

Visitors from beyond the Grave

Ghosts in World Literature

Dámaris Romero-González, Israel Muñoz-
Gallarte, Gabriel Laguna-Mariscal (eds.)

THE ROLE OF THE GHOSTS IN SENECA'S TRAGEDIES¹

MIGUEL RODRÍGUEZ-PANTOJA
University of Córdoba
(orcid.org/0000-0002-6115-4412)

ABSTRACT: This chapter aims to present the general frame of Seneca's tragedies, and the formal frame and the typology of the apparitions of ghosts within them. It also reviews the presence of *umbrae* and *simulacra* in Seneca's tragedies. It concludes with a brief reflection about the "afterlife" in the author's dramatic work.

KEYWORDS: Seneca, tragedy, ghost, *umbrae*, *simulacra*, afterlife.

We will focus on the apparition of *umbrae* (and, occasionally, *simulacra*, which are basically different from the former in that they are not identifiable), in Seneca's tragedies: the Greek word *phantasma* appears very sporadically in Latin, at least in the texts that we keep; in fact, according to the *Thesaurus linguae Latinae*, it is used for the first time by Pliny 'the Younger' (61-112 AD) in his important letter on this subject and does not appear again until Tertullian (c. II/III AD)².

It deals with the two most common fields where such phenomenon takes place, or is imagined, even in real life: dreams and apparitions.

THE GENERAL FRAME: SENECA'S TRAGEDIES

Before analyzing it in detail, I think that it is necessary to briefly review the literary field where those apparitions take place, the tragedy as it is understood by the Cordubensis.

In general terms, the question often arises from if they were written for performance or only to be read, which, as it happens habitually, has defenders, detractors and intermediate positions³.

First, we have to try and place them in their cultural context. We all know that when we like a dramatic performance, we tend to enjoy it again when we hear or watch it a second, third or fourth time. That has to do with the intellectual reactions and sensations: it impresses the first time because it is unexpected;

¹ This text is the translation of the conference "El papel de los fantasmas en las tragedias de Séneca", presented on May 16, 2013 within the course "El fantasma en la Literatura".

² *ThLL* vol. X, 1 p. 204, 71: "*legitur semel apud PLIN. min.* [p. 205, 8 ss.: *epist.* 7. 27. 1 *velim scire, esse -ta et habere propriam figuram numenque aliquod putes an inania et vana ex metu nostro imaginem accipere] et inde a TERT.* [p. 2005, 10 s.: *apol.* 22, 12 -ta *Castorum (sim. de deis paganorum e. g. idol.* 4. 3 *servitis -bus et daemoniis et spiritibus)]"*

³ About this matter, cf. Dupont 1997, Fitch 2000, Kragelund 2008.

the rest of them it has a similar effect because the spectator is getting ready, conscious or unconsciously, to enjoy its performance. On the other hand, if the actors are different, they lead to comparison and, therefore, to immediate discussions. In conclusion, the spectator becomes an active protagonist.

Indeed, since the beginning of theatrical performances, we know that the good ones, of course, and even those that are not so good, were repeated over and over again. And it is happening just the same today.

It is evident that an essential part of any drama is what we call staging the action. And since ancient times, as Cicero formulated it with his well-known competence, we know for sure that there is no efficient rhetoric unless it is accompanied by a competent *actio*. It is clearly seen what we mean. Seneca stood out for dominating the word. A question of inheritance: we would exaggerate if we say that he grew up among *controversiae* and *suasoriae*, his father's main literary activity, but there is no doubt that he had a careful education in that field, so that he was returned from exile in Corsica to Rome by Agrippina, Nero's mother, in order to take care of his rhetoric education.

Consequently, Seneca's tragedies are full of rhetoric, and rhetoric made from the techniques practiced during the time in which he lived. These techniques were so well compiled by his father: the above mentioned controversies and suasories, based on fictitious situations of characters or real circumstances. And we should not forget that both were performances with public, an usually knowledgeable public and, therefore, able of judging what they are watching and listening to. As homework, as advanced as they might be, interested people, as educated as they might be, it is no wonder that the development of a much more complex rhetoric exercise, being a drama, could have a guaranteed public.

THE FORMAL FRAME

All the ghosts that appear in Seneca's dramas came from the Hades, described several times by the author, from the inside as well as the outside.

1. From the inside

Hercules and Theseus saw it with mortal eyes and can tell it, as they return together, in the tragedy that is the first published in the most reliable editions and translations, *Hercules furens*. When Amphitryon asks him, the second one describes it as follows (*Her.F.* 709-722)⁴:

*Est in recessu Tartari obscuro locus,
quem grauibus umbris spissa caligo alligat.*

710

⁴ The Latin texts, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from Zwierlein 1986, the translations from Fitsch 2002 and 2004.

