

## Callimachean *ars* for enthusiastic poetry in Seneca's *Oedipus*?

Within the field of Seneca's studies, more than one scholarly contribution has drawn attention to the highly allusive language of Seneca's tragedies. Among these, one can certainly mention the works of Boyle (2011 and 2014), Schiesaro (2003 and 2006), and Trinacty (2014). The research of these scholars has extensively illuminated the multi-referential nature of the terminology and images that Seneca employs within his tragedies, all the while providing evidence of the meta-poetical potential of his drama.

The above-mentioned scholars argue that several passages within the *Oedipus*, when read meta-poetically, seem to offer insights into Seneca's tragic poetics, but one of the aspects which seems to have gone unnoticed so far concerns aesthetic matters. Within this paper I aim to show that a metapoetic reading of the *Oedipus* displays an aesthetic critique of the past literary tradition with which Seneca interacts, and points to the presence of Callimachean *ars* in Seneca's own enthusiastic poetry.

The idea of a reconciliation between the Apollinean and Bacchic aspects of poetry is already advocated within the texts of some poets of the Augustan age (see ex. Batinsky 1991 on Horace), and it is my contention that references to Apollo and Bacchus within the *Oedipus* point to the idea of such a reconciliation. In arguing my selected points, I examine passages from the *Oedipus* where references to Apollo and Bacchus are conducive to the reconciliation for which I advocate. Moreover, I devote particular attention to images contained within the choral hymn to Bacchus (as for example the wedding of Ariadne and Bacchus, and the kidnapping of Dionysus by the pirates), and to the landscape described in the necromancy. It is my contention that references to chattering rivers originating from pumice stone, to gleaming and sluggish fountains, to muddy pools, and to shadowy trees, could and can be conducive to meta-poetical reflections of aesthetic nature.

Water and wine imagery as well as arboreal images play a major role within the text of the Augustan poets engaged in developing a metapoetic discourse within their works (See e.g. Hunter 2006, Fenton 2008, Henkel 2009). In fact, forests and fountains are traditional places for literary

inspiration, water and wine imagery are often used to speak about poetry, and references to shades frequently hide allusions to the previous literary tradition. I suggest that readers who are familiar with this poetic way of conveying poetic content can read Seneca's above mentioned references as reflections on aesthetic issues. For example, on the one hand, when the chorus says that the *Nyctelius latex* (the "Nyctelian wine") originates from pumice stone, this statement can be read as a possible reference to refined poetry (Cf. e.g. by Prop. 3.1.8). On the other hand, references to sluggish waters (*pigrum fontem*) surrounded by muddy pools (*limosa palus*), or to locations that are "unknown to the light of Apollo," and that characterize the literary landscape where Tiresias (a surrogate of the poet) operates, can be read as a hint to the "un-Callimachean" aesthetic that characterizes the previous literary tradition.

Within my examination, I aim to show how a study of the language associated with these, and other passages that I analyze, illuminates the claimed aesthetic difference between Seneca's poetry and the one which Seneca inherited from the previous literary tradition. By doing so, this paper provides more evidence of the multiple interpretative possibilities of Seneca's plays, as well as of the importance of images that some scholars too often dismiss as pure and mere rhetorical embellishment.

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