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Aeneas Furens? The Reception of Herculean Aeneas in Seneca's *Hercules*

Kate Hildreth

Virgil goes out of his way to blur – to problematise – the simple dichotomy between Olympian hero [Hercules] and chthonic monster [Cacus]: the hero of reason falls prey to a fiery fury that seems the more proper quality of the fire-breathing monster Cacus. The hero of civilization and future god falls below the level of humanity into a semi-bestial passion.[1]

Keywords: Seneca, Aeneas, Cacus, *Hercules*, *furor*.

Introduction

In his seminal chapter "Virgil and Tragedy," Philip Hardie outlines the ambiguity present in Vergil's depiction of Hercules. Hercules, Hardie argues, represents a "transgressive hero," one who challenges distinctions, and provides an opportunity for tragedians to explore uncertainties.[2] Scholars have also long recognized the connection between Hercules and Aeneas, as well as the connection between Aeneas and Augustus, and Vergil's attempt to extol, per Galinsky's and other pro-Augustan readings, Augustus through the characterization of Aeneas

1 Hardie (1997) 319. Many thanks to the readers of my article for their helpful comments!

2 Hardie (1997) 320. Walsh (1977) argues that *Aeneid* 8 serves as an 'interlude' between books 7 and 9, and provides an opportunity for Vergil to compare Aeneas, Hercules, Evander, and Saturn as 'forerunners' of Augustus. Fordyce compares Hercules' defeat of Cacus and Aeneas' of Turnus to Augustus' triumph over Antony. xxiv-xxv.

and Hercules.[3] Although, upon first reading, Vergil's portrayal of the hero, who is currently being celebrated by Evander upon Aeneas' arrival in Latium, may seem favorable to both Hercules and consequently Aeneas, recent scholars have made note of the somewhat-problematic depiction of the figure. As Davide Secci has illustrated, "the Cacus-Hector parallel not only hints at Cacus' role as the victim of a much stronger foe, but it also implies the ensuing Hercules-Achilles parallel, which reinforces the recurrent mention of Hercules' frenzied savagery and of his lust for revenge for having been wronged personally".[4]

In this way, it is tempting to interpret the portrayal of Hercules as a bloodthirsty monster, desperate to take revenge upon Cacus for his own personal reasons as an indictment of not only Hercules himself but also Aeneas. As Michael Putnam aptly notes, "the twining of Cacus and Hercules by means of pride and anger questions not only the quality of Hercules' immediate mission but also any easy linkage between Hercules and future Roman political genius, especially if such a bond is meant to assert a sense of moral superiority".[5]

So too have scholars elucidated the links between books 8 and 12 of the *Aeneid*, and the connections between Cacus and Turnus.[6] The extent to which these connections are problematic or tenuous, and whether their ambiguities should be read as pro- or anti-Augustan, has been the subject of considerable debate.

A great deal of Vergilian scholarship has also tended to focus on the tragic elements ever-present within Rome's founding epic.[7] Indeed, Martial refers to Vergil as 'Buskin-equipped' (*cothurnatus*) Maro (5.5.8, 7.63.5).[8] In light of the similarities between Vergil's epic narrative and tragedy, and the poet's decision to include depictions of the tragic hero Hercules, it is surprising that little attention has been paid to the reception of Vergil's Hercules into later Roman drama. References to Vergil appear more frequently than those to any other authors in the works of Seneca, with 119 quotations.[9] Michael Putnam addresses the similarities between Vergil's