*a fonte discors manat hinc uno latex,
 alter quieto similis (hunc iurant dei)
 tacente sacram deuehens fluuio Styga;
 at hic tumultu rapitur ingenti ferox
 et saxa fluctu uoluit Acheron inuius* 715
*renauigari. cingitur duplici uado
 aduersa Ditis regia, atque ingens domus
 umbrante luco tegitur. hic uasto specu
 pendent tyranni limina, hoc umbris iter,
 haec porta regni. campus hanc circa iacet,* 720
in quo superbo digerit uultu sedens / animas recentes.

In a dark recess of Tartarus there is a place bound by thick fog and deep shadows. Here from a single source there flow disparate streams: the one, appearing at rest (by it the gods swear oaths), conveys the sacred Styx on its silent course; the other races fiercely with great turbulence and rolls rocks along in its current —Acheron, impassable to any recrossing. The palace of Dis is ringed in front by this pair of rivers, and the huge house is masked by a shadowing grove. Here is the cavernous arched doorway of the tyrant; this is the path for the shades, the gate of the kingdom. Around it lies a level space, where he sits with a haughty air to organize the newly arrived spirits.

And after that, he continues with the description of the god of the hell, Dis, a Latin translation from the Greek Pluto (a name that, by the way, is only used four times by Seneca, once in *Phaedra* and thrice in *Hercules Oetaeus*⁵). I will omit it, as it is not relevant here.

Here it is interesting to remember a part of the immediate dialogue between the two same protagonists.

Amphitryon asks (*Her.F.* 727-730):

*Verane est fama inferis
 iam⁶ sera reddi iura et oblitos sui
 sceleris nocentes debitas poenas dare?
 quis iste ueri rector atque aequi arbiter?* 730

Is the story true that belated justice is meted out to those below, and that guilty ones are duly punished though they have forgotten their crimes? Who is that lord of truth and arbiter of justice?

⁵ Cf. *Phaed.* 628; *Her.O.* 935, 1142 and 1954. In the tragedies Dis appears up to 30 times (and out of them, just one, in *Apoc.* 13. 3. 3).

⁶ *iam* Ageno, Fitch: *tam* EA Zwierlein.

Theseus answers (*Her.F.* 735-736):

*Quod quisque fecit, patitur; auctorem scelus
repetit suoque premitur exemplo nocens.* 735

What each man did, he suffers: the crime recoils on its perpetrator, and the criminal is plagued by the precedent he set.

And further he adds (*Her.F.* 739-745):

*Quisquis est placide potens
dominusque uitae seruat innocuas manus* 740
*et incruentum mitis imperium regit
animaeque⁷ parcit, longa permensus diu
uiuacis⁸ aeuī spatia uel caelum petit
uel laeta felix nemoris Elysii loca,
iudex futurus.* 745

But anyone who governs mildly, who keeps his hands guiltless as master of life and death, who conducts a gentle, bloodless reign and spares lives — he measures the long sweep of a life full of years, and then reaches either heaven or the happy setting of the blessed Elysian grove, to serve as judge.

This idea of punishment after death, personalized in a number of famous people, is a recurrent issue, as we will see, in Seneca's tragedies. When Amphitryon asks, Theseus numbers the most outstanding (*Her.F.* 750-759):

Rapitur uolucris tortus Ixion rota; 750
*ceruice saxum grande Sisyphia sedet;
in amne medio faucibus siccis senex
sectatur undas, alluit mentum latex,
fidemque cum iam saepe decepto dedit,
perit unda in ore; poma destituunt famem.* 755
*praebet uolucris Tityos aeternas dapes
urnasque frustra Danaides plenas gerunt;
errant furentes impiae Cadmeides
terretque mensas auida Phineas auis.*

Ixion is whirled and racked on a speeding wheel; a huge rock rests on Sisyphus' neck. In mid-river an old man with parched jaws pursues the water; it laps against

⁷ *animaeque* E PCS Fitch: *animoque* TPC recc. Zwierlein.

⁸ *uiuacis* Bentley, Fitch: *felicitis* EA Zwierlein.

his chin, and after inspiring his trust, though so often deceived, it vanishes from his mouth; the fruits leave his hunger cheated⁹. Tityos furnishes the vulture with an eternal feast, and the Danaids carry full pitchers to no avail. The unnatural Cadmeids wander in madness, and the gluttonous birds threaten Phineus' table¹⁰.

