Her.F.* 98–122 and 939–1053; Sen. *Ag.* 39–48 and 875–905; Sen. *Thy.* 56–66 and 244–286). What is worth noting in Seneca, however, is not the status of these characters combined with their (limited) knowledge of the future (in this respect, they could be regarded as typical “farsighted” characters known from the Attic tragedy, cf., e.g., Aesch. *Eu.* 64–83 – Apollo reveals the future to Orestes; Eur. *Ba.* 1–52 – Dionysus foreshadows Pentheus' punishment; Eur. *Hipp.* 21–50 – Aphrodite foreshadows Hippolytus' punishment and the death of Phaedra; and Eur. *Hec.* 40–50 – Polydorus foreshadows the death of Polyxena and his own burial; cf. also Eur. *Alc.* 64–69; *Rhes.* 595–639), but the clear separation of their turns from the dialogues of human heroes and the formula that ends their turns. Still, there are no sufficient grounds to argue for the simultaneous occurrence of the events presented in the prologue and those from other acts of the plays under discussion, as suggested by Shelton (1975: 257–269; cf. Shelton 1978: 17–25) with reference to *Her.F.* and *Thy.*; cf., among others, Monteleone (1991: 190–192) (on one of Shelton's assumptions), and Heil (2013: 17–24, 74–80, 120–121), whose extensive criticism is in many places accurate but is based on a number of dubious interpretive assumptions. For instance, Heil (2013: 92–110) assumes that Amphitryon succumbs to illusion when he hears Hercules leaving the underworld in *Her.F.* 520–523. However, from Juno's turn in *Her.F.* 47–61, it may but does not have to follow that Hercules managed to leave Hades before the dramatic action (the tense Juno uses does not seem significant here). Amphitryon's and Hercules' turns are separated by the Chorus (*Her.F.* 524–591) so, considering the conventional treatment of time in offstage events (cf. above), Hercules might have travelled from Taenarus through the Peloponnese to Thebes in the span of the song. What is also worth noticing is the laconic nature of Amphitryon's words: he mentions the ground rumbling under the steps of (powerful) Hercules, not necessarily his emergence from the underworld. It may be assumed that he hears Hercules, who earlier (at night?) crossed the Peloponnese and is now approaching Thebes. In this context, a prayer Hercules offers to Phoebus and other divinities

where the author denies the existence of the afterlife with its traditional scenery and inhabitants of the underworld,<sup>33</sup> and in view of the fact that elsewhere he avoids including ghosts or divine beings in the group of speaking characters,<sup>34</sup> one may hypothesise that this strategy emphasises the imaginary status<sup>35</sup> of such “nightly” characters, which represent a higher level of fictionality than “daily” heroes. Another example may be the function of a remark about the early morning in the prologue of *Oedipus*. It not only highlights the fact that the king is alert and concerned, emphasised in Sophocles (cf. especially *OT* 65<sup>36</sup>), but also plays an important cohesive role, opening the theme of criticism of Phoebus and his oracle.<sup>37</sup>

In Seneca, we also find solutions that potentially weaken the illusion of the continuity of time. These include, for instance, compressing a relatively short period of time within a scene<sup>38</sup> rather than within a song of the Chorus, which normally suspends the regular passage of time; see, e.g., *Med.* 843–845<sup>39</sup> (Medea summons the children; in the next line, she gives them a command); *Oed.* 823–839 (Oedipus summons former shepherds; after he exchanges a few words with Old Man, he introduces Phorbas to him<sup>40</sup>); *Tro.* 627–630 (Ulysses supposedly gives orders to

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would be understandable, since the sun has only just risen above the horizon (cf. *Her.F.* 592–597 and 125–136).

<sup>33</sup> See Sen. *Cons. Marc.* 19, 4; *Ep.* 24, 18; 82, 16; cf. *Ira* 2, 35, 5.

<sup>34</sup> In Seneca’s plays, there are several madness scenes in which some scholars recognise the presence of silent Furies on stage (cf. Boyle 2017: 97–99); these, however, are speculations, and except for the three prologues mentioned above, no superhuman character speaks on stage.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. similar conclusions but based on different assumptions in Shelton (1975: 257–269; 1978: 17–25: the prologues in *Her.F.* and *Thy.* acquaint the receiver with the heroes’ determination, which has sources in their inner mental power rather than in external factors); and Monteleone (1991: 192–215: the scene with Tantalus and Fury in *Thy.* is symbolic. The misfortunes that fall on the Tantalids are not caused by external forces but result from evil that is passed between generations; Tantalus is a stage representation of this evil spirit of the family, now released by anger).

