

The language of motion in Seneca's theoretical and literary representation of passions¹

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Περίληψη: Το κέντρο βάρους στις τραγωδίες του Σενέκα μετατοπίζεται συστηματικά από τα γεγονότα στα πρόσωπα των εκάστοτε πρωταγωνιστών και τις συναισθηματικές τους εξάρσεις. Απότοκο της μετατόπισης αυτής είναι η δημιουργία ενός μοτίβου στο τραγικό corpus του δημιουργού, το οποίο σχετίζεται με τις απόπειρες των δευτερευόντων χαρακτήρων των έργων να αποσοβήσουν τα συναισθηματικά ξεσπάσματα των ηρώων. Το παρόν άρθρο εστιάζει στην ανάλυση της συμβουλευτικής που ακολουθούν οι χαρακτήρες, με ένα ιδιαίτερο ενδιαφέρον για τον θεραπευτικό – συναισθηματικό χαρακτήρα της γλώσσας που χρησιμοποιούν στην προσπάθειά τους αυτή. Απώτερος στόχος της παρούσας ανάλυσης είναι η ανάδειξη της υλικής – φυσικής – κινητικής έκφρασης της γλώσσας του συγγραφέα, που χρησιμοποιείται για την εξυγίανση των παθών και η οποία φαίνεται να έχει, εν πολλοίς, επηρεαστεί από τις απόψεις της Αρχαίας Στοάς περί της φύσης συναισθημάτων. Τα τελευταία σκιαγραφούνται ως βίαιες κινήσεις που δημιουργούν μια ψυχοσωματική αστάθεια στους ήρωες και, ως εκ τούτου, η γλώσσα που αποσκοπεί στη θεραπεία τους φαίνεται να παρουσιάζει μία ιδιαίτερη «κινητικότητα».

Abstract: Senecan drama is characterized by a consistent focus on character portraits and emotional responses rather than on events. Among Seneca's tragedies, we find a motif that is integral to understanding the development of emotions: the secondary characters' attempts to emotionally restrain the protagonists' anger. The thesis of this article will be based on an analysis of advice voiced by supporting characters within Seneca's tragedies, which aim to discipline the emotions of the protagonists. Significant attention will be given to the linguistic aspect of the emotional language. My purpose is ultimately to establish that the philosopher incorporates a physical – corporeal – kinetic aspect into the language, as influenced by the Early Stoa. A deeper understanding of this tendency stems from a focus on the Stoic concept of passions as violent movements of the mind, resulting in violent movements of the body.

Λέξεις κλειδιά: Σενέκας, συναισθήματα, Στωικισμός, θεραπευτική γλώσσα, υλικός – σωματικός, κίνηση των παθών.

Key words: Seneca, emotions, Stoicism, therapeutic language, physical – corporeal – kinetic, movement of passions.

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Introduction

Seneca demonstrates a sustained focus on restraining anger and achieving mental stability.² The philosopher's viewpoint regarding self-control can be traced primarily in his treatises *De tranquillitate animi* and *De Ira*, which constitute the first extant works on the therapy of passions. His linguistic options in these prose works have been found to bear strong reminiscences of the language and the advice that supporting characters use in Senecan drama in order to restrain the protagonists' *ira*. The therapeutic language used in these instances seems to carry an element of physicality/corporeality, which literally presents passions as movements, whose kinetic energy must be restrained. Although the phrase "movement of passions" may be ambiguous at this stage of the present paper, this aspect of emotions will be analyzed extensively in the following sections. Ultimately, my intention is to underscore the therapeutic language used in Seneca's tragedies and its exceptional motive quality.

The writer's predilection for particular Latin physical terms that refer to natural phenomena, movements of objects, and so on, is more than just an interesting stylistic choice. Within Seneca's corpus, words that describe the physical/natural world take on new meanings, as they are used to talk about emotions in a literal, rather than a metaphorical manner. In ancient literature, the physical world and its processes are often used to convey the intensity and ferocity of emotions, given that something tangible and observable constitutes a far more realistic way of describing and communicating abstract concepts. On the other hand, this tendency in Seneca's writings represents the writer's view of passions, in the sense that emotions do not simply stand for a notional and abstract entity, but for a literal and tangible one. While this observation resonates with Seneca's representation of passions, it also points us to the core of Stoic thought, where passions are presented as literally moving and tangible objects, flowing through the body, whilst their ferocity is only hindered by obstructing their movement.