2. From the outside

2.1. Talthybius, Agamemnon's messenger, claims to have seen with his own eyes (using the same words coming from Juno's mouth when he appeared in *Her.F.* 50: *uidi, ipsa uidi*) and heard Achilles' ghost in *Troades*. He describes the scene like this (*Tro.* 168-180):

*Pauet animus, artus horridus quassat tremor.
maiora ueris monstra (uix capiunt fidem)
uidi ipse, uidi. summa iam Titan iuga* 170
*stringebat ortu, uicerat noctem dies,
cum subito caeco terra mugitu fremens
concussa totos traxit ex imo sinus;
mouere siluae capita et excelsum nemus
fragore uasto tonuit et lucus sacer;* 175
*Idaea ruptis saxa ceciderunt iugis.
[nec terra solum tremuit: et pontus suum
adesse Achillem sensit ac uoluit¹¹ uada.]
Tum scissa uallis aperit immensos specus
et hiatus Erebi peruium ad superos iter
tellure fracta praebet ac tumulum leuat.* 180

My mind feels fear, a shuddering tremor shakes my body. Things too unnatural to be true —they scarcely command belief— I saw with my own eyes, I saw then. The Titan was just grazing the mountain ridges as he rose, day had defeated night, when suddenly the earth shook with a muffled roar and heaved all of this inner recesses from the lowest depths. The treetops swayed; lofty woodland and sacred grove thundered with an awesome sound of breaking. On Ida rocks fell from the shattered ridges. Not only the earth trembled: the sea too sensed its own Achilles near, and made its waters roll.

Then a newly opened chasm revealed measureless hollows, and the gaping maw of Erebus gave passage to the world above through the fractured earth, and eased the tomb's weight¹².

⁹ Referring to Tantalus.

¹⁰ It refers to the harpies.

¹¹ *uoluit* suggested as one possibility by Delz and Fitch: *strauit* EA Zwierlein.

¹² The great tomb of Achilles.

Then he narrates Achilles' apparition, about which we will discuss later.

2.2. Something similar happens in *Thyestes*, where the messenger describes an access to after death through a holy place with several votive offering and mentions the apparition of *simulacra*, or spectral images (*Thy.* 650-656+665-673):

Arcana in imo regio secessu iacet, 650
alta uetustum ualle compescens nemus,
penetrabile regni, nulla qua laetos solet
praeberere ramos arbor aut ferro coli,
sed taxus et cupressus et nigra ilice
obscura nutat silua, quam supra eminens 655
despectat alte quercus et uincit nemus.

...

Fons stat sub umbra tristis et nigra piger 665
haeret palude: talis est dirae Stygis
deformis unda quae facit caelo fidem.
hinc nocte caeca gemere feralis deos
fama est, catenis lucus excussis sonat
ululantque manes. quidquid audire est metus 670
illic uidetur: errat antiquis uetus
emissa bustis turba et insultant loco
maiora notis monstra.

At the farthest and lowest remove there lies a secret area that confines an age-old woodland in a deep vale —the inner sanctum of the realm. There are no trees here such as stretch out healthy branches and are tended with the knife, but yews and cypresses and a darkly stirring thicket of black ilex, above which a towering oak looks down from his height and masters the grove. [...]

In the gloom is a dismal stagnant spring, oozing slowly in the black swamp. Such is the unsightly stream of dread Styx, which generates trust in heaven. Here in the blind darkness rumour has it that death gods groan; the grove resounds to the rattling of chains, and ghosts howl. Anything fearful to *hear* can be *seen* there. A hoary crowd walks abroad, released from their ancient tombs, and things more monstrous than any known caper about the place.

We should remark that there is also a generic reference to ghostly beings, coming from the Hades, called by the name *simulacra*, in *Oedipus*, when the chorus refers the misfortunes that affect Thebes (*Oed.* 171-175):

*Quin Taenarii uincola ferri
rupisse canem fama et nostris
errare locis, mugisse solum,
uaga per lucos <uolitasse sacros>¹³
simulacra uirum maiora uiris.*

175

Yet more, the hound¹⁴ has burst his chains of Taenarian iron, some say, and roams at large in our land; the earth has groaned: through the <sacred> groves <have flitted> errant images of men, larger than men.

TPOLOGY OF THE APPARITIONS

Once we have seen the frame, it is time to establish, although just to lead this process, a basic typology of what we can interpret as a ghost, or apparition, and its objectives in the tragedies that we are dealing with.

A.- We will start with the objectives:

A.a. Claiming revenge

A.b. Informing or warning about something

B.- Regarding the introduction we can discuss:

B.a. Apparitions that take a direct part in the dramatic action:

They are the ghosts that act on stage in front of the spectators, like characters interpreted by an actor. The inclusion in the context that we are dealing with can be argued, but, certainly, they are visions of supernatural or fantastic beings. Although the playwright places them formally in the same level as the human beings, they have their own characteristics, because they go beyond nature's limits. The two ghosts that take part in Seneca's tragedies play a similar role to that of Juno in *Hercules furens*' prologue.