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Finglass 2018: 187.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. especially Sen. *Oed.* 1–5; 212–215; 1042–1046.

<sup>38</sup> Considering pantomime as a source of inspiration for Sen. *Tro.* 351–359, Schmidt (2014: 542) speaks of “the gap between the two actions [which] is clearly to be imagined or to be staged as filled by the actions.” However, in terms of the structure of the text of the drama rather than its presentation, one may choose the term “implied action,” that is, one that has to be taken into account because of the logical succession of dramatic events, and whose duration is a matter of convention, just like the duration of some offstage actions which take place “at the same time” as songs of the Chorus. Also, it does not seem justified to include in the list of examples (as Schmidt does) the following passages: Sen. *Tro.* 1103; *Phae.* 605; *Thy.* 100 (also *Phoe.* 319), where the disturbance of the metre and ἀποσιώπησις/*reticentia* act as rhetorical reinforcement to emphasise emotional tension (cf. also Boyle 2017: 140; Coffey, Mayer 1990: 172).

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Boyle 2014: 336.

<sup>40</sup> NB in Sophocles, the illusion of the continuity of time is maintained in a conventional way. The king summons Shepherd (*OT* 859–862 and *OT* 1069), who has to travel a longer distance than Phorbas in Seneca (cf. *Oed.* 822–824 and *OT* 758–764), but his arrival (*OT* 1111–1116) is preceded by a song of the Chorus (*OT* 1086–1109).



find Astyanax; in the following line, he declares that Hector's son has already been captured); possibly also *Tro.* 351–353<sup>41</sup> (Agamemnon decides that the dispute will be solved by Calchas; in the following line, he addresses him directly); and *Phoen.* 281–325 (from the conversation between Oedipus and Antigone, it is clear that Thebes is threatened with a siege; in the passage that follows, Oedipus learns that Polynices is besieging Thebes). Another formal solution that undermines the illusion of dramatic continuity might be the presentation of one scene from several perspectives. The eponymous hero of *Thyestes* feasts during Messenger's speech, which covers the whole of the fourth act, the fourth song of the Chorus, and Atreus' monologue in the fifth act; after the monologue, the same feast is also presented on stage (*Thy.* 920–969). The duration of the feast, contrasting with the considerable compression of offstage actions that took place earlier (cf. above), is additionally emphasised by the repeated remarks on the unexpected twilight made by Messenger (*Thy.* 637–638), the Chorus (*Thy.* 789–884), and Atreus (*Thy.* 891–897).<sup>42</sup> Together with a hint in the text (in the fourth act, *Thy.* 784–788, Messenger states that despite the darkness, Thyestes will see his *mala*; Atreus does not make this decision until the fifth act, *Thy.* 889–902), it may suggest an epic<sup>43</sup> sequence used to present events that took place at the same time or were partly overlapping.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Keulen 2001: 259–260.

<sup>42</sup> This aspect has been noted by Owen (1968: 297–299; cf. also Schmidt 2014: 545), whose remarks need a little correction, namely, the references to the darkness by Messenger, Atreus, and Thyestes are not related to the same moment in time. The first two refer to the circumstances of Thyestes' feast, in which Atreus does not take part. When Thyestes notices the growing darkness and seismic shocks (*Thy.* 989–995), he is accompanied by Atreus, who has already joined him (cf. *Thy.* 970–971). Owen (1970: 121–124) also draws attention to another formal innovation in Sen. *Tro.*, related to the category of time, namely, the alternation of simultaneous actions, which are arranged paratactically. This conclusion, however, is too far-reaching. Although Andromache does not know what Achilles' ghost demanded, she has heard about his appearance (*Tro.* 430–435), so one cannot assume that her words from the beginning of the third act (starting at *Tro.* 409) chronologically precede the message about Achilles brought by Talthybius in the second act. The fact that Pyrrhus does not explicitly mention Achilles' ghost does not imply that he does not know about the ghost and its demands. On the contrary, Achilles' son insists that Agamemnon should satisfy his father's demands (see especially *Tro.* 244–248 and 195–196). Agamemnon (*Tro.* 353–354) may also refer to Talthybius' words (*Tro.* 164–165). Moreover, the fact that the scenes with Talthybius, Pyrrhus, and Agamemnon are adjacent suggests a cause-and-effect relationship between them. Thus, the scenes create the impression that the actions are not simultaneous and are presented chronologically.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Nünlist 2009: 79–83; NB Aristotle (*Poet.* 1459b22–28) considers this technique as specific to the epic genre and does not envisage its use in plays.

