

*Foedera Naturae: A Discussion of Natural Limits in Selected Odes of Horace
and Seneca's Medea*

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this thesis is to explore the theme of natural limit in selected odes of Horace and in Seneca's *Medea*. It becomes obvious that these works have a particular relationship to each other, a study of which forms the latter part of the thesis.

In the Introductory Chapter the concept of natural limit in Greek and Roman mythology and philosophy is examined. A brief study shows that the theme appears in post-classical and modern works as well, though critics have varied widely in their treatment of it. In particular since the movement of the 1960s towards environmental awareness, the theme is beginning to receive the renewed attention of literary scholars.

Chapter Two concentrates on the Horatian material, beginning with a close study of ode 1.3., and an overview of previous interpretations. This section then expands to include several other odes. After close examination of these, I propose that Horace is depicting Nature as an all-encompassing entity, of which humans are participants not controllers. In several odes, the harmony that results for all participants of Nature when natural limits are respected becomes clear. As the depictions of natural limits in the odes often contain Stoic and Epicurean tenets, the chapter ends with a short discussion of these philosophical schools.

Seneca's tragedies are the basis for Chapter Three, and after a general survey of the terminology used to depict natural limits and their violation, the focus narrows to *Medea*. Alongside previous interpretations of the play, the theme of natural limit is examined, especially as it is portrayed in the Argonautic odes. In *Medea*, the transgression against the natural limit of the sea committed by the voyage of the Argonauts is depicted as a source of further violations, including those within human society. The ultimate destruction to which violation of natural limits can lead is fully

portrayed at the end of *Medea*. Seneca emphasizes that human civilization contains its own downfall.

Seneca portrays humankind's transgressions against natural limits more violently than does Horace. Yet he frequently alludes to Horace, and the study of these allusions is the subject of Chapter Four. Against a background of the literary theory prevalent in the first centuries B.C. and A.D., his practice of allusion is examined. Though ancient literary theory is predominantly used, some modern theory is considered, particularly in reference to issues of tradition and originality. The concentration of the chapter, however, lies on the texts themselves and to a large extent on Seneca's use of ode 1.3. It becomes clear that Seneca uses the Horatian material in a manner that emphasizes the hubristic *audacia* of humans who transgress natural limits.

The concluding remarks summarize Horace and Seneca's treatment of the theme of natural limit. Despite the difference in genres, these works have a clear relationship to each other. Familiarity with the selected odes of Horace adds significantly to the interpretation of Seneca's *Medea*.

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D. J. B. B.

Chapter One:

Introduction

This thesis explores the theme of natural limit in selected odes of Horace and in Seneca's *Medea*. The term "natural limit" refers primarily to physical limits in the cosmos, for example the limit that the sea sets to the land, but it also includes limits within human society. While the theme of natural limit appears in various guises in many works of Greek and Latin literature, this thesis will show that it has a particular importance and centrality in the works studied. These works also have a special relationship to each other, which will be investigated in Chapter Four.

... "*terras licet*" inquit "*et undas
obstruat: et caelum certe patet; ibimus illac:
... ignotas animum dimittit in artes
naturamque novat.*"

Ovid *Met.* viii. 185-189.

These words begin Ovid's version of the Daedalus and Icarus myth, in which father and son attempted to surpass one of the natural limits imposed on humankind. They were captives on Crete, when Daedalus, pining for his native land, decided to make wings for them both to escape. Soon Icarus, forgetful of his father's warning, flew too close to the sun, melted the wax in his wings, and plunged to his death in the sea below.¹

Underlying this myth is the theme of natural limit. In order to fly, Daedalus had to change Nature (*naturam novat*). He exceeded the natural limit that the sky imposes on humans, and at first he succeeded. Yet his son flew too close to the sun and his wings melted. Had he not been so careless, Icarus might have survived. In other words, to change Nature is potentially dangerous, yet not necessarily fatal until Icarus pushes too far. Transgression of a natural limit is possible, yet potentially fatal. The theme of natural limit also appears in many other myths.

¹ Ovid *Met.* viii. 183-235.

In a hymn to Demeter by Callimachus,² this theme is closely associated with the gods: transgression by humans into an area that is not meant for them results in punishment from the gods, in this case Demeter. Callimachus narrates the story of Erysichthon, who chopped down the trees in Demeter's sacred grove because he wanted to build himself a hall in which he could feast with his friends forever. Despite the appearance of Demeter's public priestess (in fact Demeter herself in disguise), and her attempt to dissuade him from his actions, Erysichthon continued his violation. His response angered Demeter and she revealed her true identity. As punishment, Demeter inflicted insatiable hunger upon Erysichthon, and he ended his life as a beggar, hoping for crusts and garbage. In this story the limits set for humans are enforced by Demeter. She ensures that there are grim consequences for Erysichthon's violation. The story told in the hymn is to serve as "a grim warning to all" (23) that transgression of limits results in unpleasant consequences.

A third example of violation of natural limit is found in the story of Phaethon. There Phoebus' son, Phaethon, desires proof of his paternity. As confirmation Phoebus promises to grant him whatever he wishes, and he chooses to drive the chariot of the sun. Unable to retract his offer, but bitterly regretting it, Phoebus tries to dissuade his son from this particular request by stressing the mortality of his son: *sors tua mortalis, non est mortale, quod optas*.³ Yet Phaethon is determined, and the most Phoebus can do is to warn him to stay on the path and to drive neither too high nor too low. Inevitably, the task is too difficult for Phaethon, and after he burns the earth, Zeus kills him at the earth's request with a lightning bolt. In this myth the effects on other elements of Nature when the human does not accept natural limits become particularly clear.

² Callimachus *Hymn* 6. The story is also told by Ovid at *Met.* viii. 738-878, again with emphasis on divine punishment.

³ Ovid *Met.* ii. 56.

The above myth also depicts the havoc that arises if the sun does not remain on its course. It is not only humans who need to obey natural limits, but also other elements of Nature. While in these three myths either natural consequences or divinely-controlled consequences resulted from violations of natural limits, Greek mythology also includes figures whose job it was to ensure that limits were respected. In Hesiod's *Theogony* it appears that both the Moirai and the Keres watch for and avenge transgressions of humans and deities:

καὶ Μοίρας καὶ Κῆρας ἐγείνατο νηλεοποίνους,
 . . . αἳ τ' ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε παραιβασίας ἐφέπουσιν.
 οὐδέ ποτε λήγουσι θεαὶ δεινοῖο χόλοιο,
 πρὶν γὰρ τῷ δώωσι κακὴν ὅπιν, ὅς τις ἀμάρτη. (217-
 222)⁴

In other works, the Erinyes (who are sometimes identified with the Keres) avenge transgressions against natural laws. While the Erinyes are usually associated with the violation of kinship bonds,⁵ they also react to transgressions against the natural order by non-humans.⁶ They are described as horrible creatures, who are clothed in black and have snakes in their hair. Yet they serve a vital function: they ensure that violations, both of standards of human behaviour and of the universal order, do not go unpunished. Their association with retributive action in the cosmic as well as the human realms emphasizes the connection between the human and the non-human spheres. In a fragment of Heraclitus, the Erinyes are said to ensure that the sun stays in its place and obeys its natural limits: "Ἡλίου οὐχ ὑπερβήσεται μέτρα. εἰ δὲ μή, Ἐρινύες μιν Δίκης ἐπίκουροι ἐξεθρήσουσιν."⁷

⁴ "And she [Night] bore the Moirai and the ruthlessly-punishing Keres, / . . . they pursue the transgressions of men and gods. / The goddesses do not ever abate their terrible anger / before they exact vengeance on whoever has transgressed."

⁵ E. g. the Furies' famous pursuit of Orestes, after he has killed his mother. Aeschylus *Libation Bearers* 1048-1062.

⁶ E. g. it is the Furies who silence Achilles' horse when it speaks to him and prophesies his death. The action is contrary to Nature because the horse speaks to a human and because it reveals destiny. *Iliad* 19. 418-422

⁷ "The Sun will not overstep its measures. Otherwise the Erinyes, ministers of Justice, will find him out." Heraclitus *fragment* 94.

This fragment identifies the Erinyes as ministers of Δίκη (justice), and the concept of Δίκη is closely connected with that of natural limits in early Greek thinking. This connection can be seen, for example, in Heraclitus' philosophical theory, in which Logos appears to be a "structural plan [of things] both individual and in sum."⁸ All parts of the cosmos have their place. All things are united in a coherent complex, thus they must all have designated places, which have limits. The idea of justice is also closely connected to the Theory of Opposites. This theory, in which Heraclitus establishes both the unity and plurality of pairs,⁹ explains the stability of the cosmos. God (who seems similar to Logos) appears to connect all things, as he embodies all the opposites. By this unifying factor one whole is created. In order to create a stable and unified complex, the opposites must always maintain a balance. The notion of Δίκη evolves from the reaction between these opposites. When there is change in the world, the balance of the cosmos can only be maintained if this change is always counter-acted by a change in the opposite direction.¹⁰ This change Heraclitus describes as war or strife (*fragment* 80), and identifies it with Δίκη, "the indicated way (from the same root as δέικνυμι), or the normal rule of behaviour."¹¹ Δίκη is the strife which ensures that there is a balance between opposites, which in turn ensures a stable complex. Correction of violation of limit is thus in the

⁸ Kirk, Raven & Schofield, 2nd ed. (1983) 187. My description of Heraclitus' philosophy is based on this work. Logos is a complex word. While technically it probably does signify a structural plan, one must realize that this definition is rather abstract. "Logos was probably conceived by Heraclitus at times as an actual component of things, and in many respects it is co-extensive with the primary cosmic constituent, fire . . ." Kirk, Raven & Schofield (1983) 188.

⁹ E. g. night and day: together they are whole, thus a unity, but if taken individually, they are two single components (*fragment* 10). Kirk, Raven & Schofield (1983) 190. It should be noted that the idea of opposites in the cosmos is not unique to Heraclitus. See Kirk, Raven & Schofield (1983) 119.

¹⁰ One must infer that most change can be viewed in terms of opposites. Growth cannot be viewed in such terms. Kirk, Raven and Schofield (1983) 194.

¹¹ Kirk, Raven & Schofield (1983) 194.

domain of $\Delta(\kappa\eta)$.¹²

The concept of limits in Nature also appears later, in a less abstract form, in Epicurean philosophy. Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*, which follows much of Epicurus' thought,¹³ shows that there is, for example, a natural limit to pleasure as well as a natural limit to life. The latter is imposed by death.¹⁴ In addition there must be a limit which prevents the creation of new material out of nothing. If there were no such limit, anything could come from anything, for example humans could arise from the sea (l. 161). Furthermore, anything could arise at any time: crops could come out of the earth in an unsuitable season (l. 180-181). No time would be needed for growth, since things could appear suddenly and fully grown (l. 187). Again, if there were no limit ensuring that new matter does not emerge from nothing, it follows that there would be no limit to size, and humans could be huge. Yet none of these phenomena occur: all things grow over time from a fixed seed (l. 188-190). The process of creation is limited (l. 199-204).

The concept of limit is also critical to the Epicurean theory of atoms. The very existence of atoms depends upon the existence of a limit to the division of matter. If there were no such limit, how does one explain the remaining bodies of all types, which have survived through the ages? Dissoluble by nature, how could they have survived? Furthermore, if there were no limit to division, all matter would by now be so fragmented that nothing would be able to reach maturity.¹⁵ When material can be divided no more, atoms remain.

There is no limit to the number of atoms (l. 1008-1051) nor to space

¹² Heraclitus also contemplates the main masses that form the cosmos: earth, sea and fire. While the relationship between these three is not quite one of opposite, the processes of change between them can be viewed in those terms. Whatever changes occur between these masses, the total of each must remain the same. Again, limit and measure are crucial for the cosmos to remain in existence.

¹³ Lucretius *De Rerum Natura* 3. 3-6.

¹⁴ These limits are discussed in detail in Chapter Two.

¹⁵ This is based on the observation that destruction is faster than renewal (l. 551-564).

(2. 92), but there is a limit to the number of shapes atoms can have (2. 478-521).¹⁶ Lucretius further stresses the existence of limit in the combinations of atoms (2. 700-729). While atoms combine to create different forms, the absence of monsters in the world shows that any atom cannot combine with any other.

It becomes clear both in philosophy, where violation of limit would result in destruction (Heraclitus) or the creation of monsters (Lucretius), and in mythology, where violation of limit can cause death and damage, that in order for all the participants of the world to be in harmony, there must be natural limits. Violation of these limits results in harm, not only or necessarily for the perpetrator, but also for other members of the cosmos. Furthermore, it becomes apparent that humans are not the controllers of Nature: they have their limits, transgression of which leads to damage.

Horace and Seneca are writing against this philosophical and mythological background. Horace shows that he was heavily influenced by Epicureanism,¹⁷ as well as by the Greek mythical tradition.¹⁸ Seneca chooses to write tragedy, a genre in which the mythical paradigms of limits, and the theme of *Δίκη* are central. The importance of these concepts to tragedy can be seen, for example, in Aeschylus' *Oresteia* and Euripides' *Phaethon*. The theme of natural limit, either with its philosophical or its mythological connotations or both, is crucial to those portions of each author's work which I have chosen to study.

Yet this theme has received little attention among the critics of

¹⁶ Otherwise, if atoms had an infinite number of shapes, standards would constantly be outdone. There would be no "most beautiful" for example, because it could immediately be exceeded by something even more beautiful (2. 500-514).

¹⁷ E. g. the influence is shown in his notion of pleasure and the concept that one can be very happy as long as one has the necessities for life. Excessive pursuit of luxury brings worries (ode 1.31.17). This is discussed more fully in the second chapter. For other influences of Epicurus, but not in the theme of natural limit, see Pöschl (1958).

¹⁸ There are references to myths throughout the odes. For example: 1.3, 1.12, 1.16, 1.17, 2.14, 3.11, 3.16, 3.27, to name a few.

Horatian and Senecan works.¹⁹ This absence indicates that the theme was not deemed interesting or relevant by previous critics. However, with each new generation of critics, certain aspects of ancient literature come into particularly sharp focus. Subsequently, it is possible to revalue aspects which did not hold the same interest or resonance for earlier generations. Increasingly since the 1960s, the issue of limits built into Nature, and limitations to human control has gained public attention.

The realization that humans are a part of the cosmos and not controllers of it underlies modern 'environmental' thinking. The growing public awareness of environmental damage has raised questions about human behaviour toward the planet and its non-human life forms. The idea that there are limits for humans, which was portrayed in the myths of the ancients, is fundamental to studies such as "The Limits to Growth," produced in the late 1960s.²⁰ There are limits to what the planet and its life-support systems can sustain; human actions affect the rest of the planet.²¹

An interest in studying how literature embodies and affects attitudes towards the physical environment has led to the emergence of *ecocriticism*.²² As Cheryll Glotfelty has observed,

. . . literature does not float above the material world in some aesthetic ether, but, rather, plays a part in an immensely complex global system, in which energy, matter, and *ideas* interact.²³

¹⁹ Previous Horatian and Senecan scholarship is discussed in detail in Chapters Two and Three respectively.

²⁰ This study was initiated by The Club of Rome and concentrates on five issues, all of which are interconnected: accelerating industrialization, rapid population growth, widespread malnutrition, depletion of nonrenewable resources, and a deteriorating environment. Meadows, 2nd ed. (1972).

²¹ The importance lies in the concept of limit, not in the actual limits in Nature that were seen in the myths. The sea or the sky no longer impose a limit to humans. The only way to define a 'natural limit' in the modern world is in relation to what the planet can sustain, or within the context of the environment.

²² The term was perhaps first coined by W. Rueckert in his 1978 essay, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism." reprinted in Glotfelty (1996) 105-123.

²³ Glotfelty (1996) xix.

It has been argued, however, that literature is a closed system of reference, that it refers and is relevant only to other literature. This approach is seen particularly in Modernism, which often emphasized the internal cohesiveness of a work, rather than its relationship to external reality.²⁴ Yet the danger of such an approach is that literature ultimately becomes meaningless: if it always and only refers back to itself, where is the meaning? In order to have meaning, literature must have a point, external to the text, which 'grounds' its meaning. Or more simply, literature must be understood within a context, other than a purely literary one.

Literary creation is a human activity, yet it does not follow that the human needs to dominate the portrayal of the non-human world in literature. Such depiction of Nature is seen in "pathetic fallacy," for example in the first *Idyll* of Theocritus, where the jackals and the wolves howl for Daphnis' death, the lion weeps as do the calves and bulls (71-75).

Ecocriticism would point out that this type of portrayal of Nature makes Nature a part of the human sphere, secondary to the human. Its inherent value is lost, because Nature is only viewed as it relates to humans. Such depiction privileges the human and disregards the centrality and importance of Nature on the planet. Nature in fact becomes subservient to the human. While such use of Nature in literature does not necessarily mean that people will treat Nature in reality as subservient, it does encourage an attitude of human supremacy. It leads humans to view themselves not as a

²⁴ Within the Modernist framework words are always seen to refer back to other words within the poem; it is believed one cannot relate the words to events in reality, before one has related them to each other and made sense out of the work. In other words, a poem (or novel) has an internal structure, and the relation to reality is not the primary objective of the work. Frank (1945) 321. Frye, in his *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), postulates that literature, as a product of the imagination of humans, becomes self-perpetuating. Although one at first thinks of literature as a commentary on reality, in fact literature is an autonomous language. He uses mathematics as an analogy to explain this concept: "But just as in mathematics we have to go from three apples to three, and from a square field to a square, so in reading a novel we have to go from literature as reflection of life to literature as autonomous language. Literature also proceeds by hypothetical possibilities, and though literature, like mathematics, is constantly useful . . . pure literature, like pure mathematics, contains its own meaning." Frye (1957) 351.

part of the ecosystem, but as outside, privileged users.

To argue for an interaction between literature and the external world is not to deny that the creation of literature is affected by the literary tradition. Whether a writer adheres to a tradition or not, its existence cannot be ignored.²⁵ Even by turning away from a tradition, an author still acknowledges its presence. Through the act of literary creation, a writer adds to and modifies the tradition.²⁶ Paradoxically, tradition is both a stable and a changing concept. The context of tradition adds meaning to a text.

The literary tradition and the context it provides become very important in my study of Seneca's *Medea*. The frequent allusions to previous authors, but in particular to Horace in the portrayal of natural limit and its violation, exemplify the allusive nature of Roman poetry. The allusions that dwell on natural limit indicate that within the realm of literature at least, there was an awareness of such limits.

While literature may not necessarily directly reflect (or influence) human behaviour, cultural attitudes and contemporary concerns can influence both the creation and the criticism of literature. A historical example which is relevant to the theme of natural limit is the criticism of *Inferno* XXVI of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, written between 1308 and Dante's death in 1321.

In *Inferno* XXVI Vergil and Dante's pilgrim meet Ulysses in Hell. Ulysses proceeds to narrate his voyage beyond the Pillars of Hercules, which Hercules had established as a warning to humans that they should not venture further. While the Pillars of Hercules are a classical reference, the violation of the limit they set increases in significance in the eyes of a

²⁵ See Chapter Four for more detail and discussion of Eliot's seminal article, "Tradition and the Individual Talent."

²⁶ "To refer to and use a tradition is inevitably to modify the tradition. Yet even the mode of divergence is itself coded within the norms of the tradition." Segal, foreword to Conte (1986) 10.

fourteenth-century Christian reader. By sailing westward, Ulysses entered the southern hemisphere and travelled towards Mount Purgatory.²⁷ For Christians of Dante's day, Mount Purgatory is a place of penitence and redemption. Neither penitent nor a Christian, Ulysses is not seeking redemption, and thus his venture towards Mount Purgatory is doomed to failure from a Christian perspective. Ulysses claims he is motivated by his desire "to gain/ experience of the world, and of human vice/ and worth".²⁸ He convinces his fellow sailors to accompany him, "... choose not to deny/ experience, following the sun, of the world/ that has no people."²⁹ Furthermore, he implies that the adventure is in pursuit of virtue and knowledge.³⁰ A few lines later Ulysses refers to the voyage as *folle volo*³¹ (125) and narrates his own drowning in the whirlwind that destroyed the ship. Violation of the limits set by Hercules in Greek mythology, but reinforced by Christian symbolism in the *Divine Comedy*, resulted in death for Dante's Ulysses and his men.

Reactions to this episode change over time.³² The earliest critics reveal a concern for the motivation (was the venture really in pursuit of virtue or was it motivated rather by pride?) and for the side effects (e.g. the neglect of Ulysses' family).³³ By the end of the fourteenth century, however, one commentator has already praised Dante for his unhomeric ending which

²⁷ Dante places Purgatory opposite Jerusalem and earthly paradise atop Mount Purgatory. When Adam and Eve fell from Grace, they were cast out to wander exactly opposite Paradise near where Jerusalem would be, in the middle of the northern hemisphere. The northern hemisphere is thus inhabited, but the southern is unpopulated (*Inferno* XXVI, 117) and consists only of water, except, of course, for Mount Purgatory.

²⁸ *Divine Comedy* (trans. C. Singleton), *Inferno* XXVI, 97-99.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 116-17.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 118-120: "Consider your origin: you were not made to live as brutes, but to pursue virtue and knowledge."

³¹ In hindsight and from the perspective of the *Inferno*, Ulysses calls the venture a "mad flight." As Singleton has observed in his commentary, *folle* refers to the folly of disregarding Hercules' Pillars and the 'ne plus ultra' for which they stand. Singleton (1977) 469-70.

³² There is a brief overview of the criticism of this episode in Boitani (1994) 44-53, on which my comments are based.

³³ Boitani (1994) 45.

involves Ulysses sacrificing life itself in pursuit of experience (*experientia rerum*).³⁴ In the fifteenth century, Dante's Ulysses is established as a positive model in the literary world. His quest for experience and knowledge as well as his daring are the aspects of his adventure associated with him in other literature.³⁵ In contrast his transgression of limit seems to be of secondary importance. Here, as Boitani observes, the influence of contemporary events probably affected the interpretations: real explorations are taking place (e. g. Columbus, Vasco da Gama and Díaz), and interest in the *nova terra* is increasing. It is clear that the attitudes to Dante's Ulysses and his venture change over time as do the attitudes to the Pillars of Hercules. As exploration of the New World gains importance, proportionately the notion of transgression against the limit of the Pillars of Hercules, which such exploration entails, receives less attention.³⁶

Boitani's work shows how contemporary concerns affect the creation and criticism of literature. A more modern example showing how reality affects criticism of literature can be found in the rise of feminist criticism, which was fuelled by the Women's movement of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.³⁷ The concern with humankind's treatment of the planet and the realization that there are limits to what the planet can sustain seems

³⁴ Boitani (1994) 47.

³⁵ Boitani has shown how the positive attitude to Dante's Ulysses is reflected in other poetry, for e.g. Luigi Pulci's *Morgante*, Canto XXV. Boitani (1994) 48-49. In the sixteenth century epic, *Jerusalem Delivered*, by Torquato Tasso, Fortune tells the tale of Ulysses and his death, but then turns to the future, predicting that one day sailors will disdain the Pillars of Hercules. *Jerusalem Delivered* (trans. E. Fairfax) Book XV, cantos 25-30. In other words humans will continue to explore and ships will circumnavigate the globe. The suggestion of future exploration is a theme also found in Seneca's *Medea* (374-379). See Chapter Three.

³⁶ Boitani sums this up: "The reality of the New World sinks Dante's nightmare, silences the tragedy of myth, and extinguishes the flame of Ulysses speaking from the depths of Hell." Boitani (1994) 53.

³⁷ While Virginia Woolf already raised many feminist issues in her lifetime (1882-1941) feminist criticism in the United States did not really begin to gain momentum until the 1970s. Richter (1989) 1063-1064.

to have gained public attention in the West in the 1960s.³⁸ Yet only slowly is environmental awareness penetrating into the Western world of literary criticism and interpretations. Earlier critics appear reluctant to acknowledge that ancient portrayals of human transgressions against the natural order and its inherent limits may contain a condemnatory or skeptical tone.