B.b. Apparitions that do not take part directly in the dramatic action:

They are the shades that appear in front of specific characters and whose presence we know through them. Their participation can be important in the development of the drama.

Such apparitions have at least two ways of being show in dramatic fiction. They can be, in fact,

B.b.1 Induced (evocations). They are an answer to the participation of someone who is able to contact death beings, to see what they are doing and hear what they are saying, arousing their presence more or less willingly.

B.b.2 Non induced. They are occasional and admit at least two differences:

B.b.2.1 In direct visions

¹³ Lacuna identified, and supplement proposed, by Zwierlein.

¹⁴ Cerberus.

B.b.2.2 In dreams

C.- If ghosts take part in the action directly or indirectly, they do it in two ways:

C.a. Addressing the spectators

C.b. Addressing any of the characters within the plot. And here again there are two options:

C.b.1 Human beings

C.b.2 Non human beings

D.- When ghosts do not appear on stage, some of their physical traits are described. Laius: *stetit per artus sanguine effuso horridus, / paedore foedo squalidam obtentus comam* (*Oed.* 624-626, "he stands caked in the blood that poured over his body, with his hair covered in squalid filth"); Apsyrtus: *cuius umbra dispersis uenit / incerta membris?* (*Her.O.* 963-964, "whose shade approaches ill-defined with limbs dispersed?"); Hector: *non ille uultus flammeum intendens iubar, / sed fessus ac deiectus et fletu grauis / similisque nostro, squalida obtectus coma* (*Tro.* 448-450, "it was not that face directing its fiery radiant gaze, but one tired and downcast and heavy with weeping, and like my own, masked by filthy hair"); Achilles: *emicuit ingens umbra Thessalici ducis, / Threicia qualis arma proludens tuis / iam, Troia, fatis strauit...* (*Tro.* 181ff., "Out darted the huge ghost of the Thessalian chief, looking as when he defeated Thracian arms, already in training for your doom, Troy...").

GHOSTS IN SENECA'S TRAGEDIES

Once we have established the typology, and leaving behind those unnamed *simulacra* that *Thyestes'* messenger and *Oedipus'* chorus referred to, it is time to see the ghosts that appear in Seneca's tragedies.

- In section B.a ("Apparitions that take a direct part in the dramatic action") we include the protagonists of *Agamemnon* and *Thyestes'* prologues.

1. The drama *Agamemnon* starts with the presence on stage of Thyestes, Tantalus' grandson, Atreus' brother and Aegisthus' father's shade, inviting these ones to avenge his son [A.a].

Thyestes, *profundo Tartari emissus* (*Ag.* 2 "released from Tartarus' deep cavern"), addresses the spectators [C.a]: *En horret animus et pauor membra excutit* (*Ag.* 5 "Ah, my spirit shudders, my limbs tremble") and, after describing the tortures, which he obviously knows because he has seen them live, of Ixion (*Ag.* 15-16 *ille celeri corpus euinctus rotae / in se refertur*: "the one whose body is bound to a swift wheel circles back on himself"), Sisyphus (*Ag.* 16-17 *per aduersum irritus / redeunte totiens luditur saxo labor*: "uphill toil is vain and mocked as the stone repeatedly descends"), Tityus (*Ag.* 18 *tondet ales auida fecundum iecur*: "the greedy bird crops the ever growing liver") and Tantalus (*Ag.* 19-20 *et inter undas feruida exustus siti / aquas fugaces*

ore decepto appetit: “one parched mid-river with burning thirst seeks the fleeting water with his often cheated lips”¹⁵, numbers their own sins, which have changed nature (*Ag. 34 uersa natura est retro*), and addresses Aegisthus [C.b.1] *causa natalis tui, / Aegisthe, uenit* (*Ag. 48-49* “the reason for your birth has come, Aegisthus”).

Indeed, according to some oracles, Thyestes, whose brother Atreus had killed his three sons, serving then in a feast, could only be avenged by another of his sons, the result of incestuous relations with his daughter Pelopia. This son was, obviously, Aegisthus, who at the beginning of the drama was joined to Clytemnestra, Agamemnon’s wife, Atreus’ son, who was killed by both of them. Thyestes’ ghost foresees it: *iam scelera prope sunt, iam dolus caedes cruor...* (*Ag. 47* “now crimes are near, now treachery, slaughter, gore...”).

2. If in *Agamemnon* the shade that materializes in front of the spectators is Thyestes, in the tragedy whose name is that of this character, appears his grandfather’s, Tantalus, who begins, as well as the previous one, wondering *quis inferorum sede ab infausta extrahit / auido fugaces ore captantem cibos* (*Thy. 1-2* “from the accursed abode of the underworld, who drags forth the one that catches at vanishing food with his avid mouth?”), and then mentions his torture: *peius inuentum est siti / arente in undis aliquid et peius fame / hiante semper?* (*Thy. 4-6* “has something worse been devised than thirst parched amidst water, worse than hunger that gapes forever?”).