1. The Language of Movement

The language Seneca uses in his tragedies with relation to emotional restraint often encompasses a notion of movement that loosely follows two schemes. The first is equivalent to 'halting the force of a passion', where force is understood and described as an *impetus*, whilst the second one is related to the action of driving a passion outside one's soul. In this regard, the distinction between the two verbal schemes of movement, forged for the purposes of this paper, is not incidental, for it illustrates Seneca's view on the movement of emotions,

² A detailed analysis of the history of anger's treatment exceeds the scope of this paper. In classical Athens anger had not only its place, but its advocates, with Aristotle arguing that the absence of anger (*arogesia*) was no better than irascibility; Harris (2001) 82. For a brief overview regarding the Aristotelian view on emotions, see Gill (1997) 5-8. The philosophical school which exhibited a consistent focus on emotional therapy during the Hellenistic period is none other than the Stoic, sharing some common ideas with Epicureanism. Within this context, one of Chrysippus' books focusing on passions was known as the 'therapeutic' or ethical book; For this title, see *SVF* III.457, 461, 474; Cf. Gould (1970) 186-188; Nussbaum (1994) 368.

while clarifying the relevant arguments for the reader of this article. More specifically, this distinction is evident in the opening of the third Book of *De Ira* 3.1.1, which reads as follows:

Quod maxime desiderasti, Novate, nunc facere temptabimus, iram excidere animis aut certe refrenare et impetus eius inhibere.

[We shall now, Novatus, attempt to do what you have especially desired· we shall try to banish anger from the mind, or at least to bridle and restrain its fury.]

As a result of these two verbal schemes, language's style, in general, displays an alignment with Stoic theory of emotion that cannot be dismissed as incidental. The reason Seneca's language focuses on movement can be explained with three paradigms from his treatises, which are central to the purposes and the observations, made in this paper. To begin with, attention should be given to the nature of passions themselves, namely the fact that, according to the Stoics, they constitute violent movements. Chrysippus uses the definition of affection from Zeno, describing it as *ἄλογόν τε καὶ παρὰ φύσιν κίνησιν ψυχῆς [...] καὶ πλεονάζουσιν ὀρμήν*.³ In this sense, Cicero in his *Tusculan Disputations* 4.48 presents Zeno's two definitions of passions, that is of an unnatural and irrational movement of the soul (*perturbatio sit aversa a ratione contra naturam animi commotio*), as well as a strong vigorous impulse (*perturbatio sit appetitus vehementior*). Seneca describes what Cicero calls *perturbatio* and *commotio* in this case as an *impetus*, namely a motive power of the soul.⁴ As maintained by the Stoic theory, it is not itself an action, but a movement of the intellect towards an action. The fact that, according to Seneca, passion is itself a motion, can be juxtaposed with the observation that a steady and serene mind is one which lacks movement. In *De Tranquillitate Animi* 9.2.3, the philosopher equates peace of mind (*ego tranquillitatem voco*) with the stability of mind (*stabilem animi sedem*), a verbal selection denoting absence of movement.

Moreover, the motive language which Seneca employs in his phenomenological description of anger in the *De Ira* can also be related to the fact that anger, in particular, may cause people to lose control over their bodily movements. For instance, in *De Ira* the angry man is described bearing "spurt steps, restless hands" (*De Ira* 1.1.3: *citatus gradus, inquietae manus*, c.f. *De Ira* 3.4.2: *adice articularum crepitem, cum se ipsae manus frangunt, et pulsatum saepius pectus*, "Then add the beat of the joints when the hands break and the beating of the chest"). Accordingly, Medea displays a lack of control over her body (*Med.* 385: *talis recursat huc et huc motu effero, furoris ore signa lymphati gerens*, "so she runs now here, now there, with frantic rush, marks of distracted passion in her face").⁵ In this sense, the

³ Galen *PHP*, 4.2.8, p. 238 De Lacy.

⁴ This term is considered a direct translation of the ancient Greek term *hormê*, namely a movement of thought towards something in the sphere of action. The impulse, according to the Stoics, is caused by an ascent to an impression; Vogt (2006) 67. For an account regarding the Stoic theory about impulses, see Inwood (1985) 42–101; Brennan (2003) 265–9.

⁵ The same motif can be traced in *Phaedra*, where the heroine, stricken by her passion appears unable to control her actual actions. Her passion towards Hippolytus impels her to follow him in the forests (235: *sequi per altanemora*), or towards the sea (241: *per ipsa maria sifugiet, sequar*). Verbs like *sequor* bear Stoic connotations

fact that characters like Phaedra and Medea bear all the tell-tale signs of anger on their bodies is not a causal result of vague and intangible emotion, but a corporeal reflection, that is a physical consequence, of an emotion.⁶

According to my interpretation, the third reason for Seneca's motive language corresponds to the corporeal nature of Stoicism. In this theory, the mind, the mental state and passions are material things and physical facts. According to the early Stoics, anything that is real and interacts with the body is corporeal. By showing that the soul is a mixture of corporeal air and fire, the Stoics substantiated their argument that mental states and affections, which interact with the latter, are also to be corporeal.⁷ This can be inferred from several arguments Seneca applies to his *Epistles*, such as in Letter 106, which reads as follows (*Ep.* 106.20):

Quod imperat corpori, corpus est, quod vim corpori adfert, corpus. Bonum corporis corporale est, bonum hominis et corporis bonum est; itaque corporale est.