In the next three chapters I explore two ancient authors' depictions of these transgressions. This includes consideration of the motivation attributed to humans and of the implications that arise concerning both human behaviour and the relationship between it and the natural environment in which it occurs.

³⁸ I do not mean to imply that such awareness was absent from earlier generations, or from other cultures, but it seems that in the 1960s there was a movement towards environmental awareness, reflected in the formation of the Club of Rome (see above) and in publications such as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962).

Chapter Two:

Natural Limits and Their Violation in Selected Odes of Horace

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the theme of limit in Nature, the transgression of that limit and the consequences of such transgression. Predominantly the focus is on Horace's *carm.* 1.3,¹ though further examples of boundary violation in other works of Horace are examined. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first begins with an introduction providing the background to ode 1.3, continues with a brief summary of previous criticism, and ends with a close examination of the content, style and vocabulary of the ode. This includes a detailed analysis of the ode, through which various limits in Nature become obvious. Instances of limit transgressions in other works of Horace are examined and compared in the second section. The third section considers the concept of Nature, the importance of its inherent order, and the position of humans within that order. The influences of Epicureanism and Stoicism are considered. A study of the motives found in the works for respecting natural limits is also included.

Section I: *Sic te diva*

Sic te diva is the third ode in Horace's first book of odes. This position testifies to its importance. The ordering of the odes is a topic which has recently been rediscovered, but which already occupied scholars in the nineteenth century.² That Horace ordered his own work is likely; as Santirocco writes:

... there is no good reason to doubt that the order of the Odes as we have it is the poet's own. Whereas the position of the lyrics with relation to Horace's other works varies in the manuscripts, there is unanimity regarding the placement of individual lyrics ...³

¹ The odes of Horace are entitled *Carmina*. Citation for individual odes follows the Oxford Latin Dictionary (OLD) abbreviation *carm.*

² M. Santirocco gives an overview and detailed bibliography for the history of scholarship on the question of structure. Santirocco (1986) 1-13.

³ *Ibid.* 179 n. 12.

Moreover, Santirocco assumes that Horace arranged the odes after he had written them: they were not written to occupy a position in the collection but rather the collection was formed from the odes.⁴ This would signify that the position of *Sic te diva* is deliberate and the importance it grants the ode should not be overlooked by critics. 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 are interconnected in various ways, and 1.3 also leads into 1.4 thematically with the reference to springtime sailing.⁵ These factors all suggest that its position as third in the collection is deliberate and significant.

Carm. 1.3, *Sic te diva*, is indirectly addressed to Vergil.⁶ The forty lines of the ode are usually divided into ten stanzas by modern editors.⁷

The first two stanzas are the *propemptikon*.⁸ They begin with an invocation to Venus.⁹ Castor and Pollux, who are called upon next, are already associated with protecting seamen in Homeric Hymn 33, which is dated to the sixth century B.C. at the latest.¹⁰ Horace then refers to *lucida sidera*, which commentators unanimously interpret as the phenomenon now

⁴ *Ibid.* 185 n. 58.

⁵ One way in which the first three odes are interconnected is in their indirect reference to Vergil. See Santirocco (1986) 25-27.

⁶ Directly the ode is addressed to the ship, *navis*, line 5.

⁷ Meineke's edition of 1834 established that of the one hundred and three odes, seventy eight are written in metres based on a four-line stanza, and that the remaining twenty-five (in couplets and single-line metres) were also composed in four-line stanzas.

⁸ Elements of the *propemptikon*, the sending-off poem, can be found in Sappho 5.1 and Theognis 692; Theocritus' *Idyll VII* contains a *propemptikon*, 52-89. For Horace, Callimachus' fragment 400 seems to be influential. Horace's ode 1.3 and Callimachus' fragment 400 have in common: Asclepiad meter, address to a ship, declaration of friendship and an appeal to a god. Kiessling suggests Horace's variations by comparison with Ovid's *propemptikon* to Corinna (*Amores* II. 11), and to Theocritus' *Idyll VII*. Two important differences are: the joyful anticipation of the return of the voyager is lacking and the boldness of the first sailor evokes awe rather than curses. The awe and astonishment soon lead to chastisement, according to Kiessling. The final difference Kiessling notes is that the hubris of humankind (of which sailing is an example) is responsible for the suffering that befalls humankind, not fate or the gods. Kiessling, A. (1958) 19-20. Horace's ode 3.27 is also considered a *propemptikon*, his tenth epode a *propemptikon* in reverse, i.e. the speaker wishes the traveller a bad voyage.

⁹ It is usual to invoke sea gods in a *propemptikon*. Venus, born from the foam, is considered a sea god, see Nisbet and Hubbard (1970) 45.

¹⁰ See A. S. F. Gow (1952) 382. Both the thirty-third Homeric hymn and Theocritus' *Idyll XXII* present the Dioscuri as guardians of sailors. Gow cites Wilamowitz and Allen, Halliday and Sikes for his dating of the Homeric hymn.

called St. Elmo's fire, and lastly to Aeolus, who controls the winds.¹¹ It is only now that it becomes clear, by the *navis* at the start of stanza two, whom the poet is addressing. He is speaking to the ship, to which Vergil (*animae dimidium meae*) has been entrusted.

After these two stanzas, which explain the specific occasion, Horace embarks on a scathing description of the audacious rashness of the first sailor. This continues for twelve lines. The lack of fear experienced by this first sailor is particularly emphasized (17-20). The sixth stanza communicates strong disapproval of sailing as it disrupts a divinely ordained separation of the lands. The audacity of humans is further stressed by the examples of human boldness contained in the next three stanzas: Prometheus' theft of fire and its consequence, which is a new host of fevers for humans and thus a shorter life (27-33); Daedalus' attempt at flight (34-35); and Hercules' trip to the Underworld (36). While Horace does not mention the renowned results of these exploits, to an audience well-versed in mythology, they would become immediately apparent: Pandora was sent by Zeus as punishment for Prometheus' theft; Icarus died as a result of disobeying his father's orders to keep a middle path between sun and sea; and Hercules suffered insanity, during which he killed his beloved wife and children. The examples Horace has chosen all have disastrous consequences.

The last four lines of the ode make a general statement that nothing is too difficult for mortals and that we are seeking heaven itself in our folly. As we continue to act in this audacious manner, we do not allow Jove to put down his angry bolts. In this ominous tone, the ode ends.

There is contradiction amongst critics in the interpretation of this ode. The one-sided denunciation of the audacity and impiety of sailing and other human technological advancements has lead some critics to condemn this ode. Nisbet and Hubbard write:

¹¹ For *lucida sidera* as St. Elmo's fire, see Nisbet and Hubbard (1970) 46.

Horace's ode is an accomplished piece of versification, but little more . . . the trite and unseasonable moralizing seems out of place in a poem of friendship. The diatribe against enterprise has none of the universal validity which we expect from Horatian commonplaces, . . . *it sounds particularly unconvincing to modern ears.*¹²

Quinn, too, doubts the seriousness of the ode:

. . . one suspects it is more a case of one poet showing another what he can do by grafting a mock-solemn diatribe against the wrongness of progress . . . on to a propemptikon.¹³

The criticism that this ode is not serious is found in Hahn's work as well.¹⁴ Such criticism implies that a work which develops one aspect of truth is not to be taken seriously, but rather, that truth must be presented in a balanced way. Unqualified condemnation of human technological progress seems impossible to such critics. All critics are naturally influenced by their own views and by the age in which they live. It is important to realize that Nisbet and Hubbard's commentary was published in 1970; in the atmosphere after the 1960s, it may be that outright condemnation of progress was not readily accepted, especially as humans had just succeeded in visiting the moon, a journey which clearly involved violating natural boundaries.¹⁵

Others, instead of rendering the ode humorous or not serious, determine that it contains both admiration and condemnation of

¹² Nisbet and Hubbard (1970) 44-45. Emphasis is mine.

¹³ Quinn (1970) 125. Williams also thinks the second half of the poem not worthy of much praise: "The major part of the poem consists of well-worn commonplaces on the sea and its dangers, but the introduction is addressed to Horace's friend Vergil, the poet, and he calls him half of my soul. It is a touching and convincing introduction and gives a sense of real personalities but the rest of the poem hardly lives up to this opening." Williams (1970) 34.

¹⁴ Hahn (1945) xxxii-iii.

¹⁵ The growing awareness about the interaction between humans and their environment in recent years likewise influences my interpretation.

humankind. One example of this type of interpreter is Commager.¹⁶ He finds admiration in the description of the first sailor, lines 9-12, followed by condemnation of the impious ships, lines 23-26. Determined to see both attitudes, Commager perceives Prometheus, Daedalus and Hercules both as "paradigms of heroic freedom" and as examples of the "impious *audacia*" of humankind. Moreover, he perceives a dichotomy in the final stanza, which he reads as both an admiration of man's entrepreneurial enterprises and as an "elegy upon his folly".¹⁷ While this interpretation is more convincing than those which render the ode humorous, the unwillingness to accept that the ode may be completely negative about humankind's technological enterprises is still evident.¹⁸ In studying the tone, style, vocabulary and content of this ode, it becomes clear that there is no basis for a balanced reading. In particular from line 23 on, there is an obviously condemnatory tone towards human 'progress.'

One critic who does take ode 1.3 seriously and does not try to find admiration for humankind in it is Syndikus.¹⁹ He comments on the negative, one-sided treatment of the first sea voyage, and sees in this the well-known topos of the ancient world, namely that the increase of technological expertise did not necessarily result in a better life. On the contrary in many writers the Golden Age, often considered the happiest for humankind, is

¹⁶ Commager (1962) 119. Another is Elder, who argues for the theme of admiration for heroic stature. Using Daedalus as example, Elder finds this theme particularly strong in 34-36. Though death is the result of Daedalus' violation of the natural limit for humans, Elder sees this as worthwhile. Before Icarus' fall, Daedalus for a few moments did defy human's natural limit; he reached a status of heroic greatness, which is worth the final penalty in Elder's interpretation. Elder (1952) 140-158, esp. 152-153.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* It is worth noting that as support for his view of Horace's admiration of human inventiveness, Commager cites the Ode to Man (Sophocles *Antigone* 332 ff). But surely there is irony in this ode.

¹⁸ My interpretation, which follows that of Syndikus, is influenced by contemporary thought. In an age in which it is becoming acceptable to question 'progress' and especially to look at the price of 'progress,' it is easier to acknowledge a condemnatory tone. Progress is not necessarily bad, but nor is it always inherently and completely good. I am arguing for a discerning and critical approach to progress.

¹⁹ Syndikus (1972) 58-69. Though his book was also published in the early 1970s, obviously sentiments other than admiration for technological advances influenced him.

marked by a lack of technical innovations.²⁰ Syndikus examines the concept of humankind's violation of natural limit and the examples Horace uses for the human *Urfrevel*, which are: Prometheus' theft of fire, Daedalus' attempt at flying and Hercules' trip to the Underworld. Syndikus draws attention to the fact that these three mythological examples are particularly important for humankind today: fire was crucial for the start of human civilization, Daedalus flew by means of his own ingenuity (as humans do now) and Hercules is often considered helpful to human civilization.²¹ By concentrating on the transgression of the natural limits that these three figures and the first sailor committed, Horace has covered the four elements: water (first sailor), fire (Prometheus), air (Daedalus) and earth (Hercules). He has, in fact, encompassed the entire universe. Humankind has tried (and is still trying, *petimus* (38) and *patimur* (39) are in the present tense) to transgress limits in all areas of the world.

Syndikus' exploration of the theme of transgression in the content of 1.3 can be supported by an examination of the meter and vocabulary Horace employs. By using the second Asclepiad meter, Horace has the shorter glyconic line (eight syllables) alternating with the basic Asclepiad line (twelve syllables). He has thus established a simple yet regular rhythm, and for the first twenty-eight lines, sense-pauses occur mostly at the end of the Asclepiad lines. But, with the mention of death, the pause comes after the glyconic line (33). As Wilkinson observes, it is as though "the metre, like death, has caught up a line - *corripuit gradum*."²² Death, the ultimate limit for humans, and a force beyond their control, can arrive suddenly and early; this is paralleled in the ode by the unexpected change in its pattern.

²⁰ Other instances where the Golden Age is associated with a lack of technical knowledge: Aratus, *Phaenomena* 110-113; Ovid, *Met.* 1. 76-215.

²¹ Syndikus (1972) 67. For an example of how Hercules is associated with civilization and culture: Vergil, *Aeneid* VI. 802 ff: *Erymanthi/pacant nemora* . . .

²² Wilkinson (1951) 145.

Overstepping the expected division in an ode is one way to make the form correspond to its content.

Another is by effective placement of words. For example, *praecipitem Africum* and *decertantem Aquilonibus* portray the force of the headlong Southwest wind fighting with the North winds in part by their positions. The former, at the end of line twelve, leads into the latter, which occupies line thirteen. Line thirteen is in fact filled metrically by the contending winds; this stylistic factor stresses the magnitude of the storm. These details, though seemingly minor by themselves, together combine to create a picture of Nature's powerful elements, beyond human control. As Horace began line twelve by referring to the first sailor who did not fear these elements, an understanding of that sailor's fearlessness is awakened in the reader. In lines 19-20, the description of the natural phenomena (*mare turbidum et infames scopulos Acroceraunia?*)²³ again emphasizes the power of Nature: the description of the cliffs fills line twenty. In these two examples, Horace has placed the words in positions that emphasize their meaning. In the line *perrupit Acheronta Hercules labor* (36), Horace seems to be playing with the words. For the line refers to Hercules' charge into the Underworld, yet through the elision of *Acheronta* with *Herculeus*, it looks as if it is death that is catching Hercules. Stylistically, the Underworld is submerging Hercules. Furthermore, the lengthening of the final vowel in *perrupit* is archaic: here the use of it could be seen to emphasize the gravity of Hercules' action.²⁴

The Herculean labour is described in one line and is followed by a general statement, *nil mortalibus ardui est* (37). There is no description of the consequences of Hercules' deed. Indeed, the brevity of the information surrounding the task itself contrasts with the depictions of the earlier violations. Horace devoted sixteen lines to the first sailor and his exploit (2-

²³ The OCT (Wickham 1901) reads *turbidum*, the Teubner edition (Klinger, 1959) *turgidum*. Either reading stresses the sea's dangerous power.

²⁴ Nisbet and Hubbard (1970) 57.

24), seven to Prometheus and his adventure (27-33), and two to Daedalus and his experience (34-35). The decreasing amount of attention paid to the individual mortals who contravened the natural limit is accompanied by a shift to include all humans: *gens humana* (26), *homini* (35), *mortalibus* (37) and a use of the first person: *petimus* (38) and *patimur* (39). We are seeking heaven itself in our folly and are not allowing Jupiter to put down his thunderbolts.²⁵

The clash of human action with divine will has already been introduced in lines 21-24:

*nequiquam deus abscidit
prudens Oceano dissociabili
terras, si tamen impiae
non tangenda rates transiliunt vada.*

Nequiquam has a prominent position beginning the line (and in texts where the ode is divided into stanzas, this corresponds to the start of the sixth stanza). In vain did the prudent god divide the lands from the incompatible Ocean, if impious ships are nevertheless going to pass over the depths. Horace's choice of *transilire* is significant: the primary meaning is to leap or spring to the other side, to leap across.²⁶ The lands were separated by the prudent god, yet humans just spring over the sea and the limit it imposes: humankind's rashness and thoughtlessness are intimated. The impiety of the ships (23) is reinforced.²⁷

Navigation is not only contrary to divine will, but is also associated with rashness and boldness. This boldness is emphasized by the important

²⁵ It is important that Prometheus, Daedalus and Hercules all attempted to violate the heavens: Prometheus by stealing fire from its heavenly abode, Daedalus by flying, and Hercules by trying to become immortal. Seeking the heavens can also be a metaphor for scientific investigation of the heavens, Nisbet and Hubbard (1970) 44.

²⁶ OLD, s.v. *transilio*

²⁷ The only other time *transilire* is used by Horace is in ode 1.18.7, *ac ne quis modici transiliat munera Liberi*, where the speaker is warning that wine must be enjoyed in moderation to avoid the lesson of the Centaurs' contest with the Lapithae. There is an implicit importance of limit. The word *salis* (from which *transilire* is formed) is used in 2.18 to refer to the wealthy man who leaps across his clients' boundaries.

position granted *illi* (start of line 9, and the third stanza) and *primus* (first word in line 12). The obvious risk of sailing becomes apparent in the placement of *fragilem* beside *truci* (10), and in the list of dangers from lines 12 to 20. Yet the sailor does not fear (12). While the focus has until now been on the boldness of the first sailor, with line 21 (*nequiquam . . .*) it moves to transgression, and humankind's venture is seen as contrary to the natural order which has been established by a wise and thoughtful god.

It has become clear that the theme of transgressing the natural limit is displayed in ode 1.3 through content, style and vocabulary. Violation of the land/sea boundary in 1.3 was committed by navigation, but this is not the only means of such transgression referred to in the odes.

Section II: Further Examples of Transgression of Natural Limits

The practice of building villas into the sea is another violation of the natural limit of the land. Horace comments on the wealthy and their villas in the sea in odes 3.1 and 2.18.²⁸ In 3.1, the first of the Roman Odes, Horace writes about power, wealth and the accompanying evils. The construction of villas into the sea is described:

*contracta pisces aequora sentiunt
iactis in altum molibus; huc frequens
caementa demittit redemptor
cum famulis dominusque terrae
fastidiosus . . .* (33-37)

The first thing to strike the reader is the manner in which Horace has depicted the building. From the perspective of the fish, he has shown the sea as shrinking. The *pisces* and *aequora* are contained between *contracta* and *sentiunt*. One can almost feel the sea shrinking around the fish. The personification of fear, threats and care follows these lines, as well as the warning that these will follow the house master everywhere. Although the fish occupy a prominent position, the warning against disrespect towards the

²⁸ *Epist.* 1.1.84-85 refers indirectly to the practice. It is mentioned by other writers, too, e. g. Sallust *Bellum Catilinae* 13.1 and 20.11.

natural limit is not founded in environmental concern in the modern sense. Yet the fish show that transgression of limits necessarily involves invasion into another's territory.²⁹ The disturbing effect on the fish shows the wrongness of the transgression. The unpleasant consequences for the transgressor (*sed Timor et Minae/ scandunt eodem quo dominus* 37-38) additionally exemplify it. The expression *terrae fastidiosus* is particularly important for the idea of natural limit. Furthermore, *fastidiosus* implies that the dissatisfaction is rather perverse.³⁰ The power of *fastidiosus* is strengthened by its position after *terrae*. Only with *fastidiosus* does the motivation of the house master become clear: he is unsatisfied with the land, hence he is building out into the sea. The underlying belief is that the land is sufficient for people: this is shown not only in the depiction of building into the sea but throughout the ode with Horace's positive portrayal of rural life:

... *somnus agrestium*
lenis virorum non humiles domos
fastidit umbrosamque ripam,
non Zephyris agitata Tempe. (21-24)

Soft slumber comes to the peasant, to the shady bank and to the valley. The implications are that contentment comes to the peasant and the land is sufficient for humankind. Only the wealthy can afford to build out into the sea and throughout the ode Horace has been stressing that the less wealthy person is happier. He ends the ode with a description of various signs of the wealthy person's lifestyle: marble from Phrygia, Falerian wine and Persian perfume, all of which compare unfavourably with the simplicity of life on the Sabine farm.

Ode 2.18 also contrasts the affluent with the simple lifestyle and links this contrast to the theme of natural limit. As in 3.1, Horace refers to himself as a "poor" man: *pauperemque dives/ me petit* (10-11). Poverty is not

²⁹ Cf. 2.18 where the patron's transgression of limits results in invasion of the clients' land.

³⁰ Other meanings of *fastidiosus* include haughty and wearisome, adjectives which have a condemnatory tone.

equated here with a life of need, but rather refers to a life devoid of ostentatious luxury. Idealization of the farm life is certainly unrealistic, but such one-sided development of a topos has already been seen in ode 1.3 with the evil of sailing.³¹

Beginning the ode with *non* which is repeated again at the start of line 3 and followed by *neque* and *nec* (5, 7 respectively), Horace establishes the absence of luxuries in his life. As in 3.1, one of the symbols of wealth is the marble that has been brought from afar, in this case Africa (. . . *columnas ultima recisas/ Africa* [4-5]).³² The fact that the marble is brought from furthest Africa implies a disregard for physical limit which is comparable with the disregard for physical limit shown by those who build into the sea. After the picture of opulence is established, Horace contrasts his own non-material wealth:

*at fides et ingeni
benigna vena est, pauperemque dives
me petit: nihil supra
deos lacezzo nec potentem amicum
largiora flagito,
satis beatus unicus Sabinis.* (9-14)

Until now the deprecation expressed towards wealth has been based on moral criteria. There is no need for luxury: as in 3.1, the implied reason that people pursue luxury is greed, not need.

At line 15, however, there is a shift. The moral criteria change to natural criteria. The wealthy human's pursuit of luxury is now placed within the framework of Nature.³³ The ultimate subjugation of the human to other, higher forces, the existence of an order over which the human has no

³¹ The depiction of farm life as pleasant and comfortable is already found in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* V.9. Obviously, Xenophon (4th century) did not have the experiences that Hesiod (7th century) writes of in *Works and Days*, 37 ff, where Zeus has made it difficult and laborious to win livelihood from the earth.

³² According to Nisbet and Hubbard, the quarries were at Smitthus, in the north-west of modern Tunisia. Nisbet and Hubbard (1978) 294.

³³ The word *Nature* is here used as a general term for the universe, its various life forms and ecosystems, its astronomical and meteorological phenomena.

command, becomes apparent. The march of time is one of these forces: *truditur dies die* (15). The repetition of *dies* stresses the continual forward motion of time, the sound of the line is reminiscent of a march. This motion is further emphasized by the next line, *novaeque pergunt interire lunae* (16). Time is beyond human power, yet nevertheless the wealthy man attempts to defy, or at least ignore it, and there can be no doubt in the reader's mind about the senselessness of such behaviour. The futility of the wealthy man's defiance of limits, as well as his arrogance in his presumptuous attempts, is perceptible. Horace further accentuates this in the subsequent description of the rich person: he is *sepulcri immemor* (19) and he concentrates on building out into the sea, thereby ignoring the time limit of humans and blatantly defying the land limit:

*marisque Baiis obstrepentis urges
summovere litora,
parum locuples continente ripa.* (20-22)

Lest the moral criteria of the first part of the ode be forgotten, Horace reminds the reader that the well-to-do man's motivation is greed, he is not rich enough with the mainland. Building out into the sea defies the natural limits of land and is motivated by greed. By using *locuples*, Horace has united the natural and moral criteria: greed is described with a physical dimension.

The next step the rich man takes is tearing down the *agri terminos* (24). This conduct, following as it does on the construction into the sea, is not surprising. The affluent person has displayed no respect for natural limits, he is not restrained by moral considerations, why would he honour his neighbour's markers? Already Plato writes that one must not remove a neighbour's landmark.³⁴ Moreover, there is a religious aspect to *terminus*. Livy tells the story that when Tarquinius built the temple of Jupiter on the

³⁴ In this case Plato says that even if the neighbour is an alien, the property must be respected. Plato *Leges* 842e-843b.