Later he will find out that they are the Furies, with one of whom he dialogues along this prologue [C.b.2]. But before doing so, he also refers to the same tortures that Thyestes mentioned (*Thy. 6-12*):

*Sisyphi numquid lapis
gestandus umeris lubricus nostris uenit
aut membra celeri differens cursu rota,
aut poena Tityi, qui specu uasto patens
uulneribus atras pascit effossis aues
et nocte reparans quidquid amisit die
plenum recenti pabulum monstro iacet?*

10

Can it be that Sisyphus’ stone comes to be carried — so slippery— on my shoulders, or the wheel¹⁶ that racks limbs in its swift rotation? Or the punishment of Tityos, who with his cavernous vast opening feeds dark birds from his quarried

¹⁵ Description of the tortures: *Her.F. 750ff.*: Ixion, Sisyphus, Tantalus, Tityus, Danaids, “Cadmus’ daughters” (Agave and Ino), Phineus; *Phaed. 1229ff.* (Theseus) “Sentenced shades”: Sisyphus, Tantalus, Tityus, Ixion; *Ag. 15ff.* (Thyestes’ ghost): Ixion, Sisyphus, Tityus, Tantalus; *Her.O. 942ff.*: Sisyphus, Tantalus, Ixion, Tityus, Danaids, Procne..., 1068ff. wheel (Ixion), Tityus, Tantalus, Sisyphus.

¹⁶ Of Ixion.

wounds —who regrows by night what he lost by day, and lies as a full meal for the fresh monster?

Tantalus tries to avoid tragedy by speaking about his grandchildren [C.b.1] (*Thy.* 93-95):

*Moneo, ne sacra manus
uiolate caede neue furiali malo
aspergite aras. stabo et arcebo scelus.* 95

I warn you, do not defile your hands with accursed bloodshed, and do not sprinkle the altars with the evil of avenging fury. I shall stand and block the crime.

But his own presence is already baneful, as the Fury explains: *sentit introitus tuos / domus et nefando tota contactu horruit* (*Thy.* 103-104, “the house feels you entering, and shudders throughout at this accursed contact”), being satisfied: *actum est abunde. gradere ad infernos specus / amnemque notum* (*Thy.* 105-106, “it is done, and amply! Go to the infernal caverns and the river you know”).

Here it is the presence of the Furies that indicates that we are again in front of revenge as an objective [A.a.].

- Section B.b. (“Apparitions that do not take part directly in the dramatic action”) is, obviously, more complex.

It can be used as an example of direct evocation of the afterlife’s souls (and, finally, goddess Hecate’s) [B.b.1] Medea’s, in the tragedy which is named after her, where, once again, we find Ixion, Tantalus and Sisyphus’ known tortures, to which he adds Danaid’s (*Med.* 740-751):

Comprecor uulgus silentum uosque ferales deos 740
...
*supplicis, animae, remissis currite ad thalamos nouos:
rota resistat membra torquens, tangat Ixion humum,
Tantalus securus undas hauriat Pirenidas,* 745
*[grauior uni poena sedeat coniugis socero mei]
lubricus per saxa retro Sisyphum soluat lapis.
uos quoque, urnis quas foratis inritus ludit labor,
Danaides, coite: uestras hic dies quaerit manus.*
- nunc meis uocata sacris, noctium sidus, ueni 750
pessimos induta uultus, fronte non una minax.

I invoke the thronging silent dead, and you the gods of the grave. [...] Eased of your torments, run, you ghosts, to this strange marriage rite; the wheel that tortures limbs my stop, Ixion touch the ground, and Tantalus may swallow

down Pirene's stream in peace. But my heavier punishment rest on one, my husband's marriage relation: over the rocks may the slippery stone roll Sisyphus back downhill. And you who are mocked by fruitless toil with pitchers pierced by holes, assemble here, you Danaids: this day demands your hands. Now summoned by my rites appear, you heavenly globe of night, displaying your most hostile looks, with menace in every face¹⁷.

3. In the tragedy *Oedipus*, it is Creon, Jocasta's brother, who sees to the details and the whole ritual put on stage in its appropriate place by the seer Tiresias to evoke the shades and find out the remedy for the misfortune that destroys Thebes [B.b.1]. Creon wants his words to be real, stating them before describing the wonders that he is watching, with a resource that we have already seen in Juno and Talthybius' mouths (*Oed.* 583-586):

*Ipse pallentes deos
uidi inter umbras, ipse torpentes lacus
noctemque ueram; gelidus in uenis stetit
haesitque sanguis.* 585

With my own eyes I saw the pallid gods among the shades, I saw the stagnant lakes and authentic night. My blood stopped still, cold in my veins.