<sup>44</sup> Heil (2013: 25–69) disputes the concept of nonchronological composition of this part of *Thy.*, but he does not take into account Messenger's knowledge about the development of events in the fifth act and bases his conclusions on poorly justified assumptions. For instance, he treats the Chorus (cf. above) as a character in the drama and assumes that the peak of the eclipse occurs at the end of the fourth act, during the song of the Chorus, and at the beginning of the fifth act, and that Thyestes must be experiencing hallucinations when he expresses his fears at the growing

Finally, it is worth mentioning the monologues of Seneca's heroes, which they give on the side while joining the characters who are already on stage and who can see the newcomers but cannot hear them. This situation takes place in the monologue of Lycus (*Her.F.* 332–357), which intertwines with the conversation between Amphitryon and Megara; possibly in the monologue of Atreus (*Thy.* 491–507; cf. below); and in the monologue by Jason (*Med.* 431–446) and, probably, by Creon (*Med.* 179–187) and Aegisthus (*Ag.* 226–233). Here Tarrant also includes the monologues of Helen (*Tro.* 861–871) and (wrongly<sup>45</sup>) Clytemnestra (*Ag.* 108–124). He describes them in terms of a suspension of dramatic time and points out that such scenes are absent from the Attic tragedy, but that they do occur in the comedy (e.g., Aristoph. *Plut.* 335–342; Plaut. *Capt.* 998–1006; *Trin.* 843–850; 853–860; 866–868; *Stich.* 155–195; and *Amph.* 633–653; 660; 661–663; 675).<sup>46</sup>

## 2. PLACE

A widespread research approach to the construction of space in the Attic drama assumes that in the old comedy, the basic point of reference is the theatrical space, and the scenery – constructed verbally and fluent – may change at any time, most commonly in the prologue. In the new comedy, in turn, the construction of space is closer to the model known from tragedy. In tragedy, space is more closely defined, and a change of scenery occurs in only a few of the preserved plays, where it is communicated explicitly and is possible only when the heroes and the Chorus are not present on stage, as in Aesch. *Eu.* 74–243 and, possibly, Soph. *Ai.* 803–865; there are also controversies regarding the unity of place in *Cho.* and *Pers.*<sup>47</sup> A minor departure from the convention regarding the

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darkness and the earthquake. In fact, however, we are faced with reports of the unexpected twilight by different protagonists, and the seismic shocks, which have apparently continued since the beginning of the dramatic action, are mentioned earlier in the text not only by Atreus (*Thy.* 263–264) but also by Messenger (*Thy.* 696–698), which suggests that this experience was intersubjective.

<sup>45</sup>This is not a case of suspension of dramatic time. The illusion of the continuity of time is preserved; Nurse cannot hear Clytemnestra's monologue but notices the long silence of the queen (cf. *Ag.* 125–128).

<sup>46</sup>Tarrant 1978: 231–241; see also the bibliography there. It seems, however, that this conclusion cannot be extended to other asides that occur within dialogues: in *Med.* 549–550; *Tro.* 607–618; 625–626; 642–662; 686–691; and *Phaed.* 592–599 (Tarrant 1987: 242–246 enumerates and discusses the examples, so does Boyle 2017: 274–275). It is doubtful whether in these cases one can talk about a suspension of dramatic time, since the passages are very short – and the silence during the character's internal monologue would not have to result in an unnatural pause – or the situation on the stage does not require a fluent interaction or admits longer silences (as in the case of Phaedra regaining consciousness or a test of strength between Andromache and Ulysses).