3 Secci (2013) 202.

4 Secci (2013) 195-227.

5 Putnam (1995) 257.

6 Mynors (1969), Bernstein (2018).

7 Panoussi (2010).

8 Secci (2013) 312.

9 Papaiannou (120).

Juno in the *Aeneid* and Seneca's Juno in *Hercules Furens,* arguing that in Seneca's play, the goddess "span[s] the course of the *Aeneid*," and is driven by her grief, much like the titular hero.[10] Indeed, Putnam positions the Vergilian Hercules as "spiritual ancestor" of the Senecan, and appropriates these connections to advance his argument in favor of an anti-Augustan narrative.[11] Putnam explains, "as Seneca elsewhere demonstrates, this hubris is a vigorous incentive behind Hercules' frenzy. It is one in which Virgil carefully has Augustus also share. In *Hercules Furens* we watch the development and permutation of fury through the progress of a play whose demarcation in striking ways mimic the outline of the Aeneid".[12]

I offer this paper as one in conversation with both Putnam and Trinacty, in which I shall further elucidate how Seneca appropriates the connection between Aeneas and Hercules in the *Aeneid* to enrich his tragic depiction of Hercules' fury—the very fury that leads to the murder of the hero's wife and children. In fact, Vergil's own Hercules in book 8 of the *Aeneid* carries the adjective 'raging,' (*furens*, *Aen.* 8. 228-230),[13]

> *Ecce furens animis aderat Tirynthius omnemque*
> *accessum lustrans huc ora ferebat et illuc,*
> *dentibus infrendens…*
>
> Look how Hercules arrived, raging uncontrollably,
> Surveying every entrance, whipping his head around,
> Gnashing his teeth.

Aeneas is also described as *furens* in *Aen*. 10.604,[14]

> *Talia per campos edebat funera ductor*
> *Dardanius torrentis aquae vel turbinis atri*
> *more furens.*
>
> Of this sort were the deaths that the Dardanian commander
> carried out through the camps, raging in the way of
> rushing water or a black tornado.

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[10] Putnam (1995) 255. Christopher Trinacty (2014), too, notes the connection between the Vergilian and the Senecan Juno and her role in the authors' respective works.

[11] Putnam (1995) 257.

[12] Putnam (1995) 258.

[13] Fratantuono and Smith (2018) cite Dainotti here who writes of the suspense cultivated by the hypermetric line. 346.

[14] Frantatuono and Smith (2018) 346.

I shall direct my focus on three major connections between Seneca's portrayal of Hercules in *Hercules Furens* and Vergil's portrayal of Aeneas in *Aeneid* book 12. I shall conclude with a brief examination of the portrayal of Augustus in Seneca's *De brevitate vitae* and of Aeneas in Seneca's *Ep.* 56.

First, I shall analyze the last scene of the *Aeneid* where Aeneas slays Turnus as he begs for mercy in the position of a suppliant and the way that both Seneca and Vergil depict the anger of their characters, Hercules and Aeneas respectively. Notably, both Aeneas and Hercules kill while their victims, Aeneas' foe and Hercules' sons, stretch out their hands. I shall then examine the descriptions of sleep that occur both in the drama and the epic. In the ode immediately following Hercules' merciless slaughter of his wife and children, the tragic chorus sings of sleep (*sopor*), '...which binds indomitable limbs…' (*indomitos alliget artos*, *Hercules* 1079).' So too in the scene immediately preceding Turnus' death does Vergil allude to sleep which produces the effect in which '...known strengths of the body are insufficient…' (... *non corpore notae | sufficiunt vires…*, *Aen* 12.911-912).' The tragic nature and structure of *Aeneid* book 12, as well as the connections drawn between Hercules and Aeneas in *Aeneid* book 8, provide an excellent intertext for the reception of an Aenean-Hercules into Seneca's *Hercules Furens.*[15] In this way, deliberate allusions to Vergil's Aeneas and Hercules in Seneca's own Olympian hero may provide modern readers with a more negative interpretation of Aeneas, and consequently of Augustus.[16] Based on these similarities, I argue in tandem with Putnam that Seneca's direct and indirect allusions to the *Aeneid* provide us with a window into the tragedian's interpretation of Aeneas and consequently, the reception of the interpretation of the emperor Augustus.