He finishes with a physical description of Laius, Oedipus' father (*Oed.* 608-626):

*Pauide latebras nemoris umbrosi petunt
animae trementes: primus emergit solo,
dextra ferocem cornibus taurum premens, 610
Zethus, manuque sustinet laeua chelyn
qui saxa dulci traxit Amphion sono,
interque natos Tantalus tandem suos
tuto superba fert caput fastu graue
et numerat umbras. peior hac genetrix adest 615
furibunda Agaue, tota quam sequitur manus
partita regem: sequitur et Bacchas lacer
Pentheus tenetque saeuus etiamnunc minas.
Tandem uocatus saepe pudibundum extulit
caput atque ab omni dissidet turba procul 620
celatque semet (instat et Stygias preces
geminat sacerdos, donec in apertum efferat
uultus opertos) Laius - fari horreo:*

¹⁷ It refers to Hecate.

*stetit per artus sanguine effuso horridus,
paedore foedo squalidam obtentus comam,
et ore rabido fatur.*

625

In panic the timid spirits seek out hiding places in the shadowed grove. First to emerge from the ground is Zethus, his right hand restraining a fierce bull by the horns, and Amphion, holding in his left hand the lyre whose sweet sound once shifted stones. Amongst her children the Tantalid¹⁸, at last safe in her pride, carries her head high in insufferable arrogance and counts her ghosts. Here is a worse mother than she, frenzied Agave, followed by the whole troop that sundered the king; the Bacchae are followed by the torn Pentheus, still fiercely continuing his threats.

The one repeatedly summoned at last raises his head, sullied as it is, but stays concealed far from the main crowd. Insistently the priest redoubles his Stygian prayers, until Laius reveals his hidden face. I shudder to speak of it. He stands caked in the blood that poured over his body, with his hair covered in squalid filth, and speaks in rage.

Then he mentions Laius' long speech, who, first addressing the *Cadmi effera /... domus* (*Oed.* 626-627, "savage house of Cadmus") and later Oedipus himself [C.b.1], explains his murder and his own revenge, which will not end until Oedipus suffers a worthy punishment. Again we are in front of a shade that claims revenge [A.a].

4. As a non-induced apparition, we can add Medea's vision, who, in her delirium, watches the Furies and his brother (Apsyrtus') shade, whom she had killed and torn apart so that her father Aeetes delayed his chase when Medea was fleeing with Jason after seizing the Golden Fleece [B.b.2.1]. Apsyrtus also claims revenge [A.a] (*Her.O.* 963-965):

*Cuius umbra dispersis uenit
incerta membris? frater est, poenas petit:
dabimus, sed omnes.*

965

Whose shade approaches ill-defined with limbs dispersed? It is my brother, he seeks amends. We shall pay them, yes, everyone.

5. Similarly non-induced is the apparition that Talthybius, Agamemnon's messenger, refers in *Tro.* 190-197. I have already mentioned the participation of this character describing the place where *tum scissa uallis aperit immensos specus / et hiatus Erebi peruium ad superos iter / tellure fracta praebet* (*Tro.* 178-180 "then a newly opened chasm revealed measureless hollows, and the gaping

¹⁸ Niobe.

maw of Erebus gave passage to the word above through the fractured earth”), through which *emicuit ingens umbra Thesalici ducis* (*Tro.* 181 “out darted the huge ghost of the Thessalian chief”), that is to say, Achilles, claiming Polyxena’s, Hecuba and Priam’s younger daughter, sacrifice at the hands of Pyrrhus, Achilles and Deidamia’s son himself, so as to calm his *manes* and Greece keeps on paying for the big heroes’ anger. Only thus could the Greeks surf what he calls “my seas” (her mother Thetis was the daughter of the marine god Nereus).

In this case, the narrator, after describing his appearance by means of a comparison, *Threicia qualis arma proludens tuis / iam, Troia, fatis strauit...* (*Tro.* 182-183 “looking as when he defeated Thracian arms, already in training for your doom, Troy...”), he states the literal words of the ghost addressing the Greeks [C.b.1] claiming revenge [A.a.] (*Tro.* 191-196):

*Ite, ite, inertes, debitos manibus meis
auferte honores, soluite ingratas rates
per nostra ituri maria. non paruo luit
iras Achillis Graecia et magno luet:
desponsa nostris cineribus Polyxene
Pyrrhi manu mactetur et tumulum riget’.* 195

Go on, you idlers, carry away the honours owed to my hands, launch your ungrateful ships —to travel through my seas! It cost Greece no small price to appease Achilles’ wrath, and it will cost her dear. Let Polyxena, betrothed to my ashes, be sacrificed by Pyrrhus’ hand and quench the tomb’s thirst.