Tarpeian Mount, he decided to annul the consecration of other temples on the site, thereby granting the area to Jupiter alone. All temples were consequently de-consecrated except for the temple of Terminus. The auspices for this temple were interpreted to mean that the kingdom would be firm and steadfast and that the shrine of Terminus should not be moved.³⁵

The practice of sacrificing to Jupiter Terminalis is recorded by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who asserts that it was Numa who decreed a law appointing boundaries to every person's possessions.³⁶ Stones were laid on the boundaries of land and were consecrated to Jupiter Terminalis. A yearly rite was established, the Terminalia, at which sacrifices were performed. Numa is also credited with saying that the killer of a man who had displaced or removed the boundary markers would be considered guilt-free. In addition Dionysius records the custom of sacrificing to the boundary stones, but the blood of animals is not to be shed.³⁷ Interesting is the motive attributed to Numa for deifying the stones: people were to content themselves with their own possessions and not take others'. Dionysius ends his passage by commenting that the bounds people now set are established by their own greed, and this is a πρᾶγμα οὐ καλόν.³⁸ Greed has been established as a powerful motivation for boundary violation in ode 2.18.

The ripping out of the *termini* is followed by more immoral behaviour: the rich man jumps over the boundaries of his clients. Not only does the well-to-do man disrespect property markers, but he also maltreats his clients. That such behaviour was unacceptable can be seen in Vergil's *Aeneid* in Book VI, 608-614, where the Prophetess is telling Aeneas what she has seen of

³⁵ Livy, 1.55.3.

³⁶ Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Roman Antiquities* 2. 74. 2-5.

³⁷ Contrast this to Ovid, who in his *Fasti* II. 639 ff includes in the rite putting the blood of a slaughtered lamb on the stones. Ovid also refers to the establishment of the temple for Jupiter on the Capitoline, and that the temple of Terminus was not moved. As Terminus did not move for Jupiter, he is not free to move now, lest he seem to value a person more than Jupiter. Moreover, Ovid mentions that the boundary markers are not corruptible: *nulla tibi ambitio est, nullo corrumpere auro, / legitima servas credita rura fide* (661-662).

³⁸ "Not a fine thing."

the Underworld and its inhabitants. Those patrons who cheated their clients are in the same part of Hades as those people who beat their parents.³⁹

As has become apparent, the rich man actively attempts to defy limits. His ultimate opponent is death and therefore, time. It is to death that the ode now turns, beginning with:

*nulla certior tamen
rapacis Orci fine destinata
aula divitem manet
erum. (29-31)*

The industry, speed and agility that the affluent man has displayed in the middle section of the ode (*locas, struis, urges, revellis, salis*) all combine to form a hectic picture. The rich man is engaged in a race against time.⁴⁰ In stark opposition, death simply waits, for both the rich and the poor. Despite human attempts to defy natural limits and human-made boundaries, the one ultimate limit imposed by time cannot be avoided. Time relentlessly continues, bringing death.

The natural limit of death is also expressed in the Spring Odes: 1.4, 4.7 and 4.12. The odes all begin with the return of spring after winter. 1.4 *Solvitur acris hiems* and 4.7 *Diffugere nives* accentuate the movement of change by their first word: *solvitur* and *diffugere*. 4.12, *Iam veris comites*, begins with *iam*, which emphasizes that the changes are *already* in progress. The descriptions of spring with Zephyr, beautiful meadows, the calm sea and the call to human activity, particularly sailing, can be found in Hellenistic times, though older possible antecedents to this poem include Alcaeus.⁴¹

Human death is closely associated with the cycles of Nature in these odes. Perhaps death makes its most shocking entrance in 1.4, partly by its sudden and unexpected arrival. Prior to death's arrival, Horace devotes

³⁹ Horace presents the clients in a particularly positive light, by describing them as *paternos/ in sinu ferens deos* 26-27. Their piety contrasts strongly with the impiety of their landlord.

⁴⁰ Syndikus (1972) 469.

⁴¹ The epigram by the Hellenistic poet Leonidas of Tarentum (Greek Anthology, X.1.) is an example; the Alcaeus fragment referred to is 286. Nisbet and Hubbard also list other works that use similar descriptions. Nisbet and Hubbard (1970) 58-59.

twelve lines to the return of spring; scenes associated with winter are depicted and then negated (3-4). The activity which the coming of spring initiates is emphasized: *machinae trahunt, Venus ducit choros, Gratiae quatunt pede terram, Volcanus visit* (2, 5-8). The beautiful image of the Graces and the Nymphs striking the earth with their feet is followed by an invitation to humans to *viridi nitidum caput impedire myrto/ aut flore*, and also to perform sacrifice to Faunus. Suddenly, amidst this pleasant scene of springtime activities, *Pallida Mors* knocks. Death's impartiality (*aequo pulsat pede pauperum tabernas/ regumque turris* 13-14) leads to the admonition to Sestius, not to engage in great hopes for the future (15). Death will come and it will come unexpectedly (cf. 2.18). It is important to realize though, that while the individual does die, the cycle of life and death continues. Death is always a presence. It is the natural limit for each individual human, but it is not the end of humans. The human cycle of birth and death is continued by others, and is a part in the greater framework of Nature.

This perception of human life as a cycle, albeit a non-repetitive one for the individual, is not agreed upon by critics. Davis, for example, uses ode 4.7 to establish a contrast between cyclical time in Nature and linear time of humans, thereby stressing the differences between human life and the non-human world.⁴²

Parallels not differences, however, between the cycles of Nature and human life exhibit themselves particularly in ode 4.7. The most powerful parallel is that both realms are bounded by the natural limit of time. How the march of time affects the seasons is displayed in the vocabulary: *frigora mitescunt* - the cold yields, *ver proterit aestas interitura*, the summer crushes the spring but that summer is itself destined to die as soon as the autumn has poured forth its fruits, *fruges effuderit*, and then lifeless winter returns, *recurrunt*

⁴²Davis (1991) 155-157.

(9-12). The seasons always return, but nevertheless the individual parts must give way: they cannot escape time, just as the humans must yield to their mortality. The obvious contrast lies in the eternal return of the seasons versus the finality of death for the individual human. This is emphasized by Horace's *reparant* in line 13: the swiftly changing moons restore their losses in the sky, whereas the humans once dead are *pulvis et umbra* (16). Yet the use of *decidimus*, which can also be used to describe plants drooping and leaves or fruits falling, in the very next line, stresses the connection between human death and the processes of decay in the rest of Nature.⁴³ Horace emphasizes the difference between the finality of human death and the return of the seasons, but he simultaneously strengthens the connection between the two concepts by using vocabulary that links them.⁴⁴

Another depiction of the connection between the cycles of Nature and human life is found in ode 1.4. The hustle and bustle that spring creates is associated with warmth: the winter is breaking up, *solvitur*; there is no more frost; the ploughman does not have to sit by the fireside; Vulcan is described as burning; the earth is released, unbound. Though death then emerges and, as Commager discusses, a contrast is established between the openness of spring and the enclosure of death, the warmth associated with spring returns in line 19: *nec tenerum Lycidan mirabere, quo calet iuventus/ nunc omnis et mox virgines tepebunt*.⁴⁵ Warmth, primarily attributed to spring, is now used to describe young people in love - the season of spring

⁴³ OLD, s. v. *decido*.

⁴⁴ Davis argues that using a metaphor from the natural world (that of fallen leaves) - *nos ubi decidimus* - to describe human death contaminates human imagery and helps to establish the incompatibility of the two domains. Davis (1993) 156-157. I would argue, rather, that it shows the ultimate connection between the two domains (which I see as belonging to one) which cannot be severed by death, as death is only part of the cycle. There are other examples of language linking the human and non-human elements of Nature, e.g.: *donec virenti canities abest* (1.9.17): *canities* can apply to colouring of feathers or hair as well as to the down on plants (OLD, s. v. *canities*). Further it specifically recalls the first line of the ode, in which *candida* was used to describe the snowy Mount Soracte (1-2). The primary meaning of *vireo* refers to plants (to show green growth); it is then extended to describe people who are full of vigour (OLD, s. v. *vireo*).

⁴⁵ Commager (1962) 269.

and the season of youth thus have a mutual relationship. It can be gleaned, though, that just as winter gave way to spring, spring will have to give way to summer and that likewise the love of youths for Lycidas will soon yield to the love of maidens for him; the time of young love will pass.

It has become clear that while death is an ultimate limit for humans, the cycle of Nature is also bounded by a limit. That limit is imposed by time. The parallels, rather than the differences between the human life and the cycle of seasons are stressed. Perception of such parallels in Horace's odes, however, depends largely on the reader's attitude towards the place of humans in the universal order. If readers see themselves as a part of a greater system, then they are perhaps more willing to see human life as parallel to the various cycles and rhythms of Nature. In this case humans are participants in the wider framework of Nature and are not granted a dominating or privileged role. If, however, readers engage in an anthropocentric viewpoint and see the world of Nature (that is, all non-human life forms and all seasonal, planetary cycles) as completely separate, then questions of domination arise and the inherent parallels between humans and Nature remain unobserved.

The ultimate rule of time, to which humans and seasons must yield, is also found in ode 2.9. In this ode, Valgius is being admonished for his incessant mourning for the dead Mystes, whom he loved. He is encouraged to start singing of Augustus Caesar's conquests. Time causes the weather to change:

*non semper imbres nubibus hispidos
manant in agros aut mare Caspium
vexant inaequales procellae
usque nec Armeniis in oris,*

*amice Valgi, stat glacies iners
menses per omnes, aut Aquilonibus
querqueta Gargani laborant
et foliis viduantur omni . . . (1-8)*

The implication is that you, human, ought also to move on. The ode then shifts to encompass other humans who have endured great losses, but have not mourned forever (13-17), and then to the exhortation to celebrate the Romans' conquests. As the limit of death is ineluctable and superimposed, one should focus rather on what humans can and have achieved: the ode ends with mention of the limit that Romans have imposed on other people: *cantemus . . . intraque praescriptum Gelonos/ exiguis equitare campis*. (19, 23-24). This limit is obviously not natural, it has been set by humans, but this seems appropriate as Valgius is encouraged to set a limit for himself.

As in ode 1.4, by using certain vocabulary, Horace has underscored the link between one cycle in Nature (weather) and human life. In lines 1 - 8 several words used to describe the weather can apply also to the grief of Valgius.⁴⁶ Bad weather is part of a cycle of weather, just as grief is part of human emotions. It never only and always rains; to do so would violate *rerum natura*. Likewise grief should not always be the only emotion. There is a warning implicit against the existence of one thing to the exclusion of everything else. As Commager writes,

The elegists treat a part of life as though it were the whole; for them love is the sum of experience and grief an eternal attribute. And in such an attitude Horace saw a perversion of human nature that had no sanction in nature itself.⁴⁷

Limit for grief is also the subject of ode 1.24. In this ode, Horace actually uses the word *modus* in his first line. The finality of death is once again indisputable, *tu frustra pius heu non ita creditum/ poscis Quinctilium deos* (11-12). This is further stressed by the comparison to Orpheus, who

⁴⁶ In particular: *laborant* and *viduantur*. The trees are struggling with the winds, Valgius with his grief. *Laboro* can mean to suffer from strain for people and plants. OLD, s. v. *laboro*: 3 a.e. *Viduo*, which means to deprive of can specifically be used to describe the death of a husband. Thus the trees are deprived of their leaves, which parallels Valgius' deprivation of Myestes. OLD, s.v. *viduo*: 1b.

⁴⁷ Commager (1962) 240.

could force trees to follow him. Even if the addressee played the lyre better than Orpheus, he still could not bring back the dead. Even he who controlled Nature had to accept death.⁴⁸

Ode 1.28 also gives various examples of humans who exceeded their natural limit, yet nevertheless succumbed to death. Archytas, apostrophized in line 1, is described as *maris et terrae numeroque carentis harenae/ mensorem*. To measure Nature, one must objectify it and thus separate the human sphere from it. The artificiality of such separation becomes clear in the very next word *cohibent*: the small amount of paltry earth confines Archytas in death. Though he may have tried to separate himself from Nature while living, in death he has returned to his place as a part of the greater whole. Measuring sand is a task considered beyond human ability; it is often used in literature to express an impossibility.⁴⁹ Archytas not only tried to measure land and sea, and count the sand, he also engaged in astronomy. Line 5 depicts Archytas making an attempt on the gods' home: *aeris temptasse domos*. This recalls the giants, who tried to dethrone the gods and thereby exceeded their place. In addition it echoes the hubris inherent in line 38 of ode 1.3: *caelum ipsum petimus stultitia*. Next follows a list of mortals who also died, or at least met with an ineluctable end to their earthly existence.⁵⁰ In line 21 the reader finally learns that the speaker is a drowned sailor. This revelation reminds the reader of the

⁴⁸ Orpheus attempted to bring back Eurydice from Hades, but despite permission from Pluto, he ultimately failed.

⁴⁹ See especially *Georgics* 2.103-108, where Vergil uses the image of counting sand grains to show the impossibility of numbering Nature's bounty (he is trying to enumerate the various vines); also see Homer where Achilles says he would not accept all Agamemnon's gifts, even if they outnumbered the grains of sand. *Iliad* 9. 385

⁵⁰ The list of others is especially important for the idea of limit as they are figures who were in some way favoured by the gods: Tantalus ate with Zeus, Tithonus was loved by Eos, Minos is said to have spoken with Zeus. Tantalus and Tithonus are both considered immortal but Tantalus lives in Hades in eternal punishment and Tithonus grows ever older until, according to one myth he begs Eos to turn him into a grasshopper. Although Pythagoras yielded only his sinews and frame to death and in line 10 appears to have returned from Hades, the *semel calcanda via* (the path must be trodden once) in line 16 implies that even this escape was not for ever. In the end death catches everyone. Nisbet and Hubbard (1970) 329.

violation humans committed by sailing and ode 1.3 comes to mind. The release of his identity is quickly followed by the realization that the addressee is also a sailor. The dangers of sailing are alluded to and a threat issued to persuade the sailor to bury the drowned speaker. The reminder that the addressee will die in his turn and may need burial underscores yet again the inevitability of death.⁵¹

All humans must succumb to death, but there is a way to 'outlive' death through one's work, in Horace's case through the poetic word. In ode 2.20, the physical death for humans and the immortal life possible through fame are contrasted. The confines usually associated with death are defied by the unlimited reach of the poetic word: *nec Stygia cohibebor unda* (8). Throughout the ode, however, there are clear indications that this 'escape' from the confines of death is rather magical.⁵² In ode 3.30 Horace again stresses that his poetry will last: *exegi monumentum aere perennius* (1). Elements of Nature, rain and wind, are specifically shown as incapable of eliminating his immortality. Even time, to which Nature and humans must yield, will not be able to diminish the fame, in fact Horace will remain *recens laude* (8) throughout time.⁵³ This immortal fame does not exempt Horace from the limit of death, which is unavoidable.⁵⁴

It has become obvious that death is ineluctable. While fame may be achieved and thus keep the memory of a dead person alive, the person must accept the natural limit of death. Change is a part of the natural processes of the universe, and death is a form of change. Change should

⁵¹ For a discussion of clausal allusions to the temporal limit of death in the odes, see Hynd (1978), esp. 104-107.

⁵² The strong position of *vates* at the beginning of line 3 already hints that such escape is not for anyone; the metamorphosis into a swan is imaginative and the reference to the Hyperborean plain, a fictitious place "beyond the North wind" all emphasize that Horace is not referring to a real avoidance of death, but rather to a means of combating the eventual consequence of death - that one is forgotten.

⁵³ The position of these odes, both at the end of books, emphasizes their importance.

⁵⁴ The idea that poetry can outlive mortality Hynd sees hinted at in ode 1.1, and manifested in 2.20. Hynd (1978) 108-109.

also play a role in human emotion: incessant grief should yield. Stagnation in one mode of emotion (grief) or in life itself defies *the way things are*. In other words, adherence to and acceptance of natural limits result in a greater chance of a harmonious life.

Accordingly, violation of natural limits decreases the chance. Sailing involves such a violation: it means leaving the natural place for humans and entrusting oneself to the *levibus auris*. In several odes, Horace draws attention to the vulnerability of the sailor in the high seas.⁵⁵ The approach to Nature in part determines one's reaction to it: violation of the land/sea boundary by sailing results in fear of bad weather. Nature here is seen not as an avenger for immoral human behaviour, by making sailors suffer for their greed, but as a greater system in which humans have a place.⁵⁶ If humans venture outside their place, they must take the consequences.

Section III: The Concept of Nature, its Order and Humankind's Position

In the above interpretation, Nature is not seen as a moral metaphor for human life, as it is often called in Horatian criticism.⁵⁷ Moral interpretations result from an approach to literature in which Nature is seen as a literary device, a means of expressing values that are based on a system of human constructs.⁵⁸ As Commager writes, "nature provided the classical world with a grammar in which it could construe any experience."⁵⁹ Using Nature in this way is feasible, but awareness of the anthropocentricity of the viewpoint is paramount. The parallels between cycles in Nature and human life that

⁵⁵ 2.16. 14; 3.29. 57-61; 1.1.15-17.

⁵⁶ This is not to deny, however, that the motivation causing this violation may be immoral, but Nature is not involved in this morality. Pursuit of luxury, manifested by building large homes (2.18) and creating fishponds (2.15), by sailing to foreign lands and obtaining exotic goods (2.18), is reprehensible, but not *only* because it is motivated by greed.

⁵⁷ E. g. Commager talks of Nature as a moral metaphor: Commager (1962) 235-254; as does Santirocco (1986) 31.

⁵⁸ Such constructs are formed, for example, from religious or cultural beliefs.

⁵⁹ Commager (1962) 236.

have been discussed and which are in particular found in the relationship to time suggest that cycles in Nature and human cycles are both part of one universal system. Instead of asking what is the *meaning* of Nature within the human moral world, and searching for metaphorical significance to justify the use of natural images, in reading Horace one can take Nature at its face value. It creates a context within which humans live. Nature is not static; humans, as a part of that Nature, should also not be static. If a part of Nature, for example the weather, were static, this would violate *rerum natura*. There is no stigma of good or bad attached to ceaseless rain: it would simply destroy the way things are. If Nature is seen as an all-encompassing system, then in order to be a part of this system humans must, as much as possible, keep their cycle running in accordance with the various other natural cycles. There is a difference in subjective position between living *within* Nature, in such a manner that human life does not conflict with other natural elements, but progresses parallel to them, and looking *to* Nature for examples supporting moral behaviour.⁶⁰ According to one, the individual exists within Nature and according to the other, the individual views Nature as an object of reference. In my view Horace adopts the former position in the selected odes.

To live within Nature requires awareness of the elements participating in this natural world (humans, animals, cycles). As was shown above, harmonious living requires a certain respect for or at least acceptance of boundaries and limits. This acceptance is not limited to humans, but extends to include, for example, the weather and the seasons. While these latter are not conscious in human terms, that they must obey the limits set by

⁶⁰ One danger that results from interpreting Nature as a metaphor for human life has been noted by Reckford. In studying ode 2.3, Reckford finds that two different aspects of Nature are interpreted as conflicting lessons: the picture of the poplar and pine interlacing are seen "to furnish an object lesson in leisurely companionship" while the rushing brook, an equally natural image, could teach that "effort, trepidation and flight are as natural as quiet sociability." Indeed, Reckford has exposed a crucial difficulty with viewing Nature as a 'provider of lessons.' Nature is complex, and for any lesson that a human may find in one area, in another area, that lesson may be refuted. Reckford (1969) 92-95.

time has been shown above. Humans should, ideally, stay within the limits set by Nature. That there are natural limits for humans is one of the underlying tenets of modern environmental activism. Yet this activism is often motivated by a realization that humans have endangered other participants in the natural world: humans are trying to redress the balance, which they have violated by exceeding their natural limits.⁶¹ In the Horatian odes, however, the concern is not primarily with an environment damaged by humans, but rather with a realization of the disharmony resultant from human actions or desires that exceed the natural limits. For example, it was noted above that in ode 3.1 the portrayal of the violation of the land/sea boundary and the results thereof (water was shrinking around the fish) does not convey a great concern for the fish. It does, however, emphasize that the violation of limit necessarily involves intrusion into another's realm. Adherence to natural limits results in harmony for all the participants in the universe. The odes stress recognition and acceptance of these natural limits because of the participatory role of humans in the universe.

The attitudes towards the theme of natural limit found in the odes studied in this chapter, are reminiscent of certain tenets of Epicurean and Stoic philosophy.⁶² Both philosophies were practised in Rome in the first century B.C., and for both schools "the centre of philosophy was the question of how one should act."⁶³ They differ, however, in their method of answering this question.

⁶¹ In the Greek Anthology, there is an anonymous epigram in which the extinction of lions is mentioned. Humans have been trapping the lions and taking them to the circus to fight (*Anthol. Graec.* VII. 626.). But awareness of animal extinction does not seem to have led to a general concern that humankind can endanger animals.

⁶² This section is not meant to postulate which philosophy Horace personally followed, but rather to observe what ideas are incorporated into his work. In ode 1.34, the speaker recants his Epicureanism, thereby revealing an earlier identity with it. However, the seriousness of this expression has been questioned: Quinn (1980) 187; Nisbet and Hubbard (1970) 377. In *Epistle* 4, Horace does refer to himself as "a hog from Epicurus' herd" (16). That his work displays doctrines of more than one philosophical school has been noted by several scholars, for example: Wilkinson (1951) 27; Klinger (1961) 342. Some see a conversion from one school to another, e. g. Campbell (1924) 122.

⁶³ Sandbach (1975) 14.

The Epicurean school was founded in the late fourth century in Athens by Epicurus, who was influenced strongly by Democritus' work. In the didactic poem, *De Rerum Natura*, written by Lucretius in the first half of the first century B.C., the doctrines of Epicurus are set forth.⁶⁴ In particular, the universe is explained in terms of natural causes (5. 416-431). The emphasis on natural causes results in the removal of divine beings. While gods may exist, they live without care and are not involved with the workings of the universe and the existence of humans (5. 82-90; 6. 58-60). Death is not followed by a judgment from these gods and subsequent eternal punishment or bliss. It is followed by nothing. The soul is mortal, and when humans die, the soul and body separate. There is no further awareness of any sensation, as body and soul are no longer unified and the soul disperses (3. 830-846). As death is followed by nothing, there is no cause to fear it. Moreover, there is the idea that the one who has died is not aware of his death, and thus does not suffer any bitterness: therefore excessive grieving by the remaining mortals is pointless (3. 904-911). The focus of *De Rerum Natura* is to explain phenomena in terms of natural causes and to dispense with supernatural powers. In order to account for free will, however, and to avoid a mechanistic fatalism, the swerve of the atoms is introduced (2. 216- 262). Free will enables the mortal to follow pleasure. Pleasure is the ultimate good.⁶⁵ The Epicurean perception of pleasure is especially relevant to the Horatian odes and the theme of natural limit.⁶⁶

Pleasure means the absence of pain. It does not mean a luxurious lifestyle,

⁶⁴ Lucretius writes: *te sequor, o Graiae gentis decus, inque tuis nunc/ ficta pedum pono pressis vestigia signis,/ non ita certandi cupidus quam propter amorem,/ quod te imitari aveo* . . . (3. 3-6)

⁶⁵ Diogenes Laertius *Lives of Eminent Philosophers: Epicurus*, 129 ff. Careful thought has to be given this pursuit: sometimes pain must be endured in order to achieve greater pleasure, sometimes pleasures must be foregone if they cause a greater annoyance.

⁶⁶ That Horace was acquainted with Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* is supported by allusions in Horace's odes. For examples, see Nisbet and Hubbard (1970) 59, 175.

... nonne videre
 nil aliud sibi naturam latrare, nisi utqui
 corpore seiunctus dolor absit, mensque fruatur
 iucundo sensu cura semota metuque?
 Ergo corpoream ad naturam pauca videmus
 esse opus omnino, quae demant cumque dolorem,
 delicias quoque uti multas substernere possint;
 (De Rerum Natura, 2. 16-22)

Such a definition of pleasure is absolute in the sense that once absence of pain is achieved, the increase of luxuries is unimportant. The standard for pleasure is a natural one: absence of pain. Admittedly luxuries are pleasant, but they are beyond what is needed for living. Lucretius continues, emphasizing that Nature does not care if luxuries abound, poorer men are equally happy (2. 23-36), a simple lifestyle also grants absence of pain.⁶⁷ These passages exemplify that there is no *moral* limit to luxury imposed on humans in Epicurean philosophy, but rather a natural one: absence of pain instigates the limit to pleasure. Clearly, then there are limits to the amount that pleasure can be increased, and thus also to the usefulness of possessions. Yet the existence of such limits evades many people (5. 1430-1433).