[Only a body can control or forcefully affect another body. The good of the body is corporeal; a man's good is related to his bodily good; therefore, it is bodily.]

The fact that passions represent not just a vague, but rather an actual movement of the mind can be also deduced from Phaedra's words to her Nurse, when she explains her failure to control her infatuation with Hippolytus (*Phaedra*, 177-83).

Quae memoras scio
vera esse, nutrix; sed furor cogit sequi
peiora. vadit animus in praeceps sciens
remeatque frustra sana consilia appetens.
sic, cum gravatam navita adversa ratem
propellit unda, cedit in vanum labor
et victa prono puppis aufertur vado

[I know the things you say
are true: but my lust forces me to follow
the worse decision. My mind knows, but it wanders,
yearning for wise advice, and tries in vain to return.
As when a sailor propels an overloaded boat
against the current, but his effort fails, he yields,

related to the lack of mastery that the protagonist exhibits towards her body, as she follows her passion almost reluctantly.

⁶ The connection between physical objects and passions is important within the Stoic thought, hence it would require a paper on its own. In short, this relation is revealed for instance by the fact that the inanimate body bears the signals of the passion of anger. Seneca often elucidates his characters' soul by a consistent focus on *incessus*, *vultus*, and *gestus*. Of all passions, anger is the most tangible emotion with the philosopher asserting: *De Ira* 1.1.5.; *ira se profert et in faciem exit, quantoquemaior, hoc efferue sci tmanifestius*, "anger shows itself openly and appears in the countenance, and the greater it is, the more plainly it boils forth". For more regarding the foregoing, see Evans (1937); Evans (1950).

⁷ Boeri (2001) 726-8; Strange (2004) 36-8; Graver (2007) 18.

and the ship is swept away by the gushing water]⁸

Although Phaedra is willing to follow the nurse's advice, she is incapable, because her emotion makes her passive. Phrases like *cogit sequi* (178) and *vadit animus in praeceps* (179) are not just used metaphorically. In fact, it is my hypothesis that, when Phaedra asserts that her soul “*moves on to the abyss*” (179), and “*comes back seeking for sane counsels*” (180), she does not describe a plainly figurative mental process, but an actual motion of the corporeal soul. Given that for the Stoics any passion should be driven outside the mind, people should resist its movement (both mental and physical), since emotions can lead them astray. Anger, the wave (*unda*) in the metaphor above (181-3), can overturn the ship, which is ultimately carried away in the same way that the soul is unable to resist passions and eventually yields to them.⁹

But why is the movement of the body connected to the movement of passions or, more accurately, why are passions considered movements and actual bodies? The philosopher explains this in another passage of Letter 106:

Etiam nunc cui tanta vis est, ut impellat et cogat et retineat et inhibeat, corpus est. Quid ergo? Non timor retinet? Non audacia impellit? Non fortitudo inmittit et impetum dat? Non moderatio refrenat ac revocat? Non gaudium extollit? Non tristitia adducit?(*Ep.* 106. 9).

[Furthermore, any object that has power to move, force, restrain, or control, is corporeal. Come now! Does not fear hold us back? Does not boldness drive us ahead? Bravery spurs us on, and give us momentum? Restraint reins us in and call us back? Joy raises our spirits? Sadness casts us down?]¹⁰

Therefore, according to Seneca, passions and the soul itself are corporeal, for they cause the mind and the body to move. While Seneca's tendency towards corporeality seems undeniable, his above quoted passage may be confusing for the reader, due to the vague and twofold nature of the passions' movement. It appears that, when Seneca writes that “fear holds us back” and “boldness drives us ahead”, he refers to the actual bodily motion. Nevertheless, I tend to believe that the writer also illustrates the movement of the soul towards the action, irrespective of the causal result. In this sense, the assertion that joy raises our spirits (*gaudium extollit*), appears to denote more of a mental rather than a bodily action. It is clear from

⁸ Translated by E. Wilson (2010).