Anger and the murder of suppliants

In this section, I shall analyze the parallel scenes of Aeneas' and Hercules' murders of victims in the positions of suppliants. Near the close of the final book of the *Aeneid,* Aeneas seems to waver about whether to kill Turnus. The text reads (*Aen*. 12.939-941),

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[15] Highbarger (1948) and Hardie (1997).

[16] Fitch (1979) argues convincingly against previous interpretations of the close of *HF* as one showing a transformation of the eponymous hero. "… there is no significant change in Hercules' attitudes; what Seneca has dramatised is not a transformation, but on the contrary the rigidity and unresponsiveness of Hercules' character." 242.

… Stetit acer in armis
Aeneas volvens oculos dextramque repressit;
et iam iamque magis cunctantem flectere sermo
coeperat…

Aeneas stood fierce in his arms,
Whirling his eyes about and held back his right hand,
And presently he began to let up even more, delayed by the speech…

Turnus is almost able to sway Aeneas, and Aeneas begins to hesitate in his assault upon Turnus. However, the sight of Pallas' baldric around Turnus' neck re-ignites Aeneas' anger (*Aen.* 12.945-957),

Ille, oculis postquam saevi monumenta doloris
exuviasque hausit, furiis accensus et ira
terribilis…

He [Aeneas], after he drank in the spoils and the monuments of fierce grief with his eyes,
lit up by furies and terrible with anger…

As Tarrant notes, "Dido also looked at familiar objects filled with memories before her final words, 4.648-651, *hic, postquam Iliacas vestige notumque cubile | conspexit… | 'dulces exuviae*".[17]

The parallels between Aeneas' and Dido's respective scenes situate us in the realm of tragedy, especially in consideration of the particularly tragic depiction of Dido in book four.[18] Aeneas (and Dido) both seem to represent tragic figures, overcome by emotion during the climax of their individual stories.[19] It is precisely Dido's passion that leads to her demise, and Aeneas' passion that will lead to Turnus', even as his begs for his life. This comparison between Aeneas and Dido establishes book 12 as one parallel with book four and situates Aeneas and Turnus' final interaction within the realm of the tragic.

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17 Tarrant (2012) 336.

18 Hardie (1997).

19 Some scholars have tended to interpret Aeneas' final act as an example of the hero's '*vis temperata.*' (Galinsky (1966) 41). So too has Highbarger (1948) characterized the final book of the *Aeneid*, "If we seek for the 'teaching' of such a drama, as the Greeks always did, it is simply this, that *furor* brings with it only defeat in the end, whereas *pietas* is able to triumph over all obstacles." 121.

In Seneca's *Hercules Furens*, the word *ira* either in its adjectival or participial form, occurs fourteen times.[20] In one occurrence, Hercules himself appeals to anger, 'let anger rush upon all' (*ruat ira in omnis*). Then, after he recognizes the slayed bodies of his children and realizes that they died at his own hands, he turns his command to 'angered,' (*iratus*) Jove (*Hercules* 1202-1205),

> *Nunc parte ab omni, genitor, iratus tona.*
> *oblite nostri, vindica sera manu*
> *saltem nepotes. stelliger mundus sonet*
> *flammasque et hic et ille iaculetur polus.*
>
> Thunder at once, from every direction, angered father.
> Forgetful of me – at least vindicate your
> Grandsons with your delaying hand.
> Let the star-bearing heavens sound,
> And flames and pole be strewn about.

Evident here are several similarities between Aeneas, kindled with rage at the sight of Pallas' baldric and Hercules, who directs the rage of Jove upon himself; both authors employ a form of the word *ira* as well as a reference to the fiery effects of anger, with Vergil employing the participle, 'lit up,' (*accensus*) and Hercules via Seneca referring to flames, (*flammas*). Further, Amphitryon describes the fury which infected Hercules' mind and '... sent his family to their deaths,' (*idem tuos qui misit ad mortem furor*, *Hercules* 1049),' a reference to fury which is reminiscent of Aeneas', '*furiis accensus et ira terribilis…*, *Aen.* 12.945-957.'[21] Indeed, as Christopher Trinacty observes, "In the *Aeneid*, Hercules acts

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[20] More specifically, the word occurs eight times in the first half of the play: four times in Juno's opening monologue, twice in Theseus' speech, once in a tragic chorus and once in Megara's speech to Lycus. The other six occurrences come once in the speech of Hercules which precedes the hallucination that results in his mistaken slaughter of his wife and children: once to describe angered Jove, '*irato Iove* (*Hercules* 932),' and then four times afterward.