6. It is not induced, but it materializes through a dream, the one which as it did in *Troades* appears to Andromache: in this case it is Hector, her husband, who advises what to do in order to save her son [A.a.].

Andromache refers to her dream in a dialogue with an old man (*Tro.* 434-436):

*Turbat atque agitat Phrygas
communis iste terror; hic proprie meum
exterret animum, noctis horrendae sopor.* 435

That is a shared terror which disturbs and shakes the Prygians, but my mind is filled with a private dread from this fearful night’s dream.

And, on his behalf, she describes his aspect, as we have already seen, specifying it (*Tro.* 443-450):

*Cum subito nostros Hector ante oculos stetit,
non qualis ultro bella in Argiuos ferens*

Graias petebat facibus Idaeis rates 445

...

*non ille uultus flammeum intendens iubar,
sed fessus ac deiectus et fletu grauis
similisque nostro, squalida obtectus coma.* 450

Suddenly Hector stood before my eyes, not as he looked when he carried the war forward against the Argives and attacked Greek ships with Idaean firebrands, [...] it was not that face directing its fiery radiant gaze, but one tired and down-cast and heavy with weeping, and like my own, masked by filthy hair.

On this occasion the words of the apparition are stated (*Tro.* 452-456):

*'Dispelle somnos' inquit 'et natum eripe,
o fida coniunx: lateat, haec una est salus.
omitte fletus -Troia quod cecidit gemis?
utinam iaceret tota. festina, amoue
quocumque nostrae paruulam stirpem domus'* 455

“Cast off sleep, my faithful wife, and rescue our son. He must be hidden, this is the only hope of safety. Leave off weeping. Are you lamenting Troy’s fall? I wish she were completely fallen! Hurry, take the little offspring of our house away somewhere, anywhere!”

SUMMARY TABLE

Character	Tragedy	Apparition	Speaks	Description	Objective
Thyestes	<i>Agam.</i>	direct	yes	-	revenge
Tantalus	<i>Thy.</i>	direct	yes	-	revenge
Laius	<i>Oed.</i>	evocation	yes	yes	revenge
(Apsyrtus)	<i>Med.</i>	vision	no	no	revenge
Achilles	<i>Tro.</i>	vision	yes	yes	revenge
Hector	<i>Tro.</i>	dream	yes	yes	warning

To sum up, apart from the spectral images or *simulacra* mentioned twice in different circumstances, there are six ghosts that appear on stage in two ways: directly at the beginning of the tragedies (Thyestes and Tantalus) and through specific people’s evocations, visions or dreams (Laius, Apsyrtus, Achilles, Hector). These, except for Apsyrtus, whose name is not even mentioned, are described likewise by an intermediate person, who is watching them now and had seen them alive; a message is transmitted through this person, with the purpose of claiming revenge.

THE VALUE OF THE APPARITIONS IN SENECA'S WORK: THE AFTERLIFE

Ghosts, the shades that we have been reviewing, are beings intimately joined to “life” after death. Their simple presence, which goes beyond the *simulacra*, because they are identifiable by their presence even by their voice, implies the admission that, not only the soul, but also some corporeality exists, since they are described, when necessary, with physical traits¹⁹. In fact, they are *umbræ*, something always joined to a corporeal entity.

Even, as we have seen, Seneca offers, through Theseus' eyes, the description of the Hades divided in the two classical parts: the part of the good ones, the Elysian Fields, and the one of those that were not, a place of punishment, gloomy, dark, where there were even some sounds of chains; in conclusion, the performance of all the evils that fetter the men. In that same passage he speaks about a justice *post mortem*.

The ghosts that we are dealing with are “shades”, not “souls”; the souls themselves, as they are ethereal, go up to heaven, according to the most elemental physical law. Seneca is not a theorist of philosophy, but an eclectic and pragmatic one who, as such, cannot omit, in such an important issue, at the most, a vague negation or acceptance, based on the doctrines of the “wise” or, just, the belief of the most.

In fact, in all of his work, depending on the circumstances, he openly admits the immortality of the soul, not even partial, that is to say, until the end of a cycle, following the Stoic doctrine (thus, above all, in the *Consolationes ad Martiam* and *ad Polybium*), or he considers it a *desideratum* and he even denies it in the so discussed chorus, typically Epicurean, of *Troades*, which, from the formal point of view, has a rhetoric component, where the technique of the customary syllogism appears²⁰.