⁹ Terms such as passivity and apathy of the mind can easily give rise to confusion and dispute. Passivity is related to the fact that “passions have in their very nature a propensity to ungovernable excess”. For an account of Chrysippus' viewpoint towards the passivity of passion see Nussbaum (1994) 396. The fact that, according to Seneca, passion is itself a motion, can be juxtaposed with the observation that a steady and serene mind is one which lacks movement. Cf. Sen. *Ep.* 23.7. See Cic. *Tusc.* 4.10 (*animi tranquillitatem, id est placidam quietamque constantiam*, “tranquility of mind, that is calm and quiet constancy”). Both the advocates of the moderation of passions as well as those of the extirpation of them attempted to offer some kind of tranquility. Democritus described the latter as *euthumia*, while Seneca proposes the Latin *tranquillitas*. It can also be described as *ataraxia*, namely the lack of disturbance according to the Epicureans; Sorabji (2000) 182.

¹⁰ Translated by R. M.Gummere (1925).

passages such as the above that the mind and its subsequent physical manifestations are intimately related, within Seneca's philosophy. Additionally, the writer's frequent usage of words that describe emotions in a physically intensive manner should not be interpreted as a metaphor, but rather as an attempt to show that passions and the soul are corporeal. Finally, in the above passage, it must also be noted that restraint (*moderatio*) can halter (*refrenat*) and recall (*revocat*). For it is exactly this ability of discipline that secondary characters will use in their advice towards the impassionate protagonists in Senecan drama, albeit unsuccessfully.

1a. The verbal scheme of halting the movement of emotions

Having established that passions are movements, both mental and bodily, the language used by Seneca in his tragedies to address the extirpation of passions can be better understood. The fact that, as already stated, passions are not just irrational movements of the mind, but actual motions of the corporeal soul may now inform our analysis of the therapeutic advice some minor characters offer to the protagonists in Seneca's tragedies. Phrases such as "the literal meaning of the term", "the physical aspect of the word" and so on, will intentionally be used to substantiate the corporeality of Seneca's language, prevalent in his tragedies. The lines from the tragedies which encompass the language of movement will, then, be juxtaposed with paradigms from Seneca's prose work in an attempt to demonstrate that the motive language permeates his writings.

The first category I intend to examine is the advice regarding 'halting the force of a passion', where, in most cases, the force is described as an *impetus*.¹¹ Starting with *Medea*, this verbal scheme occurs from the first stages of the play. *Medea*'s anger culminates after hearing the wedding song, which leads her to assert that she wants to attack (156: *libet ire contra*, "I want confrontation"). This line is suggestive of the movement that passion generates. The Nurse responds and urges the heroine to control her impulsive rage (157: *siste furialem impetum*, "Stop this crazy passion").¹² The striking verb *sistere* is used in general to express the obstruction of literal movement as well as the action of preventing something from continuing (usually an activity or emotion).¹³ The exceptional physicality that this term bears is used in several instances by Seneca to convey an intention to obstruct an emotion. In this sense, *Phaedra* is urged by her Nurse in two instances to stop her anger and frenzied impulse (*Phae.* 247: *precor, furorem siste teque ipsa adiuva!* *Phae.* 263: *siste furibundum impetum*).¹⁴ *Sistere* is sometimes used by Seneca in his prose work to express obstruction of emotion, but it is most frequently used in compounds to convey the same meaning. The

¹¹ C.f. *De Ira* 3.10.1, where Seneca asserts that it is imperative to restrain one's impetuosity (*inhibere impetum*) as soon as possible.

¹² For an almost identical verbal scheme cf. *Sen. Phae.* 262-3: *siste furibundum impetum*, "control this frantic impulse".

¹³ See *OLD s.v.siste* 8a; e.g. *Ov. Ep.* 19.179: *siste metum virgo*, "stop your fears virgin"; cf. *Sen. Ep.* 116.4: *lacrimas suas et voluptates ubi volet siste*, "her tears and her pleasures stay where she wants".

¹⁴ C.f. *Ag.* 203-4: *Regina, frena temet et siste impetus et quanta temptes cogita*, "Queen, restrain yourself and control your impulses and think as much as you try".

adjective *furialem* derives from the Furies and it is, thus, used for actions inspired by madness.¹⁵

Nevertheless, what is more substantial in the line 157 of *Medea* is the noun *impetus*. At first, the word entails the concept of motion and, therefore, it is deployed to illustrate, amongst other things, the force of natural phenomena.¹⁶ Moreover, it conjures an element of violence, efficient to describe the violence and the force instigated by passions.¹⁷ In *Medea*'s case, the impassioned mental movement that the heroine experiences, has the force of a violent natural phenomenon and, as such, it should be restrained.¹⁸ The violence of the mind's impulse is similarly described in Seneca's *Ben* 2.14.1 as an *impetus ille flagrantis animi qui consilium fugat* ("when that frenzied impulse which masters our good sense has passed away").¹⁹ Seneca's recurrent choice of this term is not incidental, but rather results from its previous application, notably that of Cicero as a synonym of an impulse that prompts the mind towards an action.²⁰ Nevertheless, when Cicero uses *impetus* metaphorically to describe a mental force, Seneca uses the very same term not just as a mental force, but, additionally, as an actual and corporeal mental movement.