<sup>47</sup>On the differences between tragedy and comedy in terms of the conceptualisation of space, see Lloyd 2012: 341–357; Bowie 2012: 359–373; Lowe 2006: 48–64, and bibliography there. See also Petrides 2010: 105–106; Lowe 1987, 128–134; Marshall 2006: 49–56. Taplin (1977:

setting of scenes in Sophocles concerns only the location of the action in an open space (*OC*).<sup>48</sup> In the preserved plays by Euripides, in turn, scenes always take place in front of a palace, house, temple, or tent in an army camp; moreover, their position in relation to orientation points in the extrascenic space is closely defined.<sup>49</sup> It must be noted that departures from the tragic model do not include changes of scene resulting from introducing an interior scene within an exterior one, that is, situations which from the staging perspective may need ἐκκύκλημα. Such cases can be found in the works of all three great Attic tragedians: Soph. *Ai.* 344–595(?); *El.* 1458–1477(?); Eur. *Her.* 1028–1426(?); *Hipp.* 808–1089(?); possibly also Aesch. *Ag.* 1372–1673(?); *Cho.* 973–1076(?); *Eu.* 85–234(?).<sup>50</sup> They may be assumed to have applied a formal solution that was becoming conventionalised and was thus taken into consideration by playwrights in the conceptualisation of space that formed the background of the dramatic action. Thus, it can be concluded that in the majority of the preserved Attic tragedies, the action is situated in a single, paradigmatically conceptualised place; as a result, one can talk about a characteristic formal feature of tragedy, which, however, is not obligatory.<sup>51</sup> Because of the specific nature of the above-mentioned plays, whose action is, or appears to be, situated in two places, some scholars have concluded that the verbal construction of scenery was also possible in tragedy. According to this approach, the setting focused attention or remained indefinite depending on its current dramatic function; and its changes did not violate the principle of dramatic illusion.<sup>52</sup> Still, it seems more appropriate to talk about (potentially) exceptions here rather than a rule.

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103–107) emphasises that among the preserved plays by Aeschylus, only four closely adhere to this principle, and points out that the conditions of the absence of the Chorus and explicit announcement of a change of scene in Aeschylus are not necessarily met. Scullion (1994: 67–128) rejects the idea of a change of scene in Greek tragedians, with the exception of the obvious case of *Eumenides*. A contrary opinion is presented by Finglass (2011: 11–22), among others; see also the bibliography there.

<sup>48</sup> See Rehm 2012: 325–339.

<sup>49</sup> See Lloyd 2012: 341–343. There are some controversies concerning the place of action in *Herac.* because of the blurred distinction between Athens and Marathon, cf. Allan 2001: 46–52.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Finglass 2011: 241; Finglass 2007: 532; Bond 1981: 329; Barret 2001 (1964): 317–318; Fraenkel 1962: 644; Garvie 2002 (1986): LII–LIII; Sommerstein 1989: 33, 93. Cf. discussion on the presence of ἐκκύκλημα in the Attic theatre of the 5<sup>th</sup> c. BC: Lucarini 2016: 138–156 and bibliography there.

<sup>51</sup> Its obligatory status might follow from a simplified theory of three unities (of place, time, and action) in the classical Greek tragedy. Still, the very concept of the “unity of place” was not explicitly introduced by any of the preserved ancient theorists of literature or literary critics; it is usually attributed to Lodovico Castelvetro, the author of *Poetica d’Aristotele vulgarizzata e sposta* (1570), cf. Carlson 1984: 47–50.

<sup>52</sup> Scullion (1994: 68–77) disputes both the hypothesis that in *Cho.* and *Pers.*, the scene changes, and the theory that the fluency and conventionality of space is a feature that can be ascribed not only to comedy but also to tragedy. For the opposite view, see, e.g., the discussion in Garvie