Not only is pursuit of luxury unnecessary in life, but according to Lucretius it is fed by a fear of death (3. 59-64). While this is not directly expressed in the odes studied, the rich man in 2.18 is forgetful of death and tries to defy it by increasing his property. Fear of death is not directly attributed to him; his race against time, however, implies that he is trying to keep death at bay. Such a desire to live forever, thus defying the natural limit of death, is discouraged by Epicurean philosophy. Eventually, Nature will have no new pleasures to offer the human, and the same old pleasures will become stale (3. 944-945).⁶⁸ A time limit to the enjoyment of pleasures is

⁶⁷ A similar emphasis on the simple life occurs in ode 3.1.21-24. Horace then elaborates on this concept by emphasizing that pursuit of unnecessary pleasures is accompanied by new worries: *desiderantem quod satis est neque/ tumultuosum sollicitat mare/ nec saevus Arcturi cadentis/ impetus aut orientis Haedi*, (3.1.25-28).

⁶⁸ That no new pleasures are provided by Nature is repeated at 3. 1080-1081.

thus imposed and no sensible reason to prolong life remains. The limits that are placed on luxury and life in both these cases are based on Nature, they are not created from a human-made moral system. That acceptance of and respect for natural limits is beneficial for humans is further shown by Lucretius in Book 5, where he flashes back to an earlier age.

In this age humankind respected the limit of the land, it did not seek to build out into the sea, nor did it engage in sailing (5. 988-1010). The days prior to navigation are associated with simplicity and to a certain extent, ignorance, whereas now, after the invention of sailing, the age is one of excesses. People die because of overindulgence, instead of starvation; people deliberately poison each other, whereas they used to inadvertently kill themselves. In Lucretius, the decline of this earlier age is partly due to the growth of civilization, in particular the use of fire. Fire softened the people and decreased their resilience to the cold (5. 1011-1016). In ode 1.3, after chastizing the first sailor, Horace concentrates on the arrival of fire and the evil consequences of it.⁶⁹ Unlike Lucretius, however, Horace dwells only on the negative side (this is because he is developing the topos of the folly of navigation and technological advancement), while Lucretius offers a more balanced viewpoint. Lucretius is setting out a philosophy: he is trying to explain the growth of civilization without divine interference. The world he depicts is not an idealized one, the non-human elements of Nature can be dangerous to humans (5. 982-987). There is an affinity between the physical components of the universe and humans as they are all composed of atoms and void,⁷⁰ but there are no imaginative leaps from the non-human to the human parts of Nature. For example in the spring odes, the mortality of humans is closely associated with the cycles of the seasons and Horace draws parallels between the two cycles. This sort of thinking is not prevalent

⁶⁹ Of course Horace is using the mythical tradition concerning fire, which would be anathema to Lucretius.

⁷⁰ Lucretius *De Rerum Natura*, I. 430-448.

in Lucretius.

Paramount to the Stoics, and in strong contrast to the Epicureans, was the belief that "the world is ordered throughout by the will of God."⁷¹ This concept of an order, determined by a superhuman power, which humans should not violate, can be seen particularly in ode 1.3, where Horace writes of a prudent god who organized the world (21-23). Violating that order by exceeding the natural limits is thus an action condemned by the Stoics.

Clearly Horace was influenced by tenets of both Stoicism and Epicureanism. The importance of the natural order is stressed by both schools. The Epicureans focus on the natural causes of the universe, and emphasize that the processes of Nature are uninfluenced by Gods (and also, in fact, by humans). Thereby, they show humans not as a powerful, controlling force, but rather as a part of the universe. The Stoics believe in a divine order, with which the human must attempt to live in harmony.⁷² Attempts to go against it, do not succeed. Horace has portrayed humans violating the natural order and they *do* succeed, at least temporarily. But the consequences that such violations perpetrate are unpleasant. Once the limits have been transgressed, there is no going back, and humans must live with the results.

Yet Horace's eclectic philosophy does not consist of only Stoic and Epicurean tenets. The concept of limits in the world goes back to early Greek thinking, before either Stoicism or Epicureanism had been established as schools of thought. That certain limits must be respected and that disregard for them brings retribution on the violator are notions closely connected with

⁷¹ Sandbach (1975) 35. While something, for example illness, may be contrary to one's individual nature, it is not necessarily contrary to the nature of the universe, in fact it must be in accord with this nature.

⁷² As Seneca wrote, *Ducunt volentem fata, nolentem trahunt* (*Epist.* 107.11.). There is a divine will and plan: if you attempt to go against it, you will be forcibly made to comply.

the implications of δίκη, or justice.⁷³

In a manner that is fitting to the lyrical mode, a mode not designated for a heavy, moralizing tone,⁷⁴ Horace has described the folly and the danger of exceeding these natural limits. Violation of the natural limits goes against an order which *includes* humans; each participant in that order, both human and non-human, has its appropriate place, bounded by limits.

⁷³ For further description of the history of limits, applicable not only to humans but to gods and elements as well, see Chapter One. For Horace, the ultimate motivation for obeying limits inherent in Nature, especially the one imposed on the land by the sea, is the ineluctability of death (2.18). Acceptance by mortals of this ultimate limit encourages acceptance of other limits, even though transgression of these is possible.

⁷⁴ For Horace's recognition that a heavy tone is inappropriate in lyric, see e. g. ode 3.3.69.

Chapter Three:

Violation of Cosmic and Human *Foedera* in Seneca's *Medea*

The violation of natural limits is a recurring theme in Seneca's tragedies. Limit, applied both to human emotions and to physical places, is a concept found throughout the tragedies.¹ The majority of instances involve either violation or absence of a limit.² This chapter considers limits in Nature in two main sections. In the first there is a general survey which covers the terminology used to express natural limits. Specifically, Seneca's use of the word *natura* is examined, followed by a study of the covenants (*foedera*) which are a part of this *natura*. The purpose of this section is to establish a context for the transgressions studied in the latter part of the chapter. The second section dwells on the violation of the limit that the sea imposes on humankind, which is portrayed clearly in Seneca's *Medea*. As becomes apparent in *Medea*, the transgression of one natural limit leads to other violations, both within human society and in the non-human world. The finality and irreversibility of the transgression, as well as the resultant movement towards chaos, is communicated through the style and content of the choral odes. A close examination of these odes, succeeded by a brief study of *Medea* herself, constitutes the main body of the second section. The conclusion reiterates the consequences of violation of natural limits and the impossibility of retroactive reinstitution of those limits.

Section I: *Natura* in Senecan Tragedy

Seneca in his tragedies uses the word *natura* more frequently than does Horace in his odes. A study of these usages provides a concept of *natura* in the plays as well as of the relationship between it and humans.

¹ E. g.: limit to grief *Troades* 786; limit to land *Her. F.* 1140-1141.

² Violation: *Thy.* 255; *Thy.* 26-27. Absence: *Phae.* 360; *Phae.* 553; *Her. F.* 166. Included in this majority are examples where the existence or position of a limit is queried: *Phae.* 359; *Thy.* 1051; *Med.* 884.

Natura appears to be a non-human, powerful entity, sometimes associated with a divine element (*Phae.* 959). It has the ability to blot out lands, sea and sky (*Thy.* 833-835). More common, however, is the use of *natura* to describe the standards that govern human behaviour, in particular sexual relationships. Such usage links human social behaviour directly with the non-human world. For example, the ghost of Thyestes in *Agamemnon*, after he has related his union with his own daughter, says: *versa natura est retro* (34). Similarly, in response to Phaedra's confession of her passion for her stepson Hippolytus, the Nurse concludes with: *natura totiens legibus cedit suis,/ quotiens amabit Cressa?* (176-177). A few lines earlier the Nurse has already stated that, were Phaedra to indulge her passion, she would simultaneously "overturn nature" (*verte naturam* 173). The Nurse's words confirm that the laws which act as standards for human behaviour are associated with Nature. These laws, moreover, are not a creation of human civilization, as even uncivilized people obey them:

*compesce amoris impii flammās, precor,
nefasque quod non ulla tellus barbara
commisit umquam, non vagi campis Getae
nec inhospitalis Taurus . . .* (*Phae.* 165-168)

Clearly, certain standards of human behaviour are in harmony with the laws of Nature (*leges naturae*) while others pervert these laws.

The connection between Nature and human behaviour is also exemplified in *Oedipus*. Oedipus has just revealed the oracle which foretold that he would kill his father and have intercourse with his mother. To avoid the fulfilment of this prediction he went to Thebes:

*non ego penates profugus excessi meos;
parum ipse fidens mihimet in tuto tua,
natura, posui iura.* (*Oed.* 24-26)

The laws governing family relationships are again associated with Nature: Oedipus wanted to keep his relationship with his parents in accordance with

the laws of Nature, and he therefore left the people he believed were his parents. Ironically, however, he violated the laws of Nature in his attempt to keep them secure because the couple who raised him as their child were not his actual parents. He subsequently met his real parents and unknowingly fulfilled the prophecy.

The connection between human social laws and Nature is concretely shown later in his monologue. In describing the state of the natural environment, Oedipus draws an uncanny picture in which the natural processes have been thwarted (37-51). There are no breezes, the water has fled the streams, the sky is pale in the twilight and there are no stars twinkling at night. Only an oppressive black fog settles over the land. Even the crops, though they have grown tall, yield no grain as they need water. The plague killing humans has spread to the non-human sphere and even the plants and stars are affected. The violation of human social standards of behaviour is directly reflected by the suffering of the environment. Oedipus strengthens the connection between humans and environment by claiming responsibility for the environmental disorder: *fecimus caelum nocens* (36).³

In other plays, the universe reacts to human violations of behaviour standards. In *Thyestes*, when Atreus murders his nephews, the cosmic reaction is that the sun disappears at mid-day (776-777). The link between human behaviour and the natural environment is further shown in *Phoenissae* (82-87). Oedipus' daughter Antigone is a loving and dutiful daughter, which contrasts strongly with Oedipus' behaviour to his parents. As Antigone's behaviour is so different from his own, Oedipus believes that Nature has reversed her laws: a pious child has sprung from an impious man.

³ Though he does not yet fully realize his crime, Oedipus senses that he is somehow responsible for the plague, for the simple reason that he personally has been spared from it while his kingdom is suffering greatly (28-36). Theseus cries out in a similar way, when he realizes he has mistakenly condemned his son: *sidera et manes et undas scelere complevi meo;/ amplius sors nulla restat; regna me norunt tria* (Phae. 1211-1212). He, too, considers he has made the sky guilty. Hercules' exclamation that he must cleanse the earth (Her. F. 1279) has the same thought.

Thereupon Oedipus anticipates further disruptions of natural laws, but this time those that apply to the environment. He expects the river to flow back to its source; the sun to herald the night; and the evening star to bring in the day.

Oedipus' words link humans with their environment. They also assume that violation of one natural law *necessarily* leads to violations of other natural laws. Such an assumption is also expressed by Polynices in *Phoenissae*, though he does not look towards the environment for other violations. Jocasta, attempting to stop her two sons from fighting each other, pledges that she will protect Polynices from Eteocles with her own body. Yet he answers: *Timeo; nihil iam iura naturae valent* (478). In other words he does not trust his mother. The reason he gives is his brother's faithlessness. Polynices fears that the violation of trust between brothers (one *ius naturae*) will lead to violation of another: the violation will spread.

There is a distinct connection between Seneca's usage of *natura* and human standards of behaviour. Certain behaviour is contrary to standards that humans consider 'laws of Nature'; humans are measuring themselves by a standard that is not set by human civilization. The standard covers humans and non-humans in so far as violation of it in the human sphere is reflected in the environment. The connection between the human and the non-human is further shown in the word *foedus*.

Foedus connects the world of the cosmos with the world of the individual human. It is used to refer to the laws of Nature, in terms both of kinship ties and of cosmic limits. *Foedus* has connotations of an agreement or treaty, not simply a limit.⁴ The definition of *foedus* in the Oxford Latin Dictionary has different entries:

a formal agreement between states or peoples,

⁴ There are three words in particular that Seneca uses to refer to limits or boundaries: *modus*, *finis* and *foedus*. While *modus* and *finis* are often used interchangeably, *foedus* has different connotations.

league or treaty (1); . . . an agreement between private persons (2); . . . (applied to the marriage bond) (3) . . . a bond or tie (of friendship, kinship (4) . . . a law or limit (imposed by Nature, Fate (5) . . .

The fourth and fifth definitions are particularly relevant to Seneca's usage of the word.⁵

Three of the ten occurrences of *foedus* in Seneca's tragedies refer to laws of Nature: in *Hercules Furens* it is used to describe the limit between the worlds of life and death (49); in *Medea* it is twice used to signify the limit between land and sea (335, 606). Hippolytus uses the term in *Phaëdra* to describe the harmonious relationship between humans and Nature that existed in former times (540). Three of the remaining examples involve an agreement between brothers (*Thy.* 1024; *Phoen.* 282, 293). The last three instances are each unique: one carries the meaning of a treaty in war (*Med.* 64), one is used in an *adynaton* as an example of a natural impossibility (*Thy.* 482), and one describes sexual bonds (*Phae.* 910).

The number of examples where the covenant was *not* kept is significant. The violation of the *foedus* between humans and Nature which Hippolytus mentions, suggests that humans can, or at least could in the past, live in a state of *natura* and harmony with the non-human world. Yet humans violated the bond that enabled harmonious living. The concept that there was a state of harmony between humans and the non-human world, which ended when humans violated *foedera*, recurs in *Medea*. The peaceful life is disrupted with the Thessalian pine's violation of the covenants: *bene dissaepiti foedera mundi/ traxit in unum Thessala pinus* (336-337). Later, the Chorus warn humankind not to break any more *foedera*: *Rumpe*

⁵ The use of the word *foedera* to express natural covenants is influenced by Lucretius: see Fitch (1987) 138. It is important not to bring the modern interpretation of 'law of nature' to the text. As C. Bailey wrote in his commentary on *De Rerum Natura*: "It [the expression *foedera naturae* I. 586] is usually, and perhaps rightly, translated 'the laws of nature', but it must be remembered that the meaning is different from that of the modern expression. Lucretius is not thinking of an observed uniformity in nature, but rather of the limits which nature imposes on the growth, life, powers, etc. of things." Bailey (1947) 699.

nec sacro, violente, sancta/ foedera mundi (605-606). A different type of cosmic limit is violated by Hercules in *Hercules Furens*. Juno announces, *foedus umbrarum perit* (49), when she is informing the audience that Hercules returned from his visit to the realm of the Dead.

Not only are the cosmic covenants broken, but also the agreements made between family members. In these examples, the word *foedus* has an added significance. Primarily it refers to the actual agreements that brothers (Atreus and Thyestes in *Thyestes* and Eteocles and Polynices in *Phoenissae*) reach, but it also describes kinship ties (the fourth meaning). Thus the violation of a *foedus* between brothers has two levels. Thyestes, upon realizing the fate of his sons, says to Atreus: *hoc foedus?* (1024). He implies that the truce they had come to (507-45) is not a truce at all. The contract between Polynices and Eteocles in *Phoenissae* is likewise not really an agreement. From the context of lines 283 and 293, it appears that *foedus* refers to the agreement between the brothers to rule Thebes alternately. This agreement has been broken, hence the invocation to the gods to witness: *ille et icti foederis testes deos/ invocat* (282-283). Yet it is also clear that war, resulting from this violation, would be impious because of the familial tie between the two leaders. The imminent war would break a *foedus* on another level.

Connotations of violence often accompany the words used to depict transgressions of cosmic covenants, for example the verb *rumpere*. Humans broke the agreement with Nature (*Phae.* 540);⁶ the Chorus warn humans not to break the covenants (*Med.* 605-606); Juno narrates how the Titans assaulted the realm of Jove (*Her. F.* 79);⁷ the Chorus tell how the first ship

⁶ Hippolytus is the speaker here, yet interestingly *rumpere* is also the verb Seneca uses to portray Hippolytus' death (*Phae.* 1102). Hippolytus scorned the covenants of Venus, which on one level constitutes a violation. Thus it is effective that his manner of death is described by a word associated with violating the covenants of Nature.

⁷ Juno describes the Titans as *ausos* (*Her. F.* 79); Tiphys is described as "daring" in *Medea* for breaking the limit between land and sea (318).

broke through the sea (*Med.* 302).⁸ *Rumpere* has been used for violating the realm of the sea and the realm of the sky; it is also the verb often used for violating the realm of the Dead. Sometimes, the living call upon those in the Underworld to break through back into the mortal world (Andromache in *Troades*, 681; Megara in *Hercules Furens* 280, 290). Elsewhere the Underworld is described as being burst open (Creon in *Oedipus*, 572); at other times the violation is a result of the numbers of dead people (*Oed.* 160, 170).

The breaking of Nature's covenants tends to be followed by destructive consequences. The harmful results of sailing, for example, are depicted in *Medea*. In particular the unpleasant deaths that certain Argonauts suffered are described in detail (617-664). In *Hercules Furens*, Hercules' successful trip to the Underworld leads Juno to fear he will try to gain the realm of the gods and seize power from Jupiter (63-65). Her response is a wish that he become his own enemy (85). The realization of this wish is shown in the madness that possesses Hercules, during which he kills his wife and children (987-1038).

Earlier it was seen that the natural environment suffered or natural processes were aborted because humans violated standards of behaviour: they all broke some type of *foedera*. Likewise, the environment responds when cosmic limits are violated. For example, when the shades from the realm of the Dead are summoned into the upper world in *Oedipus*, the surrounding environment reacts (574-577). The trees shrink down, the oaks split, and the whole grove shakes; even the earth itself groans. The shades are being forced to cross the boundary between the realms of the living and the dead, and the environment reacts correspondingly. Similar reaction is found in *Thyestes*, when the Fury brings the ghost of Tantalus into the upper world: water deserts the springs, the river banks are empty, the roar of the
⁸ *Rumpere* is also used to describe Ajax when he briefly survives a shipwreck and is trying to challenge the gods (*Ag.* 539-556).

sea is muted (107-114). The inhabitants of Hades are not meant to come to the upper world, just as those of the upper world are not meant to visit Hades. In *Hercules Furens*, Juno tells the audience the effect on the cosmos, when Hercules dragged Cerberus into the daylight: *viso labantem Cerbero vidi diem/ pavidumque Solem* (60-61).

In these examples of violation of cosmic limits and in the earlier ones of violation of human behaviour standards, the distinction between the world of humans and that of non-human elements of Nature melts away and the actions of the former affect the latter.⁹ As Regenbogen wrote:

. . . Hintergrund und Geschehen sind nicht zwei
voneinander getrennte Dinge: die Schauer des
Geschehens vibrieren hinüber in das Umgebende,
die Natur stimmt ein in Schmerz und Qual . . .¹⁰

On some level Oedipus, Hercules and Theseus all violated covenants: either those of kinship or those of the universe or both.¹¹

Violation is found also in *Phaedra* and *Medea*. In *Phaedra*, the cosmic reaction is a little different. Hippolytus violates the law of Nature by denying any sexual interest in women. The Chorus have established that sexual desire strikes everyone: old and young people, gods and animals (290-357). In fact, Nature (here manifested in love) claims all for itself: *vindicat omnes/ natura sibi* (352-353). The Nurse, in her speech to Hippolytus a little later, asks why Hippolytus is acting contrary to his nature and shunning intimate contact with women: *quid te coherces et necas rectam indolem?* (454). She draws attention to the practical reason for sexual love: it ensures that life continues in the cosmos. It was the father of the cosmos (*mundi parens*) who

⁹ Another example: in *Agamemnon* the day is held back by the presence of Thyestes' ghost (53 ff.).

¹⁰ Regenbogen (1930) 437.

¹¹ Hercules and Theseus both killed family, but they had previously visited Hades. As was seen above, Hercules' violation of the boundary between the worlds of the living and the dead resulted in violation of family bonds. In *Phaedra*, the Chorus say: *Pallas Actaeae veneranda genti,/ quod tuus caelum superosque Theseus/ spectat et fugit Stygias paludes/ casta nil debes patruo rapaci:/ constat inferno numerus tyranno* (1149-1153). Though Theseus returned from Hades, his son died.

ensured that new progeny replaced those claimed by the grasping hands of Fate (466-467). If there is no procreation, the world becomes unnatural: no fish in the sea, no birds in the sky, no beasts in the woods (470-474).¹²

Phaedra desires Hippolytus and wishes to break her marriage vow with Theseus. When she approaches Hippolytus and reveals her desire, Hippolytus is shocked that the cosmos does not react (646-671). Hippolytus flees. Phaedra alleges that Hippolytus violated her and consequently Theseus calls upon his father Neptune to grant him the last of three favours. Neptune sends a monster from the sea which attacks and utterly destroys Hippolytus. While ostensibly Hippolytus' death is due to Theseus' curse which is evoked by Phaedra's accusation, in reality both Theseus (uninformed curser) and Phaedra (victim of passion) are instruments of a higher power. The bull coming from the sea is in fact a type of cosmic reaction. Its arrival is due to Hippolytus' unnatural lifestyle.¹³

In *Medea*, the violation of *foedera* has more complex results. In fact, when Medea kills her children, the cosmos does not react. Yet on closer examination, this absence is not surprising. Medea has made her control of Nature through magic clear (e. g. 752 ff), and at one point she identifies herself as the cosmos (166-167). Thus reverberation of her actions into the cosmos does not happen; if she is the cosmos and can control it, then it is not free to react. Violation of limits by Medea shocks only other people.

To sailing and its violation of the covenant between land and sea, however, there are cosmic reactions. Yet the cosmic reactions are not

¹² The prominent position given Eros in Hesiod's *Theogony* (third after Chaos and Gaia) underscores the importance of love in the creation and continued existence of the world (Hesiod, *Theogony* 116-120).

¹³ In contrast to Euripides, Seneca does not have Aphrodite hold a long speech in which she reveals that she has a grudge against Hippolytus for dishonouring her (*Hippolytus* 1-58). Instead, Hippolytus' behaviour is portrayed against a background in which love and sexual desire are natural and necessary. Thus by shunning them, Hippolytus is in a sense violating the laws of Nature.

immediate, and when they occur they are portrayed, not as a reverberation of human actions, but rather as acts of retribution: the sea avenges itself. The revenge and the violation that instigated it are studied in the next section.

Section II: Specific Violation of the Land/Sea Boundary in *Medea*

Humankind's transgression of the boundary between land and sea and its attempt to control the sea is significant in *Medea*. Consequences, harmful for humankind, result from this transgression. The theme of transgression and its results is a crucial component in the development of the play. Three ideas emerge from *Medea* with regard to this natural limit. The first is the irreversibility of the transgression; there is no going back to a pre-sailing age. Secondly, civilization contains its own downfall. Thirdly, sailing continues to effect evil results, even after the initial voyage. As much of the material directly related to transgressions of limits is contained in the choral odes, especially the Argonautic odes, a close study of these forms the first part of this section.¹⁴

The Argonautic odes form a pair. The first emphasizes the *audacia* of the expedition and contrasts the fear faced by the Argonauts with the peace of the preceding age of humankind. Furthermore, it makes the play more than a psychological study of *Medea*: the play is also concerned with the nature of civilization and of human technological progress.¹⁵ The second Argonautic ode dwells on the violent forces of Nature released by the Argonauts' violation of a natural limit, and the consequent violent deaths of many members of the expedition.

That the *Argo* superseded the natural limit of humankind by sailing and that this act is portrayed by Seneca as violent, or at least aggressive,

¹⁴ "... often the index in Senecan tragedy of where a play's attention lies [is] the preoccupation of the chorus." Boyle (1985) 1290. "Argonautic odes" is the name given the two middle odes in Seneca's *Medea*, because they refer to the experience and result of the *Argo's* voyage.