Since the word *impetus* occupies a central position in my argument, a substantial part of the analysis that follows will be devoted on its meaning. As stated in the introduction to this paper, the term represents a movement of the mind towards an action, whilst it constitutes a translation of the ancient Greek word *ὄρμη*. A search of Seneca's writings reveals 158 instances of *impetus* in his works, underscoring its significance within his philosophy. Studying these instances, I have found that the term is generally used to express a literal and physical movement of the intellect towards an action, often accompanied by verbs which express an impediment to that movement.

Even though it is not possible to examine and analyze each of these instances, I will examine the paradigms I regard as most representative for the purposes of this essay. To start with, *Medea*, later in the tragedy urges herself to look for new punishments, unprecedented and prepare herself for action. Therefore, the heroine uses her intellect literally to stir its own momentum and follow its impulses (*Med* 895: *quid, anime, cessas? sequere felicem impetum,*

¹⁵ See *OLD* s.v. *furialis-is-e* 3; e.g. *Ov. Met.* 6.84: *quod pretium speret pro tam furialibus ausis*, "which hope is the price for such furious darings".

¹⁶ E.g. *Lucr* 2.593: *ex imis furit ignibus impetus aetnae*, "The fury of Etna's fire rages from the bottom".

¹⁷ See *Ep.* 7.6, where the noun *impetus* is used to signify the shock of faults that approaches, a hostile action and a violent attack.

¹⁸ The impulse which a passion generates can be related to the so-called hormetic or impulsive impressions. All desires within the Stoic thought are impulses and, as such, assents to impulsive impressions; Brennan (1998) 28.

¹⁹ Cf. *Herc. F.* 975: *pectoris saniparum...compesce...impetum*; *Liv.* 26.18.10: *utiam resederat impetus animorum ardorque*, "as soon as the impetuosity and burning of the soul had subsided". In *Liv.* 36.29.1 *impetus* is described as a sudden accession of anger which can lead people to war (*ut...illo impetus irae concitari potuerint*, "so that they could be stirred up by that attack of anger").

²⁰ *Off.* 1.49; see *OLD* s.v. *impetus* 3a; (*De Or.* 2.312: *quibus animorum impetus eorum, qui audiant, aut impellantur aut reflectantur*, "by which they evoke the impulses of those who listen, or are impelled, or reflected", *Inv.* 2.54: *Temperantia est rationis in libidinematque in alios non rectos impetus animi firma et moderata domination*, "Temperance is over lust of reason and over others not upright impulses of mind with firm and moderate domination"). The impulse instigated by passions and producing action is described by Chrysippus as excessive *hormai pleonazousai* (see Gal. *PHP* 4.2.8-18). In this case, it is portrayed as the case of someone running, who cannot stop at will; Müller (2014) 75. For equivalent uses of the term in Seneca, see *De Ira* 2.1.3-5, 3.4-5, *Ep.* 37.5, *Phae.* 255, *Pho.* 347, *Ag.* 127, 203, *Thy.* 136, *Tro.* 250; Boyle (2014) 126.

“Why, soul, do you delay? Follow the happy impulse”). The verbs *cedere* and *sequi* operate within the context of prompting the movement of the intellect (*impetus*) towards an action. Similarly, the Nurse in *Phaedra*, prompts the protagonist to check her unbridled mental attack and confine her mind (255-6: *Moderare, alumna, mentis effrenae impetus, animos coerce*). In addition to stressing the mental impulse, which is present in this sentence, the verb *coercere* accentuates the importance of stabilizing the soul’s movement. As a final note, a similar use of the word occurs in *Phoenissae*, where Antigone attempts to convince Oedipus to abandon his grief and go to Thebes in order to stop the conflict between his sons (*Phoe.* 347-8: *Mitte violentum impetum doloris*, “Cast away the violent impulse of the pain”). *Mittere* does not act within the context of halting the movement of a passion, but rather within the framework of driving it outside of one's soul, which will be discussed in the second part, as stated in the introduction of this article.²¹

Among Seneca's treatises, the following quotation epitomizes the term *impetus* (*De Ira* 1.7.4):

Ut in praeceptis datis corporibus nullum sui arbitrium est nec resistere morarive deiecta potuerunt, sed consilium omne et paenitentiam inrevocabilis praecipitatio abscidit et non licet eo non pervenire quo non ire licuisset, ita animus, si in iram amorem aliosque se proiecit adfectus, non permittitur reprimere impetum; rapiat illum oportet et ad imum agat pondus suum et vitiorum natura proclivis.