In the case of the majority of plays by Seneca, the same convention applies. Hints that identify the action as taking place directly in front of the temple and the palace, in front of the palace and on its roof, or in front of the palace, with the altar as the second orientation point, can be found in five plays: *Her.F.* (503; 506–507;<sup>53</sup> 520–521; 616–617; 898–899; 908–918; 1143–1144; 1227–1228); *Med.* (675–676; 980–981; 995); *Phaed.* (384; 406–425; 863; 1154–1155); *Oed.* (71; 202; 299–383; 708; 880; 915–918; 995–997); and *Ag.* (392–394; 778–779; 782–807; 867–877; 951; 953–955; 972). Next, there are hints that situate events in the extrascenic space; thus, *Her.F.* and *Oed.* take place in Thebes; *Med.* takes place in Corinth; *Phaed.*, in Athens; and *Ag.*, in Mycenae/Argos. These places are identified explicitly or through periphrases, allusions, or other orientation points, such as names of rivers, mountains, and neighbouring areas (*Her.F.* 133–135; 258; 274; 332–336; 386; 875; *Med.* 35–36; 45; 299; 891; *Phaed.* 2–26; 725–733; 1276; *Oed.* 42; 48–49; 110–112; 177; 233; 276–285; 512; 530–531; 665–667; 714–723; 749; 808; 843–844; *Ag.* 7–11; 121–122; 251; 342–344; 392–395; 757; 967; 998; 1007). In addition, Seneca introduces interior scenes in a conventional way (“in ἐκκύκλημα” or “in *exostra*”), as in *Med.* (cf. 578, 675–676 and 740–848),<sup>54</sup> *Phaed.* (863–902(?)), *Her.F.* (1122–1137),<sup>55</sup> and *Thy.* (901–1112),<sup>56</sup> cf. also Ps.-Sen. *Oct.* (72–272).<sup>57</sup>

Still, there are departures from this convention that fall within two paradigms. The action of *Troades* takes place in the vicinity of Troy, at the foot of Ida, with some other orientation points introduced (cf., e.g., *Tro.* 15–21; 175–180; 1068–1076; 1120–1125), but a precise location is difficult to establish. It is difficult to identify clearly an object or objects that form a stable background to the scenes, such as the tomb and adjacent tents. Captive women do receive some camp news (the drawing of lots, the appearance of the ghost of Achilles: *Tro.* 57–62; 430–435), but they do not seem to know Achilles’ demands or decisions that fall in the second act. Andromache hides Astyanax in Hector’s tomb, taking advantage of the lack of witnesses (cf. *Tro.* 492–514). The place of execution of Astyanax and Polyxena seems to be out of sight of captive women, as do the viewpoints (including Hector’s tomb) from which it could be seen (cf. *Tro.* 1065–1087). To make this plausible, one must make the following assumptions: 1) the events in the second act do not take place in the immediate vicinity of captive women; and 2) Hector’s tomb is located at a certain distance from the place of stay of the captives and the quarters of the Greeks. One could suppose

2009: XLVI–LIII and bibliography there; cf. also Taplin 1977: 103–107, 338–340, 377–378, 390–392; Rehm 2002: 239–241.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Fitch 1987: 248.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Boyle 2014: 312.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Fitch 1987: 351, 413.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Boyle 2017: 398–399.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Boyle 2013: 117.

that since the third act takes place at Hector's tomb (cf., e.g., *Tro.* 483–706), the tomb is also the site of Hecuba's monologue (act 1), the debate of the Greeks (act 2), the meeting of Helen and other captives (act 4), and Messenger's report of the execution. These characters would have come there from other places, located far enough to prevent them from seeing or hearing the events that had taken place at Hector's tomb. However, the secluded place by the tomb is not a likely setting of the second and fourth act; it would be strange if that was the site where Pyrrhus appeals to Agamemnon, Helen expects to meet captive women to pass them the news of the purported wedding (act 4), and Polyxena is getting dressed for this occasion (*Tro.* 945–947). A more plausible inference would be that the place of action shifts several times or, in principle, remains indefinite.<sup>58</sup> In this latter case, a more concrete spatial indications would not serve to create the illusion of a defined, spatially delimited setting of the play; the setting appears fluid, fragmented, and constructed verbally.

It is worth pointing out that a similar situation can be found in Ps.-Sen. *Oct.*, where the action for the most part seems to be set in different parts of the imperial palace. The scene with Octavia and Nurse (*Oct.* 1–272), dominated by a conventionally introduced interior perspective (*Oct.* 72–272; see above), may be situated in front of Octavia's rooms (*Oct.* 73); the setting of the scene with Seneca, Nero, and, occasionally, Prefect (*Oct.* 377–592) is indefinite,<sup>59</sup> as is the setting of Agrippina's monologue (*Oct.* 593–645). Octavia's monologue (*Oct.* 646–668) may be set outside the palace; the dialogue between Nurse and Poppea (*Oct.* 690–761), in front of Nero and Poppea's marriage chamber; and the scene with Messenger (*Oct.* 780–805), perhaps at the entrance to the palace. The setting of the scene with Prefect and Nero (*Oct.* 820–876) is indefinite, and the ἀμοιβαῖον with Octavia and the Chorus (*Oct.* 899–982) seems to be set in the vicinity of the Tiber/harbor.<sup>60</sup>