[21] Here it is also significant that in Euripides' version of *Heracles*, the hero is characterized more as one out of his mind and delusional rather than one who is incensed. Lyssa describes, "καὶ δὴ τινάσσει κρᾶτα βαλβίδων ἄπο| καὶ διαστρόφους ἑλίσσει σῖγα γοργωποὺς κόρας, | ἀμπνοὰς δ᾽ οὐ σωφρονίζει, ταῦρος ὡς ἐς ἐμβολήν, δεινὰ μυκᾶται δὲ Κῆρας ἀνακαλῶν τὰς Ταρτάρου. (*Heracles* 866-870)" Euripides' Heracles tosses his head about, rolls his eyes around, and breathes heavily. Seneca's Heracles is distinguished more by anger than madness, a characterization that lends greater similarity to Aeneas than to Euripides' Heracles.

as a model for Aeneas' heroism, but also evokes specific problems. One may wonder if the rage that Aeneas feels at the close of the epic ("burning with rage and terrible in his anger," *furiis accensus et ira terribilis*, 12.954-957) can be read into Hercules' own fury in Seneca's play".[22]

Here, I argue that Aeneas' rage can and in fact should be read into the Senecan Hercules. The fiery effect of anger is also reflected in descriptions of both Aeneas and Hercules. In his final act of book 12 and indeed of the entire epic, Vergil describes Aeneas as 'seething,' (*fervidus*, *Aen*. 12. 950-951),

> *Hoc dicens ferrum adverso sub pectore condit*
> *fervidus;*
>
> Saying this and seething, he [Aeneas] drives[23] his sword into his [Turnus'] turned-over chest…

This description, too, is reminiscent of Seneca's characterization of anger, one that is fiery and untempered. Vergil's tragedy ends with Aeneas as a different kind of *auctor* – one who drives his sword into his innocent victim's chest. Turnus, too, refers to Aeneas in similar verbiage (*Aen.* 12.894-895),

> *Ille caput quassans: "non me tua fervida terrent*
> *dicta, ferox; di me terrent et Iuppiter hostis."*
>
> That one, tossing his head about,
> "Your burning words do not frighten me, beast,
> The gods, and inimical Jupiter do."

In this example, it is the words of Aeneas that are charged with fiery anger, while Aeneas himself *ferox.* These characterizations of Aeneas are like that of Hercules in Seneca's tragedy, wherein Hercules is compared to Titan, who is also *fervidus* (*Hercules* 1059-1063),

> *… Fervide Titan.*
> *obitus pariter tecum Alcides*
> *vidit et ortus novitque tuas*
> *utrasque domos.*

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[22] Trinacty (2014) 136.

[23] Unlike *auctor,* which appears quite frequently in the *Aeneid*, *conditor* appears only once, used to describe Evander in book 8.313, *tum rex Euandrus Romanae conditor arcis*.

… Seething Titan.
Equally has Alcides seen
The rise and set, and known
Both of your homes.

This repetition of words is similar, as we have seen the depiction of anger in both Vergil's and Seneca's works as one characterized by an unbridled, seething passion. The overlap also seems to present Aeneas as a character who, at the close of his epic journey, is out of control and driven to extremes by his anger. This contrasts greatly with Aeneas' presence as an even-tempered and self-controlled hero throughout the rest of the *Aeneid*.