[Those who have flung themselves over a precipice have no control over their movements, nor can they stop or slacken their pace when once started, for their own headlong and irremediable rashness has left no room for either reflexion or remorse, and they cannot help going to lengths which they might have avoided. So, also, the mind, when it has abandoned itself to anger, love, or any other passion, is unable to check itself: its own weight and the downward tendency of vices must carry the man off and hurl him into the lowest depth.]

This passage is crucial, as it touches upon all the issues discussed thus far. It delineates an intellectual movement referred to by the word *impetus*. The latter is accompanied by explicitly physical terms which convey a sense of motion. As a result of the highly motive language used in this instance (*rapiat, agat*), as well as the corporeal aspect of emotions (*pondus suum*), the soul is literally defined as having the ability to drive an individual wherever it is compelled to go. The literal movement of the intellect, in this context, leads to the literal movement of the body, if the force is not restrained (*reprimere impetum*). Therefore, passions as well as the soul itself are corporeal, for they cause the mind and the body to move. It follows, then, that since the action of the mind precedes the one of the body, *impetus* is not an action in itself, but rather a movement by the intellect to initiate an action. What is more, the fact that the corporeal afflictions of the mind are inextricably intertwined with the afflictions of the body is underlined by the simile used in this passage. To introduce

²¹There are several instances within Seneca’s tragedies, where the term *impetus* is used to describe a mental movement; See *Tro.*250, *Med.* 381-2, *Med.* 411-4, *Med.* 901-3, *Phae.* 262-3, *Ag.* 125-7.

the theme of the intellect which has lost control of its impulses, in this passage, the writer uses a person who has lost control of his body.²²

In light of our discussion of the use of the term *impetus*, we can continue exploring phrases that communicate the intention to stop an emotional movement. The Nurse's attempts to restrain Medea's anger continue in lines 380-1, where the protagonist's inability to control her movements is again depicted (*Alumna, celerem quo rapis tectis pedem?*, "Mistress, why are you rushing away from the house?"). The Nurse impels her to curb her anger and control her aggression (*resiste et iras comprime ac retine impetum*, "Stop, suppress your anger, control yourself"), a line where the scheme of halting the motion of passion, expressed by a series of striking terms, is exceptionally distinctive. The verb *resistere* underscores again the aspect of movement or, more accurately, the absence of movement.²³ Because passions are movements, and, therefore, produce an action, the best reaction is to hold still in the face of their kinetic energy.²⁴ Using the verb *resistere*, a representative passage that accords to this scheme reads as follows (*De Ira* 3.1.4):

Cetera vitia inpellunt animos, ira praecipitat. Etiam si resistere contra adfectus suos non licet, at certe adfectibus ipsis licet stare: haec, non secus quam fulmina procellaeque et si qua alia inrevocabilia sunt quia non eunt sed cadunt, vim suam magis ac magis tendit.

[Other vices incite the mind, anger overthrows it. Even if a man may not resist his passions, yet at least the passions themselves may halt; anger intensifies its vehemence more and more, like the lightning's stroke, the hurricane, and the other things that are incapable of control for the reason that they not merely move, but fall.]

This passage is significant because it captures in the most vivid way the ebb and flow of emotions. To start with, it borrows a plethora of Latin terms that have direct or indirect obvious physical meanings (*inpellunt, praecipitat, resistere, stare*). Rather than simply serving as a metaphor, these terms are meant to accentuate the physical and motive nature of emotions. Additionally, it is interesting to note the interplay between the absence of movement and the presence of movement that is portrayed here. On this basis, according to Seneca, most emotions have a kinetic energy, albeit not a violent one, for they are capable of standing still (*stare*). On the contrary, since anger is a very volatile emotion, it can never be controlled once it manifests. This feature makes anger the most important emotion to master.

Returning now to the passage from *Medea*, by using the word *impetum*, the Nurse does not prompt the heroine to stop just the action per se, but also its mental force, (i.e. her anger),

²²Another extremely important passage worth consulting is *De Ira* 2.2.1, where the mind is literally presented as moving. For more instances of the term *impetus* in Seneca and its use as a mental movement see *De Ira* 2.3.4, 3.1.1.