Importantly, another such example can be found in *Thyestes*, so far ignored in the research on Seneca's plays as a parallel to *Troades*. The action is set at the palace of the Pelopides; its space, undefined more closely, provides the scenery for the first act/prologue (cf., e.g., *Thy.* 101–104). According to Boyle, the second act takes place inside the palace rather than outside, but this does not seem to be related (see above) to the confidential nature of the dialogue

<sup>58</sup> Cf. also conclusions in Keulen (2001: 28) and Fantham (1982: 37–39), however, based on observations which are not always accurate (e.g., the mention of Hector's tomb in *Tro.* 1086–1087 is taken to suggest that the scene in the fifth act takes place at a certain distance from the tomb; in fact, it only seems to imply that Hector's tomb was out of sight of captive women earlier, at the time of the execution).

<sup>59</sup> According to Boyle (2013: 169), the confidential character of the conversation suggests that it takes place in an interior room. These circumstances, however, do not seem significant, cf., e.g., the scene with Electra and Strophius (*Ag.* 910–952).

<sup>60</sup> Cf. also Boyle 2013: 95, 217, 230, 240, 272–273.

between Atreus and Courtier,<sup>61</sup> but to the remark of Atreus, who mentions Lares (*Thy.* 264–265). It is clear from the context that Atreus refers to the figures of Lares, rather than to Lares as a metonymy for 'home';<sup>62</sup> there is also no reason to suppose that he has in mind figures placed at crossroads, in a grove, or in a temple outside the palace (*Lares compitales/viales/praestites*). His remark may refer to *Lares familiares*, which were, in principle, connected with the hearth (their images sometimes appeared at the altar in *atrium*).<sup>63</sup> In the third act, there are hints suggesting a place with a view of the city (*Thy.* 404–410) and, at the same time, close to the place where Atreus and Thyestes are supposed to meet, since it is possible that they can see each other (cf. *Thy.* 412; 491–493), and Thyestes does not dismiss the argument that it is too late to withdraw (cf. *Thy.* 486–487). A likely setting is the partially open area of Atreus' palace (on the hill, cf. *Thy.* 641), possibly its ceremonial part, since it is here that the apparent reconciliation of the brothers will take place (*Thy.* 508–545). The setting of the fifth act, including an elaborate interior scene (*Thy.* 901–1112), is partly defined; Atreus mentions *templum* inside the palace, that is, the place of the ceremonial feast, but we cannot be certain whether he refers to the area adjacent to the sacred grove, located away from the ceremonial part of the palace. With regard to the topography of the palace, the following hints, inconclusive but informative, are worth mentioning: 1) an erudite reference to Virgil's description of the palace of Latinus, with its presumed allusion to Augustus' palace on the Palatine and the grove of Faunus (cf. Verg. *A.* 7, 81–91; 170–186 and *Thy.* 641–680), and 2) the description of *domus Pelopia* in the fourth act, because the southern location of the part overlooking the city (cf. *Thy.* 641–645) and the location of the grove (*Thy.* 650–652) suggest an analogy to the palace of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, with its temple complex possibly situated over the Lupercal.<sup>64</sup> These references may enhance the impression that the scenes in acts 2, 3, and 5 take place in different settings. Moreover, Messenger's narrative in the fourth act – with a detailed description of the facade of the palace overlooking the city, the ceremonial part, and the sacred grove located in a secluded area (*Thy.* 641–682) – would be incredible if it were delivered from any of these observation points. It is apparently set in some undefined "somewhere else"; perhaps, rather than look for a concrete location of Messenger's narrative in the fifth act of *Troades*, one could assume a similar undefined space. Thus, the paradigm of the spatial organisation of the dramatic events in *Tro.*, *Thy.*, and *Oct.* would be analogous to that in Greek old comedy rather than to Attic tragic models, which might have inspired the new comedy.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Boyle 2017: 167.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. also Tarrant 1998:128; Boyle 2017: 206.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Flower 2017: 46–52; Boyle 2017: 206.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Carandini, Bruno 2008: 188–242; cf. also Tarrant 1998: 183; Boyle 2017: 324–325.