Before he is murdered by Aeneas, Turnus pleads (*Aen*. 12.936-938),

'Vicisti et victum tendere palmas
Ausonii videre; tua est Lavinia coniunx,
ulterius ne tende odiis.'
'You have won, and the Ausonians saw me, conquered, stretch out my hands.
Lavinia is your wife, don't press on any further because of your hatred.'

So, too does Hercules' son stretch out his hands, as the hero's wife, describes (*Hercules* 1017-1018),

Natus hic vultus tuos
habitusque reddit; cernis, ut tendat manus?

This son returns your face
and demeanor; are you seeing
the way he stretches out his hands?

The overlap between the two heroes who kill as their victims beg for mercy is significant. Both Turnus and Hercules' son stretch out their hands in the position of suppliants, and in both cases this act is observed by others. I am not arguing that Seneca is directly referencing the *Aeneid* here (though I think it is entirely possible that he is), but rather that the collection of other direct and deliberate allusions to the epic, combined with the similar manner in which Aeneas and Hercules kill their victims reinforces the impact that the *Aeneid* had upon *Hercules*. Just as one might compare Vergil's Hercules and Aeneas, here we may compare

Vergil's Herculean Aeneas to Seneca's Hercules. Of the tragic elements and the presence of blood in book 12 of the *Aeneid*, Highbarger notes,[24]

"Just as this book opened with the sight of blood and blood has flowed freely throughout it, so now the closing scene will be one of blood, and Turnus will be sent swiftly down to the shades in the World Below".

This, I argue, provides additional context for the influence of the *Aeneid* on *Hercules*; the epic poet has truly equipped himself with buskins. We may recall the scene in which Hercules kills his son, as Amphitryon describes (*Hercules* 1003-1007),

…En blandas manus
ad genua tendens voce memoranda rogat.
scelus nefandum, triste et aspectu horridum!
dextra precantem rapuit et circa furens
bis ter rotatum misit. ast illi caput
sonuit. cerebro tecta disperso madent.

…See how he begs
Piteously, lifts pleading hands to knees.
Wicked, miserable crime, terrifying in sight!
He snatched him begging with his right hand, and raging
Around, whirling him about, twice, thrice, he let him go.
But his head crashed, and the walls are wet with his splattered brains.

Hercules kills his first son, too, while he begs for mercy. Once again, we may recall Turnus, '*ille humilis supplex oculos dextramque precantem | protendens*,' who prays and stretches out his hands, just as both of Hercules' sons do. Given the similarities between Hercules (both Vergilian and Senecan) and Aeneas, there lies in these descriptions another overlap in the way that these heroes, characterized by their fiery anger, kill their victims.

Sleep: the binding brother of death

Near the close of book 12 of the *Aeneid*, Turnus attempts to hurl an enormous rock at Aeneas. He fails, however, as do his limbs, and his rock misses its intended target. As Turnus begins to be weighed down by the burden of his fate, Vergil writes (*Aen.* 12.908-914),[25]

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[24] Highbarger (1948) 119.

[25] All translations are my own.

Ac velut in somnis, oculos ubi languida pressit
nocte quies, nequiquam avidos extendere cursus
velle videmur et in mediis conatibus aegri
succidimus; non lingua valet, non corpore notae
sufficiunt vires nec vox aut verba sequuntur:
sic Turno, quacumque viam virtute petivit,
successum dea dira negat…

And just as in dreams, when night's listless rest presses upon our eyes,
in vain we seem to
want to prolong our greedy courses and we collapse exhaustedly in mid-attempt;
neither does our tongue prevail, nor known strengths of the body remain sufficient, nor
does voice nor do words attend: in this way does the dire goddess deny approach to Turnus,
in spite of whatever virtue he used to seek his path…

Given the heavy tenor of the language in this passage, this scene serves as a reminder of both tragedy and epic's tendency toward metaphor and simile.[26]

Sleep also finds its way into a tragic chorus within Seneca's *Hercules Furens*. Hercules' weighty limbs are weighed down by sleep following the ruthless slaughter of his wife and children (*Hercules* 1063-1069, 1077-1081),

Solvite tantis animum monstris,
solvite, superi;
rectam in melius flectite mentem.
tuque, o domitor Somne malorum,
requies animi,
pars humanae melior vitae,
volucre o matris genus astriferae,
frater durae languide Mortis…
placidus fessum lenisque fove,
preme devinctum torpore gravi;
sopor indomitos alliget artus,
nec torva prius pectora linquat,
quam mens repetat pristina cursum.