²³E.g. Plin. *Pan* 10.4: *tu adhuc in secundo (loco) resistere atque etiam renescere optabas*, "you wished you were still in (second) place and grow back again".

²⁴The language of Seneca with reference to emotional advice has a military element. Within this context, the verb denotes the resistance towards an enemy (see OLD *s.v.resisto* 3.a) or, in this case, the resistance towards emotions.

which can lead to a potential action. An additional verb which conveys the sense of discipline and imposition of control is *comprimere*. In this context, it refers to the suppression of movement, speech,²⁵ and, for the sake of this interpretation, emotions.²⁶ Seneca in *Agamemnon* (224-5) uses the verb *comprimere* in an attempt to restrain Clytemnystra's fury and her revengeful plan against Agamemnon in a manner parallel to Medea's:

comprime adfectus truces
mentemque tibimet ipsa pacifica tuam

[Control your fierce passions, and set your own soul at peace]

The verb *comprimere* becomes similar to this usage in *De Ira* 1.10.1, where discipline and enforcing emotional control are implied:

Ideo numquam adsumet ratio in adiutorium improvidos et violentos impetus, apud quos nihil ipsa auctoritatis habeat, quos numquam comprimere possit.

[For this cause reason will never call to its aid blind and fierce impulses, over whom she herself possesses no authority, and which she never can restrain save.]

Last, *retinere* is used both for halting the movement of a physical object²⁷ but, also, figuratively, for restraining the progress of an activity. What is more, Seneca has a physical object in mind, both, in *Dial.* 7.25.6, where he uses *retinere* to describe the halting of the movement of a human body, as well as in *Medea* 38²⁸ to illustrate the restraint of the physical soul. Throughout these examples, the reader can clearly see the series of words that are exceptionally corporeal and physical, which operate within the context of discouraging passions. In light of these examples, and Seneca's other works, it is clear that the writer does not mean these 'corporeal phrases' metaphorically. On the contrary, this linguistic predilection is evident of the bodily function of emotions and soul. What is more, rather than an intangible expression of an intangible emotion, characters like Phaedra and Medea bear all the tell-tale signs of anger on their bodies as a reflection or consequence of physical emotion.

1b. The verbal scheme of driving a passion away

The motives discerned in *Medea*, are also vigorously depicted in Seneca's *Phaedra*. In this tragedy, the second scheme of the advice, related to the action of driving a passion outside

²⁵ E.g. Sen *Dial.* 7.26.7: *ut intenti et compressa voce audiat*, "so that you may hear an earnest and repressed [low] voice".

²⁶ E.g. Liv. 9.38.14: *insignem dolorem in gentu comprimi animo*.

²⁷ E.g. Sen. *Dial.* 7.25.6: *corpus in proclivi resistere debet, adversus ardua impelli*, "the body must be resisted on a downward slope, to be pushed against the steep slopes"; see *OLD s.v. retineo* 3a.

²⁸ C.f. *Ag.* 800-1: *Ag. Hanc fida famuli turba, dum excutiat deum, retinete ne quid impotens peccet furor*, "This loyal crowd of servants, while shaking the gods, keep fast any uncontrollable madness sin".

one's soul, may be detected. A remarkable example of this kind is the Nurse's exhortation to Phaedra to banish the terrible deed from her mind (169):

Expelle facinus mente castifica horridum

[Send in exile from your mind this dreadful act.]

In the same way that an individual should expel something tangible from his land or physical from his body, similarly corporeal emotions should be banished from the soul. The deployment of the verb *expellere* to describe the removal of an emotion from the soul recurs in Seneca's tragedies (e.g. *Med.* 557: *omnia ex animo expuli precor*, "I am begging you to expel everything from the soul"),²⁹ in addition to his prose works (e.g. *Ep.* 88.35: *laxum spatium res magna desiderat. Expellantur omnia, totum pectus illi vacet*, "A great thing requires ample space. Let all things be expelled, let your whole breast become free").³⁰ The philosopher's claim in *Ep.* 88.35 emphasizes in a vibrant way the physical aspect of emotions, or, better, the spatial aspect of the soul. The latter, should be emptied (*vacet*) by the removal of the negative things (*expellantur*), in order to accept in its wide space (*laxum spatium*) virtue.³¹

Expelling passions from the soul is a crucial action within the Stoic school of thought, which corresponds to Seneca's assertion:

Careamus hoc malo purgemusque mentem et extirpemus radicitus, quae quamvis tenuia undecumque haeserint renascentur, et iram non temperemus, sed ex toto removeamus (*De Ira* 3.42.1).