Before ending, it will be a good idea to see and contextualize that Trojan chorus, which participates immediately after Calchas, the fortune teller, announced the two terrible conditions imposed by the *fata* in order that the Greek fleet can sail: the sacrifice of Polyxena, Priam and Hecuba's daughter, *Thessali busto ducis* (*Tro.* 361 “on the Thessalian leader's tomb”), that is to say Achilles, and Astyanax's, also Hector and Andromache's son, dropping

¹⁹ Another thing is the repeated description of the main punishments suffered by mythic characters who evidently are related to the ethic objectives of Seneca's philosophy, taking into account that they refer to unnatural actions and pride actions: Tantalus (Zeus and the oceanid Pluto's son) was punished for killing his son Pelops and serving him in a feast to the gods; Ixion (Ares' grandson) for his tray, obviously failed, to force Juno and, later, make fun of the gods, priding of his great feat; Tityus (Zeus' son) also for having tried to rape Leto, Apollo and Diana's mother, or else Diana herself; Sisyphus (Aeolus' son) similarly for having tried to deceive the gods; the Danaids (daughters of a Nayad) for killing their husbands, fulfilling certainly, an order of his father; Agave and Ino (daughter and granddaughter of the goddess Harmonia) for destroying Pentheus, her son and brother, respectively...

²⁰ Cf. Laguna Mariscal 1997: 206-207.

him from the top of the tower. The Trojan women say (*Tro.* 371-372+378-381+390-392+397+401-408):

*Verum est an timidos fabula decipit
umbras corporibus uiuere conditis?*
...
*an toti morimur nullaque pars manet
nostri, cum profugo spiritus halitu
immixtus nebulis cessit in aera* 380
et nudum tetigit subdita fax latus?
...
nec amplius 390
*iuratos superis qui tetigit lacus,
usquam est;*
...
post mortem nihil est ipsaque mors nihil, 397
...
mors indiuidua est, noxia corpori 401
*nec parcens animae: Taenara et aspero
regnum sub domino limen et obsidens
custos non facili Cerberus ostio*
rumores uacui uerbaque inania 405
*et par sollicito fabula somnio.
quaeris quo iaceas post obitum loco?*

Is it true, or a tale to deceive the faint-hearted, that spirits live on after bodies are buried [...]? Or do we die wholly, and does no part of us survive, once the spirit carried on the fugitive breath has mingled with the mist and receded into the air, and the kindling torch has touched the naked flesh? [...] No longer does one who has reached the pools²¹ that bind the gods' oaths exist at all. [...] After death is nothing, and death itself is nothing [...] Death is indivisible, destructive to the body and not sparing the soul. Taenarus, and the kingdom under his harsh lord, and Cerberus guarding the entrance with his unyielding gate —hollow rumours, empty words, a tale akin to a troubled dream.

A Trojan chorus speaks, I insist, who have just heard the tale of the shouts thrown by Achilles' ghost, leaving the infernal areas, and the verdict of the *fatum* itself. The reality stated by Talthybius, which I have already repeated (*uidi ipse, uidi*), contrasts, within the structure of the drama, with the words of the women who try desperately to avoid the consequences of such a vision, appealing to the impossibility of its being real, because there is not anything after that.

²¹ Those of the Styx.

And it is meaningful that a little before, the misfortunate Hecuba threw a shout of hope, while stating (*Tro.* 145-150):

'Felix Priamus' dicite cunctae: 145
liber manes uadit ad imos,
nec feret umquam uicta Graiium
ceruice iugum;
non ille duos uidet Atridas
nec fallacem cernit Vlixem... 150

«Blest is Priam» you should all say: he goes in freedom to the shades below, and his neck will never bear the yoke of the Greeks in defeat. He does not see the two sons of Atreus, he does not behold deceitful Ulysses.

And the chorus answered (*Tro.* 156-163):

'Felix Priamus' dicimus omnes:
secum excedens sua regna tulit.
nunc Elysii nemoris tutis
errat in umbris interque pias
felix animas Hectors quaerit. 160
Felix Priamus:
felix quisquis bello moriens
omnia secum consumpta tulit.

«Blest is Priam» we all say: in departing he has taken his kingdom with him. Now he wanders among the peaceful shadows of the Elysian grove, and blest among the righteous spirits he looks for Hector. Blest is Priam; blest is anyone who, dying in war, has taken with him his whole destroyed world.

Seneca applies here, as I have said before, what is the most efficient in each case in order to reflect different situations of man's life and behavior, definitely the only protagonist in a strict sense of the tragedy.

I do not think that we can extrapolate from these statements what the author believes, since the author makes use of this rhetorical device in order to remark the dramatic character in some works which, on the other hand, everyone considers fiction²².

²² As Setaioli 2000: 282 n. 37 states, "Le numerose descrizioni dell'oltretomba mitologico che appaiono nelle tragedie si spiegano appunto col fatto che in esse Seneca parla da poeta, non da filosofo", and underlines (322) the "sostanziale irrelevanza del problema dell'oltretomba dal punto di vista senecano". Cf. also Laguna Mariscal 1997 passim.