¹⁵ Davis (1993) 78-79.

has been noted by Davis:

Medea is a play that is vitally concerned with man's relationship with nature and the effect of technological progress upon that relationship. The advance of human civilisation, as represented by Argo's voyage, is presented as aggression against the natural order and in the world of this play human aggression against the natural order provokes a violent response.¹⁶

Ahl, too, concentrates on the transgression of the Argo's voyage and the consequences that will follow:

But dominating the Chorus' recollection of Argo's crew is its sense that Argo's voyage was an act of trespass upon the sea, punished - or destined to be punished - by the subsequent suffering of each individual sailor.¹⁷

Dominant in both criticisms is that humans do not escape the consequences of their actions. That these actions were violations is clear from the language used to describe them (e. g. *traxit* 336, *rumpe* 605), and confirmed by the punishment inflicted on humans: *Exigit poenas mare provocatum* (616).

The First Argonautic Ode

The earlier of the two odes begins with a description of the first, bold sailor:

*audax nimium qui freta primus
rate tam fragili perfida rupit
terrasque suas posterga videns
animam levibus credidit auris
dubioque secans aequora cursu
potuit tenui fidere ligno
inter vitae mortisque vices
nimium gracili limite ducto.* (301-308)

Immediately his excessive audacity is emphasized by *audax nimium*, and seven lines later the repetition of *nimium*, this time in reference to the boundary the ship is drawing between the paths of life and death, focusses

¹⁶ Davis (1993) 93.

¹⁷ Ahl (1986) 108.

on the extremity of the action. Absence of moderation is evident. Audacity is coupled with violence: the fragile ship *cleaves* the sea, which is treacherous. There is some irony in the attribution of the adjective *perfida* to the sea when it is man who is acting in a treacherous manner, breaking the covenants of the world (*foedera mundi* 335) by venturing forth where he does not belong. The juxtaposition of *fragili* with *perfida* conveys a sense of danger for the ship to the audience.

This danger is strengthened, moreover, by Seneca's emphasis on the ignorance of humankind (304-305). Humans entrusted their lives to the light winds and cut an unknown course on the sea. A few lines later, their lack of astronomical knowledge is stressed (309-315). Humankind has not even named the winds yet. By the end of line 316, the audacity of the first sailor has been established.

At this point, Seneca introduces the subject of the Argonautic voyage, by naming Tiphys. In language similar to the description of the first sailor,¹⁸ Tiphys is described as bold: he dared (*ausus*) to open sails on the vast sea and to prescribe new laws for the winds (318-320).¹⁹ Since Nature has her own laws, to write laws for Nature seems hubristic. *Novas* adds to the pejorative tone. The actual process of sailing is described (321-328) and, again, excess is emphasized. This time the zeal of the sailor is the target: *cum iam totos avidus nimium/ navita flatus optat* (326-327).

With the next section comes a variation of topic. Instead of *audax* or *ausus*, *candida* holds the primary position. The age before the invention of sailing is praised and considered bright, prosperous and morally pure. In those days, deceit was far removed, people stayed on ancestral fields and were content with what those fields provided. They had no knowledge of

¹⁸ The description of the first sailor is probably not of Tiphys. Costa (1973) 100.

¹⁹ "By learning to make use of the winds Tiphys in a sense controlled them, and so is said to have prescribed 'new laws' for them." Costa (1973) 101.

foreign wealth (329-334).²⁰ Prior to sailing, the lands were well-separated by the covenants of Nature: *bene dissaepiti foedera mundi* (335). This well-regulated world order was not the result of a prudent god, as in Horace's ode 1.3.22 *prudens deus*, but is simply the way things were: *rerum natura*. The order is violated, however, by the Thessalian pine, which dragged the lands together, *traxit in unum Thessala pinus*. The picture of an idyllic past is shattered. The position of *unum* as the third word surrounded by the others gives a finality to the events: the Thessalian pine has dragged all lands into one and holds that one in the middle of the sentence. Humankind has succeeded in conquering and controlling a part of Nature. Yet already the Chorus voices the negative and ineluctable result of this conquest: *partemque metus fieri nostri/ mare sepositum* (338-339).²¹ It later becomes obvious that this fear is not confined to the sea itself, but includes fear of foreigners brought over from barbarous lands. Lines 335 to 339 convey not only the permanence of the Argo's achievement, but also the manner in which she accomplished the unification. The expression *traxit in unum* has violent overtones: the Argo *dragged* the lands into one. Furthermore, she *ordered* the sea to *suffer blows* from the rowers.²² Yet recognition of this violence, which causes the reader at least to question technological progress, if not to condemn it, is not displayed by all critics. Lawall, for example, fails to recognize it:

The technological triumph of the Argonautic
voyage was a great turning point in human history
that brought an end to the Golden Age by uniting

²⁰ Some texts (e. g. the Loeb edition of Miller, 1917) place 329-334, the description of the *candida saecula*, after 308. The transmitted order, however, is maintained by O. Zwierlein in the Oxford Classical Text, 1986.

²¹ The idea of navigation as introducing a new fear for people is a commonplace starting in Augustan times. Costa (1973) 103. Other examples include Propertius, who writes: *terra parum fuerat, fati adiecimus undas;/ fortunae miseras auximus arte vias*. iii. 7. 31-32. Note the sense of chronic dissatisfaction conveyed by *terra parum*, already seen in Horace ode 2.18.

²² Again there is a hubristic overtone to these words. They recall the story of Xerxes, who whipped the Hellespont and threw a pair of fetters into it because a storm destroyed the bridge his men had built over it (Herodotus 7.36).

lands which had previously been separated by nature's laws. Yet, this change is described not as a violent disruption of natural law or as an act of impiety . . . but rather as a unification of the world. Even so, man must suffer for his encroachment on nature, and his suffering consists of the fear which inevitably accompanies seafaring.²³

In Lawall's words, there is a reluctance to accept a condemnation of what he considers progressive. The attitude is similar to that found in the critics discussed in Chapter Two, who refuse to take Horace's ode 1.3 seriously as a condemnation of progress.

Lawall does, however, draw attention to an important consequence of the Argo's voyage: it brought an end to the Golden Age. There are many references in Greek and Roman literature to the absence of navigation in the Golden Age and many, too, for the Argo as the first big ship.²⁴ At the time of the choral ode, sailing has been established and any vessel can brave the deep: *quaelibet altum cumba pererrat* (368). The limit that the sea imposed on humankind has been transgressed, and the consequence is twofold: intercommunication among the known world and the importation of foreign goods and people. There is no possible manner of removing the art of navigation and returning to a pre-sailing world; the Chorus talk only of future, further explorations.

²³ Lawall (1979) 420.

²⁴ For no sailing in the Golden Age see Vergil *Georgics* 1.130, where only in the Age of Jupiter was the sea ordered to be moved; also Hyginus, *Poetica Astronomica* II, ch. 25; for further details see Boas and Lovejoy (1965) 477; for the Argo as the first ship see especially Lucan, *Pharsalia* 3.193-196: *Inde lacessitum primo mare, cum rudis Argo/ miscuit ignotas temerato littore gentes,/ primaque cum ventis pelagique furentibus undis/ composuit mortale genus, fatisque per illam/ accessit mors una ratem*; Euripides *Andromache* 864; Catullus, 64.11; Ovid *Amores* 2.11.1. There do not, however, seem to be many other references which name the Argo as the specific ship which ended the Golden Age, though Ovid (*Met.* i. 94-95) does write: *nondum caesa suis, peregrinum ut viseret orbem,/ montibus in liquidas pinus descenderat undas*. The Argo is called the Thessalian pine, so perhaps *pinus* could also refer to her. The voyage of the Argonauts seems to be the first major sea voyage, but the Argo is not necessarily the first boat. There is also the point that Seneca's description at 329 ff, as Costa observes, is not explicitly a description of the Golden Age, but certainly "belongs in the category of the many accounts of that ideal early existence which we find in Greek and Latin literature." Costa (1973) 102. The point is that navigation was a major factor contributing to the demise of a happy, simple life, which was in harmony with Nature.

Though the Argo conquered the sea, she paid heavily for her daring. Lines 341-360 describe the three terrors that the unprincipled (*improba*) Argo endured.²⁵ The first terror was the Symplegades, rocks which clashed together and through which the Argo had to sail. Seneca opportunely reminds the audience of the boldness of the Argonauts by repeating the epithet *audax*: *palluit audax Tiphys* (346). Yet here the emphasis is on the fear; in other words, the boldness is qualified. Tiphys loses control of the rudder; Orpheus is silent, even the Argo has lost her voice.²⁶ The second terror is Scylla, who is described as a maiden with rabid dogs around her womb; and the Sirens, whom Orpheus actually almost forces to follow the Argo, form the third. Description of Scylla and the Sirens is in question form, each time beginning with *quid cum*. This builds up to the third question: *Quod fuit huius pretium cursus?* The answer,

*aurea pellis
maiusque mari Medea malum,
merces prima digna carina.* (361-363)

combines the seductive quality of the Sirens, represented this time by the golden fleece, and the terror of Scylla, this time aroused by the barbarian maiden, Medea. The alliterative effect of 362 is obvious, and the use of *pretium* (price/prize) with its double meaning, is deeply ironic. This is the result of humankind's boldness and determination. Moreover, *merces* is also a significant choice: it can mean a non-financial reward, but is primarily a payment, wage or fee.²⁷ Seneca subtly reminds the audience of the significance that sailing has to trade.²⁸

There is now a transition, highlighted by *nunc iam* (364). The mythical

²⁵ *Improba* has connotations of greed and disregard for others which are both characteristics that were associated with transgressing natural boundaries in Horace, especially ode 3.1.

²⁶ The Argo could speak because of the talking oak from Dodona incorporated into her (Ap. Rhod. *Argo*. i. 524 ff).

²⁷ OLD, s. v. *merces*.

²⁸ Another hint at the Golden Age: desire for money or gain is associated with its demise in Seneca's *Phaedra*: 540. Cf. e. g. Vergil *Aeneid* 8. 326-327.

world of the Argonauts is left behind and a contrast is established between the present and the past. Within the framework of the play these words try to establish a great interval of time between the voyage and the present. Yet such an interval is not realistic, as two main participants of the voyage are still living: Medea and Jason. The sea has yielded, it suffers all laws, any craft braves the deep (365, 368). While it is true that sailing has been established and that the sea has yielded to human law, the emphasis on the total submission of the sea (*omnes leges*) and the complete freedom of vessels (*quaelibet cumba*) has hubristic overtones.

There is a further significance to these lines in the use of the word *leges*. In lines 335-336, lands were well separated in accordance with natural laws (*foedera*). Now, at lines 365-366, the sea endures the laws (*leges*) of humans. Though *leges* and *foedera* are often translated as "laws" in English, *foedus* never applies to a human-made law imposed on Nature. Humans, in fact, cannot make *foedera* for Nature. Within *Medea*, *foedera* are always initiated by non-human powers (e. g. in line 64 it is the goddess who brings them to the warring people; in lines 335 and 609, they are established without human interference). Humans can, however, attempt to impose *leges* onto Nature (e. g. Tiphys in line 320), though Nature also has her own *leges* (e. g. the law of heaven which Medea confounded 757). Thus in *Medea* *foedera* are laws instigated only by Nature (or gods), while *leges* can be set by humans as well. That humans cannot reinstate violated *foedera* accentuates both the seriousness and the irreversibility of transgression. As humans can set *leges*, such finality does not apply to them.

Following the description of the laws humans have imposed on the sea, the Chorus narrate the present state of navigation. Their words focus on the 'success' of navigation, not on the hazards endured by the Argo, nor on the presence of Medea among them. Such an attitude contradicts the pattern that violation of Nature leads to catastrophe, which is set forth in

myths.²⁹ Yet the Chorus are aware of the domination under which the natural order now is (*patitur* 365) and the freedom which this domination gives humans (368). Their description of the muddled natural order is overtly neither laudatory nor condemnatory (364-374).

One way the Chorus describe the current state is: *Indus gelidum potat Araxen,/ Albin Persae Rhenumque bibunt* (373-374). To identify a people by the river they drink is not new, but to have people drinking from a river that is not the one with which they are identified is defying one of the stock natural impossibilities, *adynata*, used in ancient literature.³⁰ There is something unnatural about this picture. The Chorus' final words refer to the future:

*venient annis saecula seris,
quibus Oceanus vincula rerum
laxet et ingens pateat tellus
Tethysque novos detegat orbes
nec sit terris ultima Thule.* (374-379)

There is certainly an optimism and a belief in the continual exploration beyond known limits, though that they predict the discovery of America is rather far-fetched!³¹ Yet these lines simultaneously hint at chaos: as boundaries are removed, all parts become one. The fact that Ocean is the subject of *laxet* (372) and not humans, reinforces the power of Nature. It can mean that Ocean will release her limits and people will discover unknown territory, but it can also mean that Ocean will release her limits and simply overtake the land, thus creating chaos. Though humans have 'conquered' Ocean, there is a hint that their control may not be as powerful, or as permanent, as they believe.

The question arises whether the last sixteen lines refer to the Roman

²⁹ For the mythical pattern that violation of Nature results in catastrophe, see Chapter One.

³⁰ Costa (1973) 107.

³¹ Apparently Abraham Oertel (sixteenth-century Flemish geographer) interpreted these words as a prophecy about the discovery of America. Ferdinand Columbus appears to have interpreted them in a similar manner. In his copy of *Medea*, beside these lines he wrote, "*haec prophetia expleta est per patrem meum Christoforum Colon almirantem anno 1492.*" Both references come from Costa, who cites Farnaby and Damsté as sources respectively. Costa (1973) 108.

Empire and if Seneca is speaking in his own persona. An affirmative answer is supported by the geographical references made. The rivers named by Seneca refer to the farther reaches of the Roman empire: Araxes is in the east, the Albis and the Rhene in Germany. Furthermore, Thule represents the limits of the known geographical world.³² The literary device of the *adynaton* in lines 372-374 has already been commented on. This type of *adynaton* is used also by Vergil in his first *Eclogue* 59-63. He uses the same type of comparison, but with different elements: the Parthian will drink the Arar, the German will drink the Tigris, before Tityrus will forget the face of his benefactor.³³ In this eclogue, a herdsman (Meliboeus) is forced to leave his fields because of the destruction emanating from the city. The eclogue dwells on the geographical displacement of Meliboeus (3-4) and his suffering. Meliboeus' plight arouses sympathy in the empathetic reader, and Seneca's allusion to the eclogue evokes this sympathy. In Seneca's *Medea*, the *adynaton* has been realized: people *are* drinking from distant rivers. The unnaturalness used as a standard by Tityrus has become a real state. Vergil is referring to Rome.³⁴ Seneca, by alluding to Vergil so poignantly, is perhaps also referring to Rome, though much more indirectly. In view of the specific places named and the allusion to Vergil it is plausible that these lines do refer to Seneca's own time.³⁵ In this case they could be interpreted as a comment on the expansion of the Roman Empire. Through the voyage of the Argo a part of the barbarian world (*Medea*) which was formerly

³² Cf. Vergil, *Georgics*, 1.30.

³³ Tityrus claims that a god gave him peace (6), yet upon closer questioning of who this god is, he evasively talks of Rome.

³⁴ Lines 19-26. Boyle has noted the connection with Rome that this displacement had: "The rural or pastoral world becomes in Virgil's hands a mirror of Rome's distress, a looking-glass in which the constitutive features of contemporary experience are seen against a background of lost ideals and forgotten aspirations." Boyle (1975) 106-107.

³⁵ Bishop interprets 364-374 as "the known classical world." Bishop (1965) 313. He sees a three part movement: Jason's "heroic audacity" which destroyed the world order (329-334) and brought a new one (364-374), which will eventually be superseded through the discoveries of another bold sailor. Bishop (1965) 313-314.

outside the boundaries of the Greek world was brought to the centre. Continued expansion invariably results in the importation to the centre of elements that were previously on the periphery. Those on the periphery are identified as barbaric or even fantastical. Thus perhaps these words warn that the price of human expansion and violation of limits is penetration of the fantastical and the barbaric to the centre of civilization.

The Second Argonautic Ode

The first Argonautic ode has related the beginning of navigation, the Argo's voyage and the success of humans. The second Argonautic ode (579-669), however, shifts to a more pessimistic tone.³⁶ The horror and finality of the deaths which some of the Argonauts suffered are emphasized. These deaths are described as a type of atonement for the Argonauts' violation and control of the sea (614-615). Unlike the limit set by the sea, the limit set by death cannot be overcome.³⁷ Closing the ode there is a plea for Jason to be spared, yet placed in the context of the ode, such expectation is pathetically naive.

The ode can be divided into three sections: the first discusses wronged wives (579-594), the second moves to Jason (595-606), and the third details the fates of various Argonauts (607-669). The first section begins by comparing various powers (of a flame, of stormy wind, and of a hurtling spear) with the power of a woman robbed of her marriage. The passion of such a woman is actually greater than that of a river breaking bridges, or of the sun melting the snow. Her rage is uncontrollable:

*caecus est ignis stimulatus ira
nec regi curat patiturve frenos
aut timet mortem: cupit ire in ipsos
obvius enses. (591-594)*

In the first fifteen lines, wronged wives are aligned with Nature's destructive

³⁶ Davis (1993) 84.

³⁷ E. g. line 633: even Orpheus, who had managed to go to the realm of the Dead and return on an earlier occasion, did not escape this time.

powers, and these powers have destroyed man's technological endeavours, for example the building of bridges. The use of *ignis* to describe a wronged wife's emotion as well as *patiturve frenos* to describe the impossibility of curbing the emotion reinforces the comparison between women and the powers of Nature. The two elements most dominant are fire and water, which repeatedly occur in the second section of this ode. Interestingly, though Medea is implied, she is not named directly. But the position of this choral ode, after her speech in which the finality and reality of Jason's abandonment have registered and she begins to act (560-578), ensures that she is uppermost in the audience's thoughts.

At 595, the Chorus change their focus to Jason. He is not named either, though he is more directly implied than Medea was: *Parcite, o divi, veniam precamur,/ vivat ut tutus mare qui subegit* (595-596). Instead of identifying him as a man who has recently wronged his wife and consequently unleashed her rage (*ignis*), the Chorus identify Jason as the one who tamed the sea. The words imply that Jason is in danger because he tamed the sea. This is only part of the truth; he is also in danger because he has scorned his wife. The Chorus beg for his life, yet the master of the sea is enraged, for the second realm has been conquered (597-598).

The shift from wronged wives to violations of Nature seen in these two sections of the ode is not as surprising as it may at first seem. Both a wronged wife and the sea are victims of Jason's violation of *foedera*: the first *foedus* is a marriage bond, the second is the cosmic limit between land and sea. Moreover, in the first section, wronged wives are compared to uncontrollable forces of Nature, in the second section the sea is Nature. The link between wronged wives and Nature is strengthened by the personification of the sea and the common anger felt by both parties at the violator. Medea has already identified herself with the forces of Nature (166-167) and the constant allusions to her in the descriptions of several Argonauts' deaths emphasize

her connection with their punishments. She does in fact become the instrument of the sea's reaction, she embodies the fire and the water so destructive to the Argonauts at their deaths. She also acts, however, out of reaction to her treatment as an abandoned wife. She embodies the revenge for violation of *foedera*.

The Chorus now use the mythological example of Phaethon to emphasize the dangers of exceeding natural limits. Driving his father's chariot, he was killed by the fire he was supposed to be controlling. Two things are important: first, Medea has already asked her grandfather to lend her this chariot (32-34), she too wants to drive it, and, like Phaethon, she would respect no limits. Second, Phaethon engineered his death by his own hand. He was in control of the chariot but then lost control, because he disregarded the limit set by his father, the Sun (599-602). In a similar way, Jason engineers his own destruction, though not death, by transgressing the natural boundary between land and sea. His violation results in his relationship with Medea. When he abandons her, he loses his sons, his influence and any control he had. She is the agent of his destruction. Thus he brings about his own demise. The punishment that befalls both Phaethon and the Argonauts is in the form of the natural forces (fire and water) which they respectively tried to control, but actually unleashed against themselves *inter alios*. The Phaethon story, with its focus on violation of limit and on fire, is a good background for the various deaths of the Argonauts, many of which involve fire.

Before launching into this list, however, the Chorus comment generally on the advantage of taking the middle path in life, and of respecting natural limit, simultaneously "defining man's ecological niche"³⁸:

*constitit nulli via nota magno:
vade qua tutum populo priori,
rumpe nec sacro violente sancta*

³⁸ Bishop (1965) 314.

foedera mundi (603-606).

The violence in the disruption of *foedera* is portrayed by the tmesis of *sacrosancta*, occasioned by the vocative *violente*. It is likely that this address is to humankind in general,³⁹ since after all Jason has already broken one cosmic *foedus* as well as a marriage bond. Even for humankind, however, this warning is too late; some covenants of the world are already broken (cf. 335-336).

The second part of the ode, in which the fates of several Argonauts are disclosed or predicted, begins: *Quisquis audacis tetigit carinae/ nobiles remos* (607-608). Seneca reiterates that sailing was a bold action, yet here the daring has been transferred to the actual ship. There are several possible reasons for this. Perhaps the words are intended to remove the association of *audacia* from the humans and put it onto the inanimate ship: after all they are preceded by a prayer that Jason be spared, stressing that he was acting under orders, and thereby implying that he is not guilty. On the other hand, as the *Argo* has a voice and could therefore be considered part human, perhaps she is to be included with the daring of the humans. A third possibility is that, like the consequences of sailing, audacity itself is spreading uncontrollably. The all-inclusive *quisquis* renders the Chorus' request for Jason's exemption of punishment rather pathetic (595,669).

The various fates of the Argonauts are depicted in the next lines; all are a part of the punishment that the challenged ocean claims (616). As the first Argonautic Ode emphasized, the art of sailing is permanently established (368). But the elemental powers of Nature, notably fire and water, are significant forces in many of the deaths. The first description is of bold Tiphys. The epithet *domitor profundum* (617) recalls *dominator maris* (4) and *dominus profundum* (597), both of which refer to Neptune; the former in Medea's invocation to the gods at the start of the play and the latter in the

³⁹ See Costa (1973) 123.

Chorus' description of Neptune when his realm was conquered.⁴⁰ Ironically, Tiphys died on a foreign shore: he was the one who prescribed the laws for the winds, so that humans could reach foreign shores. Seneca makes Tiphys king of Aulis, and in lines 622-624 indirectly refers to the delay imposed on the Greek ships on their way to Troy.⁴¹

The next two stanzas are descriptions of Orpheus and Hercules respectively. In many ways Orpheus and Hercules resemble one another. As Henderson has written,

Orpheus, . . . , and Hercules, a whole stanza for each. A complementary diptych, water first, then fire. Gentle hero of peaceful coexistence in song and strong-man pacifier of the globe created respectively a wonderland of harmonious empathy (626, 628 ff.) and a cleansed world for human civilisation (637). Both overcame natural forces: Orpheus stilled the flood, silenced the gale (627), Hercules laid low the sons of the North Wind and scion of the sea . . . Both heroes transcended mortal limits to harrow Hell . . .⁴²

Orpheus charmed Nature (625-629) by song and created a "wonderland of harmonious empathy," yet he was scattered across the field by mad women (630), while his head floated down the river. The wonderland did not last. The description of his death (*sparsus* 630) recalls Absyrtus' death, whom Medea scattered across the sea (*sparsumque ponto corpus* 133).

Hercules exemplifies the principle of guilt by association (*quisquis tetigit carinae*). He did not arrive in Colchis: early in the journey he was left

⁴⁰ Phaedra addresses Crete as *dominatrix freti*, in her first appearance on stage (*Phae.* 85). As in *Medea*, the domination does not lead to happiness for humans. The domination of the sea has caused Phaedra to be in an enemy's home (89-91).