Moreover, among the preserved serious Roman plays, there are instances which, in terms of their spatial organisation, are parallel to the (rare) works of Attic tragedians where the place of action shifts. The first act of *Her.O.* seems to take place in the vicinity of Thessalian Oechalia (cf. *Her.O.* 125–135), while the others may be set in front of Hercules' palace in Trachis (cf. *Her.O.* 245–255; 1432; 1444).<sup>65</sup> The place of action also changes in Seneca's *Phoenissae*, a play which has only some characteristics of tragedy.<sup>66</sup> The first part of the play (*Phoen.* 1–362) certainly takes place outside Thebes, possibly on the road from Thebes to Cithaeron (*Phoen.* 12–13; cf. also *Phoen.* 67–72). The second part (*Phoen.* 363–664) is set in Thebes, in a place which allows for *τειχοσκοπία* (*Phoen.* 387–400; 417–419; 427–442), and outside the city walls (*Phoen.* 443–664); it is also possible that the latter could be regarded as a variation of the scene “on ἐκκύκλημα”/“on *exostra*,” where it is not an interior scene that is introduced into an exterior one, but the other way round.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

The principle of maintaining the illusion of the continuity of time is an important component of the generic paradigm used by Seneca, with its roots in Attic models. However, one cannot ignore the fact that Seneca often applies solutions that disturb this illusion, and even when he uses traditional devices for its maintenance, he applies them in a way that goes beyond the earlier practice. Similarly, analysing his plays in terms of the category of place, one comes to the conclusion that Seneca usually follows the model known from the majority of the preserved Greek tragedies; namely, he sets the action in a single well-defined place and introduces interior scenes in a conventional way. Still, on some occasions, he sets the action in two places (this solution, however rare, appears also in the Attic tragedians; it is also present in Roman *Hercules Oetaeus*) and builds the dramatic space in a way that seems analogous to the old comedy (later also to Roman *Octavia*) rather than to the tragedies of the classical period. Thus,

<sup>65</sup> There is no reason to suppose, as correctly pointed out by Braun (1997: 246–247 and bibliography there), that part of the action takes place on Oeta. Nevertheless, the front of the palace in Trachis appears equally improbable as the setting for the whole action: according to the logic of this solution, Hercules comes back from a victorious war and, standing in front of his palace, sends Lichas (*Her.O.* 99–103) with the news of his victory (the inhabitants of the palace, including Alcmena, overlooked his arrival?), and moves to Euboea to make atoning offerings (*Her.O.* 775–840). Braun (1997: 248–249 and bibliography there) goes against the existing interpretive tradition and rejects the possibility of changing the scene in *Her.O.* on the basis of the arbitrary assumption that the Chorus cannot move between Oechalia and Hercules' palace in Trachis. Among Seneca's more recent commentators, Fitch 2004: 335 is inclined to accept the view that the action of the prologue takes place in different settings than the other acts.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Discussion and bibliography in Sapota, Słomak 2021: 77–89.

in Seneca's plays, one can talk about the longevity of a feature characteristic of the genre practised by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, and, just as in the case of dramatic time, about a relative openness to other solutions. These innovations may have partly derived from Seneca's inventiveness; moreover, they were probably inspired by other dramatic genres (especially by comedy)<sup>67</sup> or epic poetry, stimulated by the evolving conventions of reception, and motivated by the need to adjust to an unknown post-classical tragic convention.

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<sup>67</sup>On other dramatic forms in ancient Rome see, e.g., Duckworth 1994; Boyle 2006; Manu-  
wald 2011; Dinter 2019, and bibliography there.



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TRADITION AND INNOVATION IN SENECA'S PLAYS  
FROM A GENOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE: TIME AND PLACE

Summary

This article aims to provide a systematic description of Seneca's approach to the categories of time and place as potentially rooted in the Attic tradition. References to this tradition long dominated the textual criticism, interpretation, and valorisation of Seneca's plays, and even though this trend has recently been on the decline, its remnants can still be found in scholarly debates on the Roman playwright. Hence, it is necessary to explore this problem, here narrowed down to two categories which so far have been discussed selectively, cursorily, or on the basis of untenable assumptions. The study shows that with regard to the categories of time and place, there is indeed a certain generic consistency within the set of preserved serious Greek and Roman plays. At the same time, the perspective adopted here sheds light on a number of innovations, which, when examined in the context of other more extensively modified elements, suggest that great caution should be taken when considering the Attic tradition as a direct or indirect source of inspiration for Seneca.