[Let us be free from this evil, let us clear our minds of it, and extirpate root and branch a passion which grows again wherever the smallest particle of it finds a resting-place. Let us not moderate anger, but get rid of it altogether.]³²

Anger constitutes an emotion from which we are required to purify our minds (*purgemus*), by extirpating it or simply by removing it completely (*ex toto removeamus*). The selection of words is graphic, but also literal, with the verb *extirpere* for instance denoting literally the action of separating something from its roots,³³ and, therefore alluding to the expulsion of corporeal passions from the body.³⁴

²⁹ Cf. Sen. *Herc. F.* 1089: *nec ad huc omnis expulit aestus*, "yet no tide has driven them all".

³⁰ Cf. Sen. *Ep.* 116.1.

³¹ Cf. *Ep.* 99.26, where Seneca asserts that grief should either not be given place in the soul at all, or else should be driven out (*dolorem aut admittendum in animum non esse aut cito expellendum*, "that pain should not be admitted into the mind or be expelled quickly").

³² Translated by Aubrey Stewart (1900).

³³ E.g. Calp. *Decl.* 26: *antiquas arbores extirpant ut novas inserant*, "uproot old trees to insert new ones".

³⁴ The same pattern is vividly depicted in *Ep.* 94.68, where Seneca maintains that virtue must be conducted into the place which vices have seized (*inducenda in occupatum locum virtus*), whilst the latter should be rooted out (*extirpet*). The action of leading virtue to its original place (here *pectus*), the fact that errors drive us

In this context, when secondary characters prompt the protagonists to “halt the motion of their passion”, to “remove it from their body”, with phrases such as “*siste furialem impetum*” (*Med.* 157) “*omnia ex animo expuli precor*” (*Phae.*169) they exhibit Seneca’s predilection for terms that bear a particular physical element. When thinking of the emotions against this backdrop, the language of movement acquires a new meaning. Ultimately, emotions should be restrained, and the individuals should resist their motion, not because they are simply somewhat vague and immaterial movements of the mind, but because they literally endorse spatial and physical motions of the thought. This material relation between passions and soul is exceptionally apparent in the use of ancient Greek terms regarding emotions, such as *eparsis* and *sustole* which denote an actual physical swelling and contraction, respectively.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, the purpose of this paper was to analyze the advice offered by secondary characters in Senecan drama, which seeks to discipline emotion. Although his protagonists break rationality and overstep their bounds, the secondary characters’ attempts to restrain them reveal a special interest in discipline and obedience. Studying Seneca’s tragedies, selected letters and treatises, with a particular focus on *De Ira*, I have come across a number of phrases which relate to the two verbal schemes of movement described above. In this context, the language of movement, as it was referred to within the framework of the current paper, emerges as a particularly influential aspect of Seneca’s thought.

Three factors contribute, according to my viewpoint, to the motive language of emotions, as detailed in the introduction to this essay. Briefly explained, the Stoics defined them as violent motions of the mind towards an action, material objects and physical facts, rather than intangible entities. Furthermore, they cause the actual human body to move in the sense that all the tell-tale physical signs of anger on the body are not a causal result of a vague and intangible emotion, but a corporeal reflection of a physical passion. From the paradigms employed in this paper, it is evident that Seneca uses vocabulary with an exceptionally physical and motive touch to convey his sentiments. Within Roman literature, these terms are either used to describe phenomena from the natural world, or to allude to emotions, albeit metaphorically. Nevertheless, they seem to acquire a new meaning within Seneca’s corpus. Specifically, while the writer deploys terms, such as “*repellere*” and “*comprimere*” solely literally, by presenting phenomena and processes of the physical world, he also uses them to highlight the physical and kinetic qualities of tangible emotions. By presenting emotions as corporeal entities endowed with motive abilities, the writer creates an atmosphere of conflict between humans and emotions. A part of this tendency can be explained by the fact that a theoretical and more internal aspect of emotion can be difficult to handle and fight. Seneca’s language of movement, his fascination towards the physical world, as well as the distinctive

involuntarily to their own direction (*expulerit*) and as such they should be abolished, is indicative of Seneca’s predilection for the language of movement. What is more, where Aristotelian/Peripatetic rivals would endorse the moderation of passions, Seneca, with passages like the above cited, seems to favor their extirpation; See *Ep.* 116.1 = *SVF* III.443. For the advice that passions must be pulled out root and branch, see Lactantius, *SVF* III.444, 447; c.f. Cic. *Tusc.* 3.13ff.; Sen. *Ep.* 22.15; Nussbaum (1994) 389.

corporeality of his thought are particularly substantial aspects in Seneca's corpus, which, if examined closely, can potentially give rise to new arguments regarding the writer's outlook towards emotions.

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