⁴¹ The connection between the two voyages, and the kingship of Tiphys, seem to be Seneca's invention Costa (1973) 124. *Retinet* could also be seen as a prophetic present, cf. 645. The voyage could continue only after Iphigenia had been sacrificed (*Eur. Electra*, 1020-1023). The importance here is that other sailing voyages bring harm to humans: Paris abducted Helen by boat (*Hom. Iliad* 3. 444), the Greeks sailed to Troy to fight for ten years. The ship was built with pines from Mount Ida, sacred to Cybele. As with the Argo, violation is both in the sailing and the building: *Troades* 70-72.

⁴² Henderson (1983) 104.

behind, yet even his small association with the Argo has caused him to be considered as a violator of the sea. He, like Orpheus, violated the realm of the Dead and died at female hands. His wife, fearing faithlessness, sent him a robe steeped in Nessus' blood, which she thought was a love potion. But the potion was Nessus' revenge for being killed by Hercules, and caused him to burn alive.⁴³ Again, allusion to Medea is evident: she too, sent a poisoned robe because of a breach of her husband's faith.

Fire and water are the causes of death for many of the Argonauts.⁴⁴ One actually dies at the hands of an angry woman (*matris iratae* 646) and his death is closely associated with fire.⁴⁵ With the description of Hyllus drowning in a pool, Seneca brings the focus back to the crucial act of the Argonauts: domination of the sea. There is sarcasm in: *ite nunc, fortes, perarate pontum/ fonte timendo* (650-651).

Not all the Argonauts have died yet, but this is not important: time is not an issue. The importance lies in the inevitability of their suffering.⁴⁶ The final death described is that of Pelias, who ordered the voyage. He died in a pot of boiling water, thus the forces of water and fire are joined. This blatant reference to Medea's powers, as it is known that she orchestrated Pelias' death (201-202, 236-237), reinforces the various allusions to Medea found throughout the ode. Medea has become, in a sense, the executrix of the elements. The Chorus' words, *iam satis, divi, mare vindicastis:/ parcite iusso*

⁴³ The monster Nessus was killed by Hercules in revenge for violating his word and trying to assault Deianara. Yet he avenged himself by this potion, which caused Hercules to burn alive (Seneca *Hercules Oetaeus*). It seems that total elimination of evil is not possible. The world must have a balance between good and evil. Similarly in *Hercules Furens*, Hercules' speech for peace and eternal order in the cosmos (*Her. F.* 926-938) is followed by his onset of madness, which underscores the naiveté of his prayer.

⁴⁴ E. g.: Meleager, see below; Hyllus drowns; Nauplius drowns while giving false fire signals; Ajax is killed by both fire (lightning-bolt) and water (shipwreck).

⁴⁵ It is indirectly the instrument of death, as Meleager's life depended on a log, the burning of which resulted in fire consuming him. In her vengeance for her dead brothers, Meleager's mother throws the log onto the fire, thereby killing him. Again, there's a parallel with Medea, who will kill her son in revenge for her brother's murder (970-971).

⁴⁶ Bishop (1965) 315.

(668-669) are doubly undermined: all these other Argonauts have suffered (or will suffer) and the last one suffered at Medea's hands. Medea was Jason's wife; it is unlikely that he will escape punishment. In fact, rather than being exempt, Jason is twice as likely to suffer: he has aroused the wrath of the lord of the ocean and of Medea. Moreover, why should the lord of the sea stop vindicating himself, even if by human standards he has claimed enough? Since humankind did not respect the limit Nature had imposed, why should Nature respect a limit humans propose? This plea for a stop to the vengeance certainly expresses the panic which Davis finds in the tone of this ode. The uncontrollable spread of far-reaching and painful consequences for humankind from the Argo's voyage, has become clear.

The First and Last Choral Odes:

While the two Argonautic odes deal most directly with the theme of Nature and its limits, the other two choral songs are also relevant.

The first ode, from line 56 to 115, is an epithalamium sung for Jason and Creusa. The only speech before this marriage hymn is Medea's prayer, 1-55, in which she partly invokes the same gods as the Chorus.⁴⁷ Interestingly, two of the gods Medea invokes in connection with her marriage, are associated with the domination of Nature. Minerva, line 2, is the one who helped to build the Argo (365-367), thereby indirectly sponsoring humankind's violation of the land/sea limit. Neptune is addressed as *dominator maris* (4), he is the dominator of the sea before humans. Already marriage, the subject of both addresses (though the perspective is different), is associated with the theme of domination.

The Chorus, after the invocations, launches into a description of Creusa who conquers (*vincit* 75) many brides with her beauty. Jason, too, excels in

⁴⁷ Medea calls upon the gods of wedlock, Lucina, Minerva, Neptune and Titan (1-5); she then moves to Hecate and spirits and places of the Underworld: Pluto, Persephone and the Furies (6-18). The Chorus invoke the gods who rule heaven and sea (56-57), then specifically Jupiter and Lucina (59), and Peace, Hymen and Hesperia (62-74).

beauty, even the gods must yield to him (82-89).⁴⁸ In the wish of the Chorus that follows these descriptions, the theme of domination is again evident:

*Sic, sic, caelicolae, precor,
vincat femina coniuges,
vir longe superet viros. (90-92)*

Further description of Creusa's beauty (93-101) precedes advice to Jason to exchange his former marriage with a barbarian for this one with Creusa. Medea is mentioned in the last two lines: *tacitis eat illa tenebris,/ si qua peregrino nubit furtiva marito* (114-115). Given that Medea is a granddaughter of the sun (light) and that use of her voice to effect magic is her most important weapon, the expectation that she pass away into the silent gloom is unrealistic.⁴⁹

The Chorus' marriage hymn offers a balance to Medea's prayer: it is only six lines longer, and as shown, shares certain elements. Yet the marriage hymn is a sign of civilized society.

The marriage hymn which constitutes the play's second speech is a cultural analogue to Medea's private incantations: the ceremony projects a concept of order, of human reciprocity with the divine by which the community acquires definition and legitimacy.⁵⁰

Marriage is also associated with civilization in the third ode, where women, from whom marital status has been removed, are compared and associated with uncontrollable powers of Nature. Given this comparison and the marriage hymn, could one infer that marriage is a form of control which civilization attempts, parallel to the control of Nature it attempts by sailing? If this is the case, then the 'control' of women only becomes clear

⁴⁸ Neither Jason nor Creusa are actually named; they are referred to indirectly only.

⁴⁹ Medea's control over Nature is achieved through her magical language. In the Nurse's speech (670-722), there are several examples: *tracta magicis cantibus/ squamifera latebris turba desertis adest* (684-685); *saeva serpens . . . carmine audito stupet* (686, 688); *adsit ad cantus meos/ lacessere ausus gemina Python numina* (699-700); *tu ... sopite primum cantibus, serpens, meis. (703-704)*. Medea, too, voices her power, *nunc meis vocata sacris . . . veni* (750).

⁵⁰ Braden (1970) 33. See also Fyfe (1983) 78.

retrospectively, once it has been removed. Medea's actions are *because* she has been abandoned, and once she has determined to act, there are no external limits imposed on her.⁵¹

The annulment of the marriage between Jason and Medea leads to disorder. By the end of the play, physically, politically and symbolically the order of human civilization is destroyed: Corinth is burning, the king and his line are annihilated, and the concept of a family has been destroyed, at least symbolically, by Medea's murder of her children.

The movement towards this disorder, and the decreasing power of civilization, is reflected in the last ode, 849-878. Until now, the odes were increasing in length (fifty-nine lines, seventy lines, ninety lines), but this one is the shortest, comprised of only twenty-nine lines. This reflects the decrease in confidence in civilization. Contrary to the Chorus' two-line wish in their first ode that Medea withdraw into the shadows, Medea has become the main focus of attention. This ode is devoted to a description of her frenzy, and emphasizes her connection with Nature by the comparison to a tigress robbed of her cubs (862-865), and her lack of limit or control (*frenare nescit iras/ . . . non amores* 866-867), which recalls 579-594. Ironically, the Chorus ask Phoebus to hurry and end the day that has been granted to Medea, yet the futility of this demand is apparent when one remembers Medea's connection with the sun (she specifically asked for the chariot 32-34) as well as her powers over Nature (which the Nurse revealed 670-739). Moreover, the third ode established that time is irrelevant in the execution of vengeance. The brief ode ends quickly and the very next words are *periere cuncta* (879), spoken by the messenger.

There has been a movement through the odes from confidence in the order of civilization (epithalamium) and belief in the expulsion of the

⁵¹ Her only hesitation comes from herself (895, 926-934; 937 ff.). It could be argued that the wildness of women is *only* in response to their abandonment, but that they have such power implies that it existed during the marriage but was latent.

barbarian element, through consideration of the technological achievements of civilization, including an observation on the irreversibility of this technological 'progress', to a panic-stricken realization of the *pretium* of those achievements, and ultimately, to a completely disorganized, frightened description of the dominating barbarian 'element'. The civilization of the marriage ceremony in the first ode has given way to the chaos of death and destruction. The transgression of the natural limit between land and sea was the start, and now the chaos, foreshadowed at 374-379 (though the Chorus in all likelihood did not mean chaos) is the end.⁵²

The odes then are concerned with natural limit, the transgression of that limit and the irreversibility and consequences of that transgression. Domination of Nature by humankind through technology is dangerous.

Medea:

Control of Nature is not exercised only by men through technological means. Medea, too, controls Nature, yet her power is through magic.⁵³ In fact, magic is Medea's method of superseding the *foedera* of the natural world.

From Medea's first appearance, her association with non-human powers is clear: she claims descent from the sun (28-29). In lines 166-167, she actually claims that she embodies natural powers: *Medea superest: hic mare et terras vides/ ferrumque et ignes et deos et fulmina*. She hints at her extraordinary abilities (40-50), stressing her past horrific deeds. She foretells that the world will tremble at her future actions: *effera ignota horrida,/*

⁵² Civilization contained its own downfall: not only did the Argonautic voyage bring back Medea, but also the instrument by which she destroys Creusa, Creon, Corinth: *est palla nobis, munus aetherium, domus/ decusque regni, pignus Aeetae datum/ a Sole generis* (570-572).

⁵³ Two other women in literature associated with magic are Helen and Dido. Helen drops drugs into the drinks of Menelaus and Telemachus to prevent natural sadness arising from conversation about Odysseus and Troy (*Odyssey*, 4. 219-226). Dido turns to magic to try to stop Aeneas from sailing away (*Vergil, Aeneid*, 4. 492-493). The pain both women wish to ease is ultimately connected to seafaring: Aeneas came by ship; the cause of Odysseus' absence was the Trojan War (see above). The resort to magic by the three women is linked in each case to the results of seafaring.

tremenda caelo pariter ac terris mala/ mens intus agitat (45-47).⁵⁴ The concept that Medea knows no limits in her actions is underscored both by Creon and the Nurse. Though Creon recognizes the danger in Medea (294-295) and instinctively knows that she has no limits, *nota fraus, nota est manus./ cui parcet illa quemve securum sinet?* (181-182), he grants her a grace period of one day before she must leave his kingdom. He fears, yet does not fathom, the extent of the danger she may wreak in the allotted time (292). The first Argonautic ode follows, with its description of the progress of human civilization.

The Nurse's address (380-396), which succeeds the first Argonautic ode, confirms the words of Medea's first speech. The impending horrible deed will be beyond her earlier actions. No control is possible, the madness (*furor* 392) is already overflowing (*exundat* 392).⁵⁵ Ironically, the Nurse beseeches the gods to prevent realization of her fears, yet Medea has already established her divine connection and has prayed to the gods herself (1-55). The lack of any superior force able to limit Medea's powers and the consequent danger she creates is obvious.

After the interaction with Creon and the Nurse, Medea herself addresses the question of limit and confirms the fear of both. The limit she sets to her hatred is the same one which she set to her love. As her love for Jason resulted in the murder of her brother (violation of a *foedus*), this limit is not at all reassuring. Having reached this decision, she uses an *adynaton* to express her ever-growing passion for revenge (401-407). This literary device, mentioned above, involves the use of a known natural phenomenon to indicate the strength or persistence of an emotion.⁵⁶ The underlying assumption is that the phenomenon used will not change, that it is a stable

⁵⁴ There is, however, no cosmic reaction to Medea's deeds, see below.

⁵⁵ Again, there is a connection to the natural world. *Exundo* is used to describe rivers, springs.

⁵⁶ Henry and Walker (1985) 14 ff.

standard. Yet in Medea's usage, the stability does not exist: if the audience do not realize Medea's powers when she utters the *adynaton*, at the latest by her speech, beginning at line 740, awareness of her control of Nature should be apparent. Her use of Nature as a standard is perverse.

In this speech, Medea displays her ability to confound the natural order. First, she calls upon the spirits of the Underworld to go the wedding of Jason and Creusa (740-743). Then she recalls her previous successes: calling rain from dry clouds (754), forcing the sea back into its own depth (755), causing the sun and stars to shine together (758), and making the stars touch the water (758-759). Her exploits did not stop in the physical realm of Nature, they extended to the abstract realm of time: she changed the order of the seasons (759-761). Through magic (*cantu meo*, 760; *vocis imperio meae* 767; *nostris cantibus* 769) Medea has achieved control of the non-human world and reduced it to chaos in the past. But the significant difference between her magical control over Nature and humans' technological control over Nature is that her magic does not last forever. She has to call on Hecate and prepare sacred rites (577-578). Though she has controlled Nature in the past, within the framework of the play, it has reverted to its normal rhythm: the sun is not still shining with the stars. In contrast, human technological dominance of Nature is permanent: despite the vengeance exacted by the sea, the art of navigation remains (368). However, within the play, though navigation is established, human order ends in total destruction. Violation of the natural limit through technology is permanent, but it has also led to the destruction of human order. Return to a pre-sailing age and a reinstatement of that age's order is impossible.

Conclusion

Violation of the covenants of Nature leads to disaster in Seneca's tragedies. Human attempts to violate the order of Nature; and to substitute a human-made one, lead to total destruction of this human-made order, as

has been seen in *Medea*. The retaliation of the forces of Nature is not confined to the area of transgression, but rather extends to include everything that is part of the human world. Medea herself, though she succeeds in her revenge, and is associated with the powers of Nature, suffers from the violation of the natural order. She is described as out of control (937-944) and the images used to convey this are from Nature: battling tides, rushing winds warring, and the ocean seething. With the increasing disorder in her, there is increasing disorder in the human civilization. Earlier, she was able to control Nature (752 ff), and yet now she is spiritually at Nature's control (940-943). Thus Medea, too, although she acts as an avenger for the transgression of the sea, also suffers.

In particular the violation of the sea, the attempt of humans to control it, leads to violation of human 'natural laws'. Sailing brought the Greeks to Colchis, violation of *foedera* among kin followed: Medea murdered her brother and eventually her children; Jason violated the marriage bond. The destruction of Corinth was the result. Phaedra, too, brought to Attica by ship from Crete, violated a *foedus* by attempting to seduce Hippolytus, though she was married to his father. Her actions lead to Hippolytus' death and Theseus is left alone and in despair (*Phae.* 1253, 1275-1276). Helen also violated the marriage bond after she had been carried off on ship by Paris, and the Trojan War, with its death and destruction of human order, followed (*Troades* 69-77). In Senecan tragedy violation of the limits inherent in the cosmos, of *foedera*, leads to violation of limits within human society and results in no order at all. Clearly then, Seneca has shown in his tragedies that violation of natural limits leads to disaster.

In the above interpretation, Seneca's portrayal of the theme of natural limits and their violation has been approached without the application of Stoic philosophy. The consequences of violations of natural limits can be fully appreciated without recourse to the philosophy that pervades Seneca's

prose work. Yet Seneca's prose writings, in which Stoic tenets are clearly found, have sometimes been used in the study of his tragedies.⁵⁷ While there are undoubtedly philosophical elements in the tragedies, to use Stoicism as a basis for understanding the tragedies is perhaps a little outdated. In Costa's preface to *Medea* he writes,

But while we certainly find Stoic sentiments in profusion throughout the tragedies - and Stoic resignation can appear a consoling and edifying reaction to the blows of fate and overpowering moral dilemmas in which they abound - it is arbitrary to force a system of teaching on the plays as a whole, and not everyone will agree that Stoic lessons are to be derived from the treatments of individual plots.⁵⁸

Stoicism is not crucial to a study of the theme of natural limits. The disastrous consequences from violations of natural limits that Seneca describes can be understood in their full significance without the application of a philosophical framework.

It is important, however, to consider that Seneca is writing in the specific genre of tragedy. In choosing any genre a writer accepts that each genre has a certain agenda. In tragedy the weakness of human power is part of that agenda and to write an effective tragedy this concept must be

⁵⁷ In the study of the natural world, for example, Rosenmeyer argues "that Seneca, a self-acknowledged champion of Stoicism in his dialogues and epistles, was pursuing a Stoic goal also in his drama, and that Stoic natural science is at the very heart of Seneca's tragic enterprise." (1989) x.

⁵⁸ Costa (1973) 6. Fitch, in his commentary to *Hercules Furens* warns against using Seneca's prose works as a key to interpreting his tragedies: "There are . . . many similarities of thought and expression between Seneca's tragedies and his prose writings. These similarities can create a temptation for the critic to use the relatively clear-cut doctrines of the *philosophica* as a ready-made key to understanding the more elusive meaning of the tragedies. This approach entails the supposition that the dramas are somehow secondary to the prose works and leads to a tendency to disregard those elements in the tragedies which do not agree with a Stoic interpretation." Fitch (1987) 40. Tarrant in his commentary on *Thyestes* warns generally about philosophical readings of the tragedies: "Philosophical readings of the tragedies, whatever their direction, have often been reductive, slighting the plays' poetic elements and taking too little account of Seneca's exuberant philosophical eclecticism." Tarrant (1985) 23. B. Marti (1945) argued that Seneca's aim in the tragedies was 'to teach Neo-Stoicism' (216) and postulated that the tragedies, read in a certain order, each explored a certain area of Stoic belief. The order ends with *Hercules Oetaeus*, which Marti reads as the apotheosis of the patron Saint of Stoicism.

respected. Seneca's *Medea* shows that humankind's attempt to control Nature by violating natural limits ultimately fails: the weakness of human power is underscored. Not all violations of natural limits in human experience lead to such drastic results. Yet Seneca has taken one aspect of the truth, that transgressions of natural limits can lead to disaster, and fully developed it for his tragedy. Although this idea is heightened for literary reasons, it is nonetheless valid in a non-literary context. This aspect of the truth applies in the context of human life in the ecosystem.

Genre is not the only factor that influences a poet's work. The use of traditional material also exercises a certain restriction. The story of *Medea* is so well established by Seneca's time, that to change the plot in a convincing manner would be difficult. Yet Seneca could, and does, dwell on aspects of the story not emphasized by Euripides, for example. Specifically he stresses the transgression of humans against the natural order. That navigation was a transgression against this order is portrayed particularly in Horace's *carm.* 1.3, as was studied in Chapter Two. In fact, Seneca alludes to Horace throughout his depiction of navigation. The material Seneca selects from Horace, his interpretation and presentation of it as well as the importance of allusion to Roman poetry is considered in the next chapter.

Chapter 4:

Seneca's Allusions to Horace

*non subripiendi causa, sed palam
mutuandi, hoc animo ut vellet
agnosci.¹*

This chapter considers the relationship between the Senecan and Horatian portrayal of natural limit, as studied in the two preceding chapters. That Seneca was alluding to Horace's *carm.* 1. 3 in the Argonautic odes of his *Medea*, can hardly be refuted, as becomes clear on a close inspection of the two texts. However, as both Spika at the end of the nineteenth century and Kapnukajas in the 1930s studied Senecan tragedies in depth and produced detailed works of *Quellenforschung*, it is not necessary to consider every allusion. Instead, I will concentrate on the theme of natural limits and their violation.²

Inevitably questions about tradition, originality and literary canons arise. With the possible exception of the last one, these topics have been discussed for centuries and are still hotly debated in the twentieth century. It is important, however, to view Seneca's use of Horace against the background of the first century A.D. and not anachronistically to apply modern beliefs or opinions to the past. In order to facilitate this, I have provided a brief overview of the literary theory of the first centuries B.C. and A.D., and then shown how gradually (partly due to the concept of literary property) attitudes and ideas have changed. Certain notions recur, however, such as strife between a poet and his precursors. In order to show the variety of approaches to the study of allusion, a short selection of modern critical theory completes this section of the chapter.

Obviously, different genres result in different treatments of material.

¹ Seneca the Elder *Suasoriae* 3.7

² Spika (1890), Kapnukajas (1930). I am indebted to these two works in particular for their extensive allusion references.

This makes Seneca's use in tragedy of Horace's lyrical material particularly interesting. Necessarily he adapts and reformulates Horace's words, yet always ensuring that the allusion can be recognized. How he plays with Horace's words and the effect he achieves forms the second part of this chapter. In particular, it becomes clear that his use of Horace often betrays more violence and boldness and emphasizes the hubris of human behaviour.

Section I: Intertextual Relations

For both ancient and modern people contact with any text, written or oral, is affected by various elements. The most obvious is perhaps the "literary tradition," the existence of earlier texts that are similar in content or form or both. For example, the Argonautic Odes may recall any number of works that discuss the voyage of the Argonauts; Apollonius of Rhodes' epic, *Argonautica*, is perhaps the most prominent. Likewise Seneca's *Medea*, may recall the genre of Tragedy, in particular Euripides' play by the same name.³ However, as a critic, it is crucial not to compare Seneca's tragedies with those written in fifth-century Athens, without making any allowances for the differences in the time periods. As Tarrant has shown in his seminal article, "Senecan Drama and its Antecedents,"⁴ the literature of the intervening half millennium has a profound effect on Senecan tragedy. Thus, Senecan tragedy must be understood in the context of the evolution of drama from the fifth century onwards, and especially in the context of Augustan drama.⁵ In fact, the importance of the latter, despite the lack of extant complete

³ This generic approach can lead to dangerous comparisons, where one author is measured by the standards of another, even though the latter may have been working centuries later.

⁴ Tarrant (1978).

⁵ The influence of New Comedy can be found, for example, in stage business (e. g. the motive of plotting further used as an exit formula). Tarrant, 246-254, esp. 249.

tragedies, has been conjectured by Tarrant.⁶

The practice of literary imitation has existed for centuries, and is linked closely to the concept of tradition, as imitation necessarily involves predecessors. As the works in question are from the first centuries B.C. and A.D., a brief overview of the literary critical theory written in those times is relevant. Horace himself broached the subject of poetic creation and imitation in his *Ars Poetica*.

The *Ars Poetica*, ostensibly written as a letter of advice to keen young poets, is known for its maxim that poets aim to delight and to teach (333), and for its rules, notably that plays should have five acts (189-190).⁷ Horace encourages adherence to tradition, but includes advice for those who wish to invent a completely new story: characters must be consistent throughout the tale (119-127). The former stipulation shows relations between pieces (oral and written) at work: what has been established by numerous previous works, an author will have difficulty changing.⁸

Horace stresses compliance with tradition. Longinus, a first-century A.D. writer, also overtly encourages imitation and emulation of preceding works. In his treatise, *On the Sublime*,⁹ Longinus determines that competition with predecessors is worthwhile, for the strife itself is good, even if the later

⁶ "No subtlety of argument can bring Augustan tragedy back from the obscurity into which it has fallen through the accidents of transmission. All that is known or that can be plausibly conjectured, however, suggests that the tragedy of the Augustans resembled that of Seneca in several important respects, and that the synthesis of fifth-century subject matter, post-Euripidean form and technique, stylistic and metrical refinement, sporadic archaism of language, and abstraction from the physical realities of the stage which is generally associated with Seneca was in fact an Augustan achievement." Tarrant (1978) 261.

⁷ However, whether it was meant to be a serious didactic piece of writing remains unclear. See Brink (1971) 196 ff.

⁸ For example, if one writes about Medea, she must be unyielding. This is not to deny that one can change a character or story; indeed the significance of the work may lie in variation from the established norm, but this is very difficult to execute well and effectively.

⁹ The exact authorship and dates are unknown; the first century A.D. seems likely. Russell (1964) xxii-xxx. Though Longinus' work might postdate Seneca, his ideas are similar, see below.

poet is worsted by the former (*On the Sublime* 13.4).¹⁰ To imitate great predecessors is not equivalent to stealing. Instead, it is rather like taking an impression from beautiful forms or figures or other works of art: ἔστιν δ'οὐ κλοπὴ τὸ πρᾶγμα, ἀλλ' ὡς ἀπο καλῶν ἡθῶν (or εἰδῶν) ἢ πλάσμάτων ἢ δημιουργημάτων ἀποτύπωσις.¹¹ Taking such an impression leads to strife and contest. Though Homer, for example, has already won his laurels, nevertheless, the successor ought to take an image from him and engage in strife.

This positive attitude towards imitation is further exemplified by Quintilian, also a first-century writer. While he is concerned with oratorical skill, his words on imitation echo Longinus': *quae bene inventa sunt, utile sequi. Atque omnis vitae ratio sic constat, ut quae probamus in aliis facere ipsi velimus* (*Institutio Oratoria*, X. II. 2). Quintilian, too, urges that imitation alone is not sufficient: one must endeavour to surpass, or at least to equal, the model (X. II. 10). One must consider carefully whom and what to imitate, as well as one's personal limitations. Similarly to Horace, Quintilian stresses the multiplicity of predecessors and encourages an eclectic manner of imitation (X.II.24).

This eclectic approach is likewise urged by Seneca, the last ancient writer considered in this brief overview. In his Epistle LXXXIV, he writes that reading and writing should be practised in conjunction, so that whatever has been collected from reading, the pen should fashion into a work (2). Using an analogy of bees, who fly about and collect pollen for producing honey and then arrange it in their cells, eventually producing honey, Seneca describes his concept of the writing process. The writer should gather information from reading, organize it and ultimately blend it with other

¹⁰ The concept of an *agon* between poets was emphasized by Harold Bloom, who also stresses that influence from predecessors does not necessarily make poets less original. Bloom (1973) 5-16, esp. 7, 11.

¹¹ *On the Sublime*, 13.4.

information, thereby creating a new product. While the creation is new, it betrays its origins (5).

From these critics two important concepts arise about the time periods of Horace and Seneca: first, that the use of imitation was not seen as a type of derivative writing, nor as a reason for classifying the writer as 'unoriginal'; and second, that the notion of authorial property, of plagiarism, was not a real issue.¹² The use of previous work does not devalue an author's work in the classical world. In fact, allusion to previous works is an integral part of Roman poetry; sometimes it was used to establish the genre of a writer's work.¹³ To consider allusion a sign of weakness or unoriginality is to do the work (and author) injustice.

In order better to understand the importance of allusion in classical literature, it is useful to consider some of the differences between the use and production of literature in Rome and in modern times. Perhaps the crucial difference between the two is the emphasis on the oral component of literature in the classical world. One of the contributing factors to this oral tradition was the emphasis on memory training in classical education. In fact, Plutarch claims it as the main goal of education in the Roman empire.¹⁴ Learning pieces of earlier literature by heart had two results: familiarity with previous works and familiarity with various metres. Thus allusions could be verbal or metrical or both. Such memorization stressed the oral component of literature.¹⁵

¹² Admittedly, a collection of Vergil's *furta* from Homer was compiled, but in view of the attitude towards imitation displayed by the above writers, this seems rather exceptional. [Vergil's response was: *facilius esse Herculi clavam quam Homero versum subripere* (*Vita Donati*, 46).] The concept of literary property that had been born by the eighteenth century, was probably a crucial factor in changing this attitude.

¹³ "In particular he [poet] imitates familiar passages of illustrious predecessors: thus Horace borrows from Alcaeus to proclaim that he is writing lyric, and Persius borrows from Horace to proclaim that he is writing satire. Such allusions are . . . acknowledgements of a shared culture; associations and contrasts are suggested to the reader's mind without waste of words." Nisbet and Hubbard (1970) 1.

¹⁴ *De Liberis Educandis* 9E. Other sources that treat the art of memory and its importance include: Cicero *De Oratore* and Quintilian *Institutio Oratoria* XI. 17-22.

¹⁵ The importance of oral diffusion of literature is discussed by Harris (1989) 29.

Furthermore, memorization of precursors' works helped to establish a common body of known literature, which in turn led to successful practice of allusion.¹⁶ Roman book production was limited, as copying texts had to be done by hand. The absence of mechanical reproduction controlled distribution.¹⁷ Primarily, such distribution as there was took the form of gifts or loans among friends.¹⁸ In part the modern commercialization and widespread distribution of multicultural literature has made the creation and acceptance of a literary canon practically impossible. Attitudes towards 'literary property' began to change, predominantly from the seventeenth century onwards. With the gradual shift from a writer's dependence on a patron to his or her dependence on the public and the simultaneous birth of writing as a *trade*, the concept of plagiarism became dominant.¹⁹ The oral quality of literature, so vital to Roman literature, was diminished:

The Writer, a new professional, was invented by a machine. Suddenly his capital and identity were at stake. An author - reader relationship that was financial and anonymous replaced something orally and visually cozy - hearing a poem, going to a play, having something highly recognizable passed around - and printing enormously increased the opportunities for misrepresentation.²⁰

Not surprisingly, mass-distribution of written literature and the need for authors to succeed in order to survive, led to a jealous guarding of literary

¹⁶ Of course, some authors in order to appear learned and erudite deliberately seek out less well-known texts for their allusions. But the point is that those educated would share at least a basic common knowledge. Today such a common basis cannot be assumed.

¹⁷ Book dealers (usually small shop owners, that carried luxury items) made the books they sold, probably under order from the buyer. Starr (1987) 214-215.

¹⁸ Starr (1987) 220.

¹⁹ See Mallon (1989) 3-4. The relationship between poets and their rich friends in the Roman Empire may be closer to friendship than to that of a patron/client. White (1993) 3-34, esp. 32-34. I am using the concept of patronage loosely in order to distinguish between a poet whose material welfare does not correspond to his or her literary output, but depends on more general gifts, and one who is paid per work. White (1993) 17.

²⁰ Mallon (1989) 4. There are earlier examples of 'professional' writers, prior to the invention of the printing press. With the invention of the printing press, however, the author-reader relationship becomes more common.

creation and allegations of plagiarism. The birth of copyright laws ensued.²¹

Yet questions of originality and the position of an author to his predecessors did not disappear once the concept of literary property had been firmly established. One of the seminal articles in literary criticism of this century is Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent," first published in 1919.²² As the title conveys, the essay centres on the relationship between a writer and the tradition in which he or she is writing. Though Eliot's notion of an ideal order, which is formed from the existing literature and modified by additions, is rather polemical (how is this order determined?) his attitude towards the use of earlier works is positive. He stresses that individuality does not depend on isolation from the past. On the contrary, "the most individual parts of his [a poet's] work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously."²³ Throughout the essay, Eliot dwells on the importance of the past, and the need to cultivate a sense of the pastness and the presence of the past. The cultivation of this sense is a life-long process. In developing it, the poet must constantly surrender his or her personality. In the attainment of tradition there is a great amount of labour involved, it is not simply something which one inherits, or which influences the poet. The relationship between the poet and the tradition is central to Eliot's essay.

This relationship has also been studied from a psychological perspective. Harold Bloom, in his book, *The Anxiety of Influence*, concentrates on the anxiety that awareness of precursors' works arouses in poets. He views the relationship between poet and precursor in terms of family and the competition between father and son. Borrowing the term *clinamen* from Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* where it denotes the swerve of the

²¹ The first, the Statute of Anne, which gave authors a monopoly of publication for fourteen to twenty-eight years, was passed in 1709 in England.

²² Eliot (1975) 37-44.

²³ *Ibid.* 38.

atoms, Bloom depicts the poetic process: "A poet swerves away from his precursor, by so reading his precursor's poem as to execute a *clinamen* in relation to it."²⁴ As with the ancient critics, there is a strong emphasis on struggle, and originality lies in the treatment and the deviation (though this word has negative connotations) from earlier material.

While Eliot and Bloom consider the relationship between the poet and the past, other critics have focussed on the art of allusion. Pasquali, in 1942, published an essay entitled "Arte Allusiva."²⁵ He tried to move away from the *Quellenforschung* that had dominated literary studies, towards a recognition of the dynamic function of allusion. According to Conte, most of the allusions Pasquali uses are emulative by nature, that is the poets were trying to compete with and outdo their predecessors. This evokes the type of writing that could be associated with the Alexandrians in that it is self-conscious and it privileges a moment of intentionality in the poet. The creation of new literature requires constant references to earlier literature, with the poets who make the most erudite references receiving the most praise. Necessarily this style eventually ends in self-defeat of the poets, as the allusions become recognizable by ever fewer people.

Moving away from concentration on an author's 'intent,' Conte examines the relations between texts rather than an author's imitation. In *The Rhetoric of Imitation*, Conte postulates the existence of a common literary codification.²⁶ This would mean that an author is not necessarily and only imitating one other author, but instead both could be following a

²⁴ Bloom (1973) 14.

²⁵ Pasquali (1951). I have taken my material from Conte's summary of the article. Conte (1986) 24-29.

²⁶ One text may resemble another not because it derives directly from it nor because the poet deliberately seeks to emulate but because both poets have recourse to a common literary codification. Conte (1986) 28.

certain code.²⁷ This code is signalled through the "poetic discourse." Using Lausberg's terminology, Conte defines this poetic discourse as a *Wiedergebrauchsrede* (reused language).²⁸ Elements that distinguish this *Wiedergebrauchsrede* from the *Verbrauchsrede* (language that is used up) also help in the memorability of it: for example, metrical regularity, parallels or unusual word order.²⁹

Throughout Conte's book, the importance of other texts to any one text is emphasized. In fact, no text can be read in isolation, each text can only be read in connection with or in opposition to other texts. Truly Conte is concerned with "intertextuality."

The term "intertextuality," though coined by Kristeva in the 1960s as a term for describing relations between *textual systems* and not at all associated with examinations of *influence*, *imitation* or *allusion*, has since been broadened to include such studies.³⁰ In the survey of first-century writers, imitation was established as an acceptable, even desired practice. As Longinus emphasized, imitation included (or should include) strife: the later text should actively and consciously engage with the former text.

Porter's term 'target' text for the former text exemplifies this deliberate,

²⁷ This is perhaps better explained by example: Homer is often considered Vergil's 'Exemplary Model', but in a sense he is also a 'Code model'. He is the 'representative of the epic institution that guarantees the ideological and literary functions of poetry itself.' Conte (1986)31.

²⁸ *Wiedergebrauchsrede* does not have communication as its sole and primary purpose. It is preserved in the poetic memory. This process of preservation "results in the shaping of a literary tradition. . . . Literary tradition does not exist in a vacuum but must work within the area of poetic discourse and must respect poetic norms. Only in this dimension can the Verbum be totally absorbed and preserved and thus have the potential for regeneration and incarnation." Conte (1986) 41-42. In this sense the poetic word distinguishes itself from the words of the *Verbrauchsrede*, which are not a part of the poetic tradition and have isolated existences. The poetic word is more a meeting place of many meanings, than a direct reference to one thing.

²⁹ Conte (1986) 40-41. It appears that the same elements which alert the audience or reader to poetic discourse can double as code markers.

³⁰ In an introduction to Kristeva's essays, the definition for intertextuality reads: "It [intertextuality] has nothing to do with matters of influence by one writer upon another, or with the sources of a literary work; it does, on the other hand, involve the components of a *textual system* such as the novel, for instance. It is defined in *La Révolution du langage poétique* as the transposition of one or more systems of signs into another, accompanied by a new articulation of the enunciative and denotative position." Kristeva (1980) 15.

voluntary engagement.³¹ Rather than being a 'source' from which the latter text 'derives' (itself a word with negative connotations), the former text is *chosen*, is *targeted*. The relationship between the texts is instigated by the later authors: their work is not merely a receptacle into which the words or ideas of their predecessors flow. Imitation requires active participation, it is not merely a matter of influence. Influence (from the Latin *influerē*: to flow into) implies passivity on the part of the receiving text or author. A writer is not necessarily conscious of influences, and there is no emphasis on emulation or rivalry. Contrary to the passivity inherent in the term influence, allusion (like imitation) requires activity.³² Stemming from the Latin *alludere*, allusion contains an element of playfulness or teasing. Allusion must be recognized and appreciated for it to be effective. It does not have to be confined to one previous text: an allusion may refer to several different previous works.³³ Nor is there only one method of allusion: allusions can be verbal, stylistic or conceptual.

Section II: Allusion in Seneca's Tragedies

That Seneca's tragedies are pervaded with allusions is apparent from several commentaries and specific studies.³⁴ The works of the Augustan poets Vergil, Ovid and Horace, each provided 'target' texts for Seneca's tragedies. Aeneas' *katabasis* (Vergil, *Aeneid* VI), for example, provided material which Seneca used for Hercules' *katabasis* in *Hercules Furens*.³⁵ Allusions to Ovid are found in particular in the portrayal of passionate female

³¹ Porter (1993) 9.

³² *Alludere* (*ad ludere*) means to play or frolic beside or around, to jest. OLD, *s. v. alludo* 1,3.

³³ The term *centripetal allusion* exemplifies the idea of an allusion referring to many different texts. Porter (1993) 16.

³⁴ See for example: Costa's *Medea* (1973); Fitch's *Hercules Furens* (1987) and Tarrant's *Thyestes* (1985).

³⁵ See Fitch (1987) 317 ff. esp. lines 764-768.

characters³⁶: in her speech preceding the murder of her children, Medea echoes Ovid's Procne, especially in her hesitation (*Met.* vi. 619 ff).³⁷ As Tarrant has observed in his commentary on *Thyestes*, Horatian colouring is often found in Seneca's depictions of the simple life, or the denunciation of luxury.³⁸ Pursuit of luxury was seen in my chapter on Horace's odes to be one cause for violation of the natural limit,³⁹ thus it is not surprising that sections concerned with such violations are full of Horatian allusions.

In their turn, the Augustan poets also allude to previous works.⁴⁰ Horace's odes contain allusions especially to Alcæus, both verbal (e. g. the first two stanzas of 1.9) and metrical. Like their predecessors, the Augustan poets are participating in a literary tradition: it is the repeated and varied handling of material that has already been portrayed by others which contributes to the formation of literary tradition. Clearly then, the relationship between an earlier and later poet (here Horace and Seneca) cannot be reduced to one of 'original' and 'copy.'

The Question of Genre

Genre affects the treatment of a subject: Seneca's use in tragedy of material which Horace depicted in lyric necessarily creates a contrast. While reading the Argonautic odes in Seneca's *Medea*, the reader who is aware of the allusions is forced to remember Horace's *carm.* 1.3 and to compare the two renditions of the same material. That similar subject matter is treated testifies to its appeal for the authors and its relevance to the

³⁶ See Jakobi (1988). His title, *Der Einfluß Ovids auf den Tragiker Seneca* (my emphasis), is an example of perception of passivity on the part of the later author.

³⁷ The description of her hesitation (940-944) recalls Ovid's description of Althaea (*Met.* viii. 470-473). For further examples, see Costa's *Medea* (1973). See also Fitch's comments on Juno's opening monologue in *Hercules Furens*. Fitch (1987) 116.

³⁸ Tarrant (1985) 18.

³⁹ E. g. ode 2.18.

⁴⁰ E. g. a glance through Nisbet and Hubbard's Commentaries verifies Horace's allusive practices.

respective audiences.⁴¹

Greek lyric poetry can be choral and solo. Both types are sung, originally to a lyre, but they differ in their metre, content and purpose.⁴² While choral lyric includes rhythmic movement, solo lyric is only a song. The latter is traditionally a light genre, and the style is more personal and intimate than that of choral lyrics. Monodies (or solo lyrics) were usually performed among friends or at a symposium, not at a public gathering.⁴³ In contrast, choral odes are often associated with public rituals, for example weddings, funerals or worship. Characteristics of the choral ode include: the narration of a myth, though this could be significantly shortened; the statement of maxims; and the inclusion of personal references.⁴⁴ Such references differ however, from those of solo lyric: they are relevant to the function at which the odes are sung and do not have the intimate quality found in monodies. Lastly, and perhaps most clearly, there are metrical differences between solo and choral lyric. Choral metres are more elaborate and their stanzas are usually longer. It is harder to group choral metres because though they share certain common characteristics, they do alter from ode to ode, whereas metres of solo lyric can be more easily categorized.⁴⁵

While Horace uses metres associated with solo lyric⁴⁶ and usually takes his subject matter from this type, he also treats topics which are more characteristic of choral lyric. In other words he combines a personal metre with a communal subject. An example of this is ode 1.12, where the first lines

⁴¹ Material becomes traditional through its continued use: such use depends on its continued appeal.

⁴² These distinctions are based on comparison between Sappho, Alcaeus and Anacreon (solo lyric) and Alcman, Pindar and Bacchylides (choral lyric). Bowra (1961) 3-7. They are not absolute, but act as a general guide.

⁴³ Barnstone (1967) 5.

⁴⁴ Bowra (1961) 12.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 6.

⁴⁶ Alcaic metre is most common. Page (1964) xvii. Horace takes pride in adapting the metre to Latin. 3.30.13-16.

overtly allude to Pindar, who wrote choral lyric. The ode is a laud to Augustus, full of mythical references (e. g. 6-12) and appropriate for a public gathering. It does not contain any particularly intimate or personal thoughts of the poet. While ode 1.3 contains references to the children of immortals, its focus, the violation of limits, is rather more serious. Horace's treatment of this rather solemn topic, may be one reason that the ode has not been readily praised.

Tragedy, on the other hand, depicts more serious themes, and characters are often caught in seemingly insoluble conflicts, which cause them to act in extreme ways.⁴⁷ Inherent in tragedy is the notion of excess and the lack of adherence to limits. According to Aristotle, tragedy was to have a certain magnitude and through the arousal of pity and horror, to accomplish a catharsis of these emotions (*Poetics* 6). Solo lyric poetry fulfils no such function. Yet similar to the lyric genre, tragedy changed over the centuries, and to measure Seneca against Attic tragedy of the fifth century B.C. is unjust. Although tragedy and lyric are quite different genres, there is no doubt that Horace's ode 1.3 inspired Seneca's Argonautic odes.⁴⁸ Seneca's selected use of Horace's material, his interpretation and rendition of that material forms the body of the following section. Seneca appears to take Horace's ode 1.3 and to emphasize the violation of the sea boundary, dwelling on the violence of the act and the chaos and disorder that result from it.

Horatian Allusions in the Argonautic Odes

Before examining the content of these works, a brief consideration of their situation is worthwhile. Horace's ode 1.3 begins with a prayer that his friend Vergil, to whom he is very attached (*animae dimidium meae* [8]) may have a safe voyage. The tone is personal, and the occasion specific: clear

⁴⁷ E. g. Antigone, caught between obedience to human political laws or religious duty, chooses the latter and dies for it (Sophocles, *Antigone*).

⁴⁸ Kapnukajans (1930) 108.

parameters have been set. In contrast, the circumstances surrounding Seneca's Argonautic odes are not so definite. To begin with, the purpose of the odes is not immediately apparent, though it becomes clear. They provide background.⁴⁹ They are placed after very emotional scenes between Creon and Medea and Jason and Medea respectively, yet do not comment directly on the events. Moreover, the identity of the Chorus is obscure; in fact, the Chorus' age, sex and social position are never revealed. This contrasts with the explicit information given in Horace's ode. Despite these initial differences in presentation, allusion to Horace is apparent.

Immediately the allusion to Horace's ode 1.3 in the first two lines of the first Argonautic ode is obvious: *Audax nimium qui freta primus/ rate tam fragili perfida rupit* (301-302). Seneca has pinpointed the essence of ode 1.3, the boldness of the first sailor, and has emphasized its excess. Horace introduces his ode with a prayer for a specific occasion, then discusses the first sailor and finally expands to include other types of violation of natural limit. Only at line twenty-five does he use the word *audax*, and then it is applied to humankind generally, for the act of sailing. At this point the reference is not specific to the first human sailor; the boats (plural) are crossing the depths (present) and it follows that humankind is bold to try all things (25). In contrast Seneca emphatically places *audax* as the first word. It is followed by *nimum*: not only was the sailor rash, but he was *too* rash. Excess is dwelt on. The stark reality of this boldness is further exemplified through absence of any description of the sailor at this point: compare Horace's *illi robur et aes triplex/ circa pectus erat* (9-10).⁵⁰ The final word of 301, *primus*, also alludes to Horace, who places it as the first word in line twelve (*commisit pelago ratem/ primus*). As with *audax*, Seneca has singled out a crucial word, and given it a prominent position, before the description

⁴⁹ See Regenbogen (1928) 440-441.

⁵⁰ These words allude to the traditional description of 'metal' hearts, a sign of toughness. Nisbet and Hubbard (1970) 48.

of the sailing.

The second line of Seneca's ode alludes strongly to ode 1.3 as well. Once more, as in ode 1.3, the ship is fragile (*rate fragili*), though this time more violence is attached to the act of sailing. The sailor *breaks* the *faithless* sea: *rupit* is the root of *perrupit*, the verb Horace uses at line 36 to describe Hercules' entrance into Hades.⁵¹ Despite the violence inherent in these lines the concept of trust which Horace conveys in lines 5 (*navis, quae tibi creditum/ debes Vergilium*) and 11 (*commisit pelago ratem*), is echoed by Seneca: *animam levibus credidit auris* (304). The replacement of *ratem* with *animam* by Seneca conveys blatantly what Horace says indirectly: life is being entrusted to forces not controlled by humans. Again, Seneca has captured the essence of Horace's line and expressed it in a bold manner. While these opening lines clearly allude to Horace's ode 1.3, Seneca has also added his own emphasis. Right from the beginning, he dwells on the excess of humankind's action, there is no gentle introduction to soften the reality. Furthermore, there is a violence and abruptness in his presentation that is not found in the ode.

Familiarity with Horace's ode leads to realization that human violation is not confined to the area of sailing: the violation of the land/sea limit is only the first transgression that Horace discusses. He eventually covers violations of all the realms, at least symbolically, and stresses the present, continued assaults on natural limits by humankind. This familiarity with the Horatian ode combines with the meaning of Seneca's lines and a new 'poetic whole'⁵² is created. In other words two images are created in the reader's mind: the surface meaning which Seneca's words convey, and the meaning arising from the target text, lines nine to twelve in ode 1.3.

⁵¹ This verb is often used in connection with violation of natural limits in Senecan tragedy, see Chapter Three.

⁵² This is what Conte calls an integrative allusion: "[two voices] tend to harmonize and so create a *single* 'word' enriched by an internal resonance. Denotation becomes loaded with an oriented connotation." Conte (1986) 66-67.

At present Seneca logically confines humankind's audacity to violation of the sea limit, as this is crucial to his tragedy. His next line, *terrasque suas post terga videns* (303) does not allude to Horace, and conveys the real insecurity of the first sailor. Already Seneca hints at the anxiety and disunity resultant from sailing (lines 362, 371-372 further support these feelings). As if to amplify the danger, Seneca repeats the deed of the first sailor, ending with the line *nimum gracili limite ducto* (305-308). This reiteration, not necessary for the audience's understanding, stresses the risk of the first sailor. A few lines earlier, the sailor was too bold; now the boundary between life and death that he drew is too slim: Seneca dwells on extremes. Seneca's words also imply that the boldness of the sailor was hubristic. After this, Seneca dwells on the ignorance of humankind at the time of the first sailor. No one (*nondum quisquam*) understood how to use the stars as a guide to the weather, no one had named the winds yet (309-317). This added information further stresses the hubris of humankind's action. While both poets convey the audacity of that sailor, they concentrate on different aspects: Horace on his fearlessness, Seneca on his hubristic boldness.

In these lines of Seneca there is a further allusion to Horace. In ode 3.1 Horace links Boötes with the Kids in reference to the weather. The context surrounding Horace's words is that those who desire only what they need will not be troubled by the savage onslaught of the setting Arcturus (Boötes) or of rising Haedus (3.1.25-28).⁵³ Violation of the natural limit by sailing was not only a bold action, as the sailor could not read the stars; it also placed him in an unnecessarily vulnerable position.

At this point, Seneca names Tiphys and speaks about the Argonautic voyage. The brief description of the art of sailing emphasizes the work of the

⁵³ The lines are: *desiderantem quod satis est neque/ tumultuosum sollicitat mare/ nec saevus Arcturi cadentis/ impetus aut orientis Haedi.*

sailors: now they must spread the sail, now catch the crosswinds, now put the yards mid-mast, now bind the yards in the highest place. Their work centers on attempts to control the winds. None of this found in Horace's ode. In fact, the controller of the winds is included in the appeal to the gods with which Horace opens his ode: *ventorumque regat pater/ obstrictis aliis praeter Iapyga* (3-4). At lines 14-16, Horace claims that there is no greater lord of the Adriatic than the wind, who decides whether to rouse or calm the sea. The attempt by humans to control the wind, and thereby take over the position of a god, is overtly hubristic behaviour. Yet as if to ensure that the arrogance of the attempt is obvious, Seneca places the description in a frame of hubris: *Ausus Tiphys* at the start (318) and *avidus nimium navita* (326) near the end. Again, Seneca's emphasis on the hubristic *audacia* of the human attempt to sail is obvious.

The description of bustling activity contrasts strongly with Seneca's description of the idyllic past, which comes immediately next and begins with *candida*. While the motive of the wealthy poor man who stays on his native land could be seen to allude to Horace⁵⁴, it is also found in many other writers, and hence is probably more of a commonplace than a Horatian allusion. Yet Seneca's next lines, summarizing the Argo's deed, allude more distinctly to Horace:

*bene dissaepi foedera mundi
traxit in unum Thessala pinus
iussitque pati verbera pontum,
partemque metus fieri nostri
mare sepositum.*

Horace's lines are:

*nequiquam deus abscidit
prudens Oceano dissociabili
terras, si tamen impiae
non tangenda rates transiliunt vada.* (21-24)

⁵⁴ Epode ii. 1-3: *beatus ille qui procul negotiis,/ ut prisca gens mortalium,/ paterna rura bobus exercet suis* . . . For other references see Costa (1973) 102.

Notably Seneca uses the idea that the world was originally well-separated (335), but he eliminates any divine agent from the process. Horace has a *prudens deus* involved, and in the *Metamorphoses*, to which there is also an allusion,⁵⁵ the world's creator is the power who is separating all things (*fabricator mundi* i. 57). Seneca simply states that the world was well separated. This absence of a divine power perhaps exemplifies the interpretation that the order was natural, not divinely-ordained.⁵⁶ Seneca's description of the breaking of the covenants is violent (*traxit, iussit, verbera*), while Horace only says that the impious ships are crossing the depths which were not to be touched. Though Seneca here alludes to Horace, he radically changes the treatment of the material and concentrates on the violence of the transgression (336-337) and its result (338-339).

Apart from the primary result, which is that the sea has become part of human fear, the consequences of the Argo's violation of the land/sea limit are taken from the mythical realm. The allusion to Horace in the following descriptions seems to lie in the nature of the dangers. Horace had mentioned *monstra natantia* and *infames scopulos* and *turbidum mare*; and simply asked, what form of death would someone fear who had faced these horrors with dry eyes? (17-20). Seneca fully develops the details of the mythical sea monsters (Scylla 350-354 and the Sirens 355-360) and the precarious rocks of the Symplegades (342-346), again from mythology. In contrast to Horace, his format is: *quid cum . . . what about when . . . ?* (350, 355). This has the effect of drawing the audience in, rather as if Seneca were telling a tale and inviting everyone to recall all the stories associated with the familiar monsters. Real violation of a natural limit and the real

⁵⁵ While the concentration is on Horace, the allusion to Ovid should not be missed: *Vix ita limitibus dissaepserat omnia certis*. *Met.* i. 69.

⁵⁶ Reference to a *prudens deus* implies that a superior power exists, that cares about the world and human affairs. There does not appear to be such a figure in Senecan Tragedy. In *Phae*. *Natura* is considered such a power, but the whole point is that this divinity does not care about the human world: *Hominum nimium securus abes, / non sollicitus prodesse bonis, / nocuisse malis?* (975-977).

consequences of that transgression are merged with the description of fantastical figures. Seneca takes care to describe the effects that the Symplegades have on the sailors: Tiphys pales and loses control, Orpheus' lyre lies still and Argo herself loses her voice.

Yet the first effect, *palluit audax Tiphys et omnes/ labente manu misit habenas* (346-347), is particularly relevant as it recalls Horace's description of Europa: *palluit audax* in ode 3.27. The ode is a *propemptikon*: Galatea is departing on a voyage.⁵⁷ The ode begins with a mixture of good and bad omens, and includes a wish to be remembered by the leaving woman. In the seventh stanza, Horace introduces the myth of Europa, beginning the line with *sic*, thus suggesting a connection between reality and myth. Europa is described as having trusted her form to the bull and as travelling over the sea with him (25-27). At this adventure the bold maiden paled (*palluit audax* fills line 28). Tiphys and Europa both pale; both entrust themselves to a power beyond their control.⁵⁸ Yet Europa regrets her actions (33-38), whereas Tiphys does not. Perhaps there is a hint that it would have been better for him had he felt some remorse; after all, in the list of the Argonauts' fates (617 ff.), his death is the first.

Having finished these descriptions, Seneca poses another question: *Quod fuit huius pretium cursus?* The answer, *aurea pellis/ maiusque mari Medea malum* (360-362) explicitly ties the violation of the natural limit of the sea to the presence of Medea. Seneca's concentration on the transgression of one limit, the immediate result of which is Medea, contrasts with Horace's expansion to include several other violations. By this technique Seneca accentuates the transgression and its results. In *Medea*, this violation is seen as the seed of further violation of 'natural' limits; these include familial as well

⁵⁷ Horace only wrote two *propemptika*, ode 1.3 and this one, (though he did write a *propemptikon* in reverse, wishing someone a bad journey, epode 10). Both are alluded to in the first Argonautic ode.

⁵⁸ Strictly, it is the first bold sailor who entrusts his soul to the wind (304), but as Tiphys is engaged in the same act, the description can be extended to him.

as cosmic transgressions. While the audience knows that Medea came on the Argo, and that she will destroy her family and Corinth, this depiction of the Argonautic voyage within the context of transgression of natural limits, rather than as a heroic success, seems innovative.⁵⁹

Seneca dwells on certain aspects of the Horatian ode: he chooses to emphasize the hubristic *audacia* of the first sailor, the violence of the transgression, and the results of this transgression. He achieves these aims through his selection and treatment of Horatian passages.

The Second Argonautic Ode

In the second Argonautic ode there are also allusions to Horace's odes. Again Seneca chooses to capture the hubris of human behaviour and the consequences of this behaviour. In two instances (595-596; 668-669) he presents the Horatian allusion in such a way that the arrogance of human actions cannot be missed. As in the first ode, Seneca dwells on excess and violence.

The comparison between the passion of a woman robbed of her husband and the forces of Nature which begins the second Argonautic ode, immediately establishes that such a woman is uncontrollable. The first three stanzas all begin with negative words : *nulla* (579), *non* (583), *non* (587). As in the first Argonautic ode, violence and excess are focal points. Passion cannot even be measured using the most violent elements in Nature as a standard. Not only does such passion defy restraint, it even wants to advance against the sword. In Horace's ode 1.16, the power of anger is also

⁵⁹ For example Pindar's Pythian Ode IV (sixth century B.C.), one of the chief surviving sources, was composed for a chariot race winner, and places the Argonautic voyage between the story of the victor's glorious ancestor Battus and a request for reconciliation and forgiveness from the King for the exiled man who requested the ode. The Argonautic episode dwells more on the connection between the victor and one of the Argonauts, and the interaction between Pelias, Jason and Medea than on the actual sea voyage. Apollonius (third century B. C.) says at the start, he will tell the fame of men of long ago who drove the well-benched Argo forward in search of the fleece. There is no connection between navigation and violation of a natural limit. Ovid (*Met.* vi. 721) calls the Argo the first ship, but attaches no concept of transgression to its voyage.

exemplified: even Jupiter cannot repress anger once aroused in the breast. This description of anger, however, is not the opening of the ode, it forms the third stanza. Seneca starts straightaway with the excess, as he does with *audax nimium* (301), omitting any introduction. In addition to recognizing the allusion in content to Horace's ode, Seneca's audience would also hear the metrical allusion to Horace. The Sapphic stanza, which was the metre for almost a quarter of Horace's odes, would sound distinctly Horatian.⁶⁰

After the description of the passionate woman, the Chorus ask that the tamer of the sea be safe, a rather striking request, since the description of a passionate woman certainly alludes to Medea, and Jason has slighted her. Furthermore, an audience familiar with Horace is sure to recognize the hubristic overtones of the request: *parcite, o divi, veniam precamur,/ vivat ut tutus mare qui subegit* (595-596). In Horace's ode 1.2, he writes: *Tandem venias, precamur,/ nube candentes umeros amictus,/ augur Apollo* (30-32). The speaker here is beseeching Apollo, a god associated with civilization,⁶¹ to come and help the empire which has been raging in civil war (21-24). By changing one letter (s to m) Seneca has left the words clear enough for the allusion to be recognized, yet has significantly altered their meaning. Instead of requesting Apollo's presence and civilizing influence, the Chorus ask that the one who tamed the sea may live (596). Jason is here identified by his 'civilization' of the sea. This description implies that Jason, like Apollo, has the ability to civilize: Jason can achieve what Apollo achieves.⁶² The hubristic concept that humans can take over the powers of the gods was already found in the first Argonautic ode, where the "too-keen" sailor usurped

⁶⁰ Twenty-five of the one hundred and three odes, as well as the *Carmen Saeculare*, have this metre. Lines 579-606 of *Medea* is in fact the only place in his tragedies where Seneca uses the standard form of the Sapphic stanza. Costa (1973) 121.

⁶¹ He is the god of poetry, music and medicine.

⁶² Jason and Apollo have already been compared in beauty, to the detriment of Apollo: *si forma velit aspici,/ cedent Aesonio duci/ proles fulminis improbi/ aptat qui iuga tigribus,/ nec non, qui tripodas movet,/ frater virginis asperae* (82-87). Again, these words reveal a hubristic attitude.

the controller of the winds.

The request of the Chorus is followed by the revelation that the lord of the deep is enraged (*furit* 597). Anger felt by the victim in violations of natural limits was not found in the Horatian odes studied. Nor was the sea directly associated with a god; though a god was credited with the separation of the lands originally (1.3.21). Moreover, the sea did not claim punishment, as it does in Seneca at line 616.

In the earlier Argonautic ode, Seneca concentrated only on the violation of the land/sea boundary. In this ode, Seneca makes the general statement, *rumpe nec sacro violente sancta/ foedera mundi* (605-606).⁶³ At this point, Seneca bursts out of the four-line stanzas, and while keeping the same metrical units more than doubles the length of the stanzas.⁶⁴ This could be seen to reflect the power that has been unleashed by humankind's attempt to control the sea. The punishments that the challenged sea exacted, mostly in the form of deaths, could not be contained in four-line stanzas. It is as if the effects of the Argonautic voyage have no limits: they cannot be made to conform to four-line stanzas, nor can they be controlled in the real world. Such excess is well suited to tragedy.

The revenge of the sea manifests itself in the various fates of the Argonauts, which Seneca lists. The connection between the first and second Argonautic odes is here evident. The two figures viewed as successful in their attempts at control were Tiphys and Orpheus; Tiphys set down laws for the winds (318-320) and Orpheus almost forced the Sirens to follow him (355-360). While Orpheus did not quite succeed, he at least ensured that the Argo

⁶³ The covenants of the world are here described as holy, there is a divine quality to them, which was absent in the first ode, but which can be found in Horace (21). In fact the gods are addressed twice in this ode: at the start and the end of the section that centers around Jason and the Argonauts. Yet the appeals to the gods in this ode seem to arise more out of fear than out of piety: the first appeal follows the drastic description of the power of scorned wives, the second follows the explicit description of Pelias' death.

⁶⁴ 579-606 are composed of seven Sapphic stanzas (three hendecasyllables and one adonius); 607-669 of seven stanzas (eight hendecasyllables, followed by one adonius).

continued on her voyage. Yet in the second Argonautic ode, Tiphys and Orpheus are the first to die. Orpheus had been able to still the winds: Seneca reminds us of this again in line 627. This reminder recalls the last reference to wind, at the start of the ode, where the passion of a scorned woman was greater than the force of wind.

The description of Orpheus exemplifies Seneca's use of Horatian material. Seneca devotes nine lines to Orpheus: the first four dwell on his ability to charm Nature. Two Horatian passages are alluded to, 1.12.7 ff. and 3.11.13 ff. As both these Horatian odes are in Sapphic stanzas, the allusion is not only verbal, but also metrical. Odes 1.12 and 3.11 both describe the power of the lyre: 1.12 is a song in praise of Augustus which starts with a question: which man, hero or god shall be the topic of the lyre's song? To establish the lyre's influence, Horace tells the story of Orpheus who made the trees follow his music (7-8,12) and halted the rivers and winds (9-11). Orpheus exercised control over Nature with his lyre. Similarly in 3.11.13-16 the power of the lyre is emphasized. In this wedding hymn, Horace appeals to the lyre to reach the bride's unwilling ears (*obstinatas aures*). Then he relates the ability of the lyre to control Nature: *tu potes tigres comitesque silvas/ ducere et rivos celeres morari* (13-14). Implied is that the lyre should be able to reach the maiden, as it could control Nature. Horace next alludes to Orpheus' successful trip to Hades, where he overcame Cerberus (15-17) and even made Ixion and Tityos smile, although they were suffering eternal punishments. The allusion to Orpheus stops here. In *carm.* 1.12, too, after Orpheus' success with the lyre has been described, Horace returns to his quest for a topic. In Seneca's second Argonautic ode, however, the five lines alluding to Orpheus' powers (625-629) are followed by graphic information about Orpheus' death.⁶⁵ Though Orpheus controlled Nature, he ultimately did not escape death. Furthermore, while in 3.11 Horace wrote that the lyre

⁶⁵ He here echoes Ovid's *Met.* xi. 35 ff.

can lead tigers and trees (present tense), Seneca uses the perfect tense (*restitit, silvere, adfuit*). Orpheus' success is described in the past and is followed by his destruction. While Seneca has recalled both the Horatian odes to the audience's mind, ultimately he has stressed that Orpheus had to submit to the natural limit of death: despite his ability to charm Nature, in the end he was powerless. As with the violation of the natural limit by navigation, Seneca is interested in the consequences of the transgressions, and the fates of those who exceed their assigned place. Violation of natural limit in Seneca does not remain an imbalance in Nature and an injustice to the invaded area, but rather it is avenged with violence (cf. ode 1.3 where there are no actual unpleasant consequences caused by sailing listed for the humans; or 3.1 where the fish merely notice the infringement of their territory).⁶⁶ This absence of violent consequences from Horace's depictions of transgression of natural limit, may be attributable to the lighter vein of solo lyric poetry.

Transgressions of natural limit in *Medea* end harmfully for humans. The hubris of humankind's actions which Seneca has conveyed throughout the Argonautic odes, is again found in the final lines of the second one. As if to recall their earlier appeal to the gods (595-596), the Chorus once more address the deities: *iam satis, divi, mare vindicatis: parcite iusso*. Yet this time, the Chorus do not *beseech* the gods, they tell them: enough now, gods, you have avenged the sea! The attempt by humans to set limits for the gods is overtly hubristic. When Horace uses these words, he does not address them to the gods:

*iam satis terris nivis atque dirae
grandinis misit Pater et rubente
dextera sacras iaculatus arces
terrui urbem* (1.2.1-4)

⁶⁶ The point is simply that Seneca emphasizes the gravity of violation of natural limits by fully depicting the consequences, whereas Horace does not offer such graphic and detailed descriptions.

The ode continues by describing the flood that Zeus sent which caused the natural order to be totally overturned. The fish lived in tree tops, the deer swam in the water (9-12). Jove has sent enough snow and hail that the people are fearing a return of this unnatural state. This fear that the natural order will be overturned, that there will be no end to the destruction that forces of Nature are wreaking, is echoed in Seneca's words. While humans overturned the natural order by sailing and changed the world (364-374), now that the effects of this violation seem to be out of control and the elements of Nature (fire and water) are killing many Argonauts, there is a request for a limit. In other words, now that humans are not in control, limits should be set.

While some of Seneca's allusions to Horace have been studied above, there are also general allusions, which do not target specific previous works, but rather presuppose a general knowledge. Seneca's *Medea* is full of these:⁶⁷ an example relevant to the study of natural limit is the allusion at lines 599-602. This allusion has two heuristic levels. On the surface, it alludes to Phaethon; a general familiarity with the myth of Phaethon driving his father's chariot and the consequences is expected. But on a deeper level, resonances of Jason's violation can be recognized.

Thus far the emphasis has centered on Seneca's depiction of the violation of the land/sea boundary, and how he has alluded to Horace in his rendition of the Argonautic voyage. Yet one of the other natural limits studied in the Horace chapter was that of death. The finality of death is accentuated by both authors: it is poignantly expressed in Seneca's *non rediturus* (633) in reference to Orpheus, and the idea is found throughout Horace's odes (e. g. *nec satelles Orci/ callidum Promethea/ revexit auro captus*. 2.18.34-36; or *sed omnes una manet nox, et calcanda semel via leti*

⁶⁷ One example, not relevant to natural limit, but which presupposes general knowledge is the description of Pallas in Medea's opening speech (3). Pallas is not actually named. Other examples include the descriptions of Dionysus and Apollo in the first choral ode (82-86). Again the gods are not overtly named.

1.28.15-16). Horace shows the importance of respecting natural limit and the inevitability of death by emphasizing the march of time and the cycles inherent in Nature. In Seneca's second Argonautic ode, death is a means of revenge, and the forms it takes allude to violations of the land/sea boundary. For example, Hyllus drowns in a fountain, though he sailed over the sea (646-651). The final death listed is that of Pelias. Again, there is no allusion to Horace, but here Seneca recalls his own earlier ode. This ode ends with Pelias *confined* in a pot of boiling water, while the last had ended with the words *ultima Thule* (379), emphasising expansion and the removal of limit. While the first Argonautic ode ended with reference to future explorations and deletion of limits, this ode ends with the natural limit of death.

Conclusion

In the Argonautic odes of *Medea* the violation of natural limits leads to chaos. To begin with, humankind violated the covenants of the world, and now there is no stopping the effects of this violation. The voyage to Colchis resulted in Jason's marriage to Medea, which ended in his desertion and remarriage to Creusa, which eventually caused the destruction of Corinth. There is a strong connection between these events: Violation of cosmic covenants led to violation of human ones. While in Horace's ode 1.3, violation of the land/sea boundary was placed in a context of other violations, which were not necessarily a result of sailing, Seneca's depiction gives the impression that sailing led to the destruction at the end of the play.

In reading Horace's odes, I argued for a perception of Nature as an all-encompassing entity, of which humans are a part. Humans have their limits, as do all other participants in this greater cosmic entity. Violation of limits results in imbalance and a less harmonious life. There is a unity between all the participants of Nature. Such unity between humans and other parts of Nature can be found in Seneca's tragedies, but it is manifested differently. Partly this unity is displayed through the cosmic reactions in which the

actions of humans affect the non-human surroundings.⁶⁸ Such reaction is absent from the Horatian odes studied. Seneca further shows this unity through the spread of results from the violation of natural limit: violation of the cosmic limits leads to all types of violations.

In contrast to Horace, where violation of natural limit is not avenged by the injured party, Seneca fully develops the theme of revenge. Once one element exceeds its place, the move towards chaos is started, and there is no limit set on the revenge. In Seneca the theme of violation of natural limit focusses on the results both to the violators specifically and to humankind in general. Moreover, Seneca concentrates on the hubris of humans in their attempts to control other elements (sea, winds) of the universe. While Horace dwells on the fearlessness and boldness of the first sailor, Seneca centers on his hubristic *audacia*.

Seneca's Argonautic odes take on a deeper significance and their meaning is intensified if the audience is familiar with Horace's odes; in other words if they are understood within the context of Roman poetry. The changes that Seneca makes in his use of Horace's material exemplify the notion of imitation and emulation that was praised in the literary critics of the first century B.C. and A.D.

⁶⁸ See Chapter Three

Conclusion

In this thesis I have argued that the theme of natural limit underlies selected odes of Horace and Seneca's *Medea*. Seneca targeted Horace's odes, in particular *carm.* 1.3, in his Argonautic odes. Yet while alluding to Horace, Seneca presented the material in such a way that the hubristic *audacia* of humankind became central.

The concept of limits in Nature was familiar to the Greeks and Romans, as was seen in Chapter One. To begin with, myths that dwelt on human transgressions against the natural order and the consequences of such behaviour were examined. This section was followed by a brief consideration of philosophical works which emphasize the potential chaos that would arise from the absence or violation of natural limits.

Against this general background, Horace and Seneca's portrayals of the theme were considered. Horace's depictions were found to concentrate more on the motivation for the transgressions and description of the actual violation, rather than on the disastrous consequences that might arise. The idea that Nature is an all-encompassing community, in which humans have their place, was seen in the selected odes. In particular, the rule of time, to which humans and non-human phenomena (weather, seasons) must yield, stresses the unity between all the various forms in Nature. Transgressing the natural boundary of the land/sea induced fear (e. g. 1. 3) or reflected greed (e. g. 2. 18). Paramount to the odes was the notion that living in tune with Nature, respecting natural limits, would result in a more harmonious and less fear-ridden life for humans. Perhaps because of the lighter vein of solo lyric poetry, Horace did not engage in dramatic descriptions of the potential results of transgressions against the natural order.

In contrast, Seneca highlighted the consequences of transgressions of natural limit. The violation of the sea which humans committed through the art of navigation acted as a source from which other violations followed.

Again, there was a notion of unity between the human and non-human, but this was established through the mutual suffering of humans and the environment (e. g. in *Oedipus*), or through the spread of violations. If a *foedus* was violated in the non-human realm, it was followed or preceded by a violation of a *foedus* in the human realm. This was seen for example in Hercules' descent to the Underworld (*Hercules Furens*), which was followed by his murder of his wife and children. The inability to stop the consequences of transgressions against natural limits, as well as the impossibility of reinstating these violated limits, indirectly yet effectively emphasize the powerlessness of humans. The ultimate powerlessness of humans is underscored by the arrogance which Seneca attributes to humans and which he portrays in particular through his allusions to Horace.

Seneca's allusive practice was the main topic of the fourth chapter; it was viewed within a framework of literary theory of the first centuries B.C. and A.D. His selection and use of material from his precursors, especially Horace, showed a practical application of various theoretical concepts that were prevalent in his time, for example the idea of strife and competition with past authors. While leaving his allusions recognizable to the audience, Seneca presented them in such a way as to centre on the hubristic *audacia* of human behaviour, on the violence of the transgression and on the far-reaching consequences of the violations.

That both Seneca and Horace in their literary depictions dwell on one aspect of the truth and present a one-sided picture should not detract from the significance of the theme of natural limit. On the contrary, that two authors who are writing in different genres, have integrated this theme into their works, and that it is found both in myths and philosophy as well, implies rather that it is a concept that was familiar to the ancients and one which was studied and approached from different angles.

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