[26] For epic, see Ready (2018), Beck (2021). For tragedy, see Rutherford (2012). Although Rutherford notes that epic tends more toward simile, while tragedy tends more toward metaphor, I argue that both genres apply figurative language in similar ways.

Release his mind from such monstrosities,
Release him, oh gods;
Set his mind right.
And you, O Sleep, Subduer of Evils,
The respite of the mind,
The greater part of the life of man,
O child of a star-laden mother, taking flight
Languid brother of harsh Death…
Peaceful, easy, embrace him, worn-out
Hold him bound in heavy numbness.
Allow sleep to bind his unconquerable limbs,
And let it not abandon his harsh chest,
Until his original sense recalls its former path.

Both Vergil and Seneca employ the adjective *languidus* to describe sleep, as well as the attempts of sleep's recipients, Turnus and Hercules respectively, to seek out, (*petivit* and *repetat*), their desired paths. So too do both authors refer to an attempt to stay on course, (*cursus*). Although Vergil's and Seneca's purposes within their own narratives are different, I argue that the presence of sleep in both *Aeneid* 12 and *Hercules Furens* proves significant. For Vergil, it is while asleep that the dreamer may find himself lacking strength, it is precisely this metaphorical lack of strength that weighs down Turnus.[27] For Seneca, deliberate allusions to the tragic elements within book 12 alert us to his employment of epic-tragic similes present in Vergil. I am not arguing that Seneca's version is a direct allusion to Vergil's description (though it may well be), rather that Seneca's description highlights the overlap of themes and wording in both epic and tragedy. As John G. Fitch aptly notes, "Seneca implies that it is the *furor* and guilt of the preceding bloodshed that causes broken sleep…"[28] We may also recall Vergil's portrayal of sleep as Death's brother in *Aeneid* 6.278, *consanguineus Leti Sopor*. This first potential collection of allusions to the *Aeneid* in Seneca's *Hercules* reinforces the additional comparisons that shall be established between Hercules and Aeneas.

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[27] Here it is also worth noting that in Euripides' *Heracles*, the eponymous hero also falls asleep after murdering his wife and children, εὕδει δ᾽ ὁ τλήμων ὕπνον οὐκ εὐδαίμονα | παῖδας φονεύσας καὶ δάμαρτ᾽. ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν | οὐκ οἶδα θνητῶν ὅστις ἀθλιώτερος. (*Heracles* 1013-1015) In spite of this similarity, I argue that the overlap in language between Vergil's and Seneca's descriptions is still significant, and that the passages employ a similar tone (as well as language) to describe sleep.

[28] Fitch (1987) 400-401.

I would like to bring in an additional intertext from *Aeneid* book 3, which bears similarities to Seneca's *Hercules*. Here, Aeneas describes the weariness of his shipmates to Dido (*Aen.* 3.509-511),[29]

> *sternimur optatae gremio telluris ad undam,*
> *sortiti remos, passimque in litore sicco*
> *corpora curamus; fessos sopor inrigat artus.*
>
> Once we put down our oars, we scattered ourselves on the lap of the desired earth
> near the waves, and we tended to our bodies all around on the dry shore;
> sleep bound our wearied limbs.

Aeneas' description of sleep recalls Seneca's, which 'binds unconquerable limbs, (*sopor indomitos alliget artus*)'. In this way, Seneca seems to draw upon epic depictions of sleep and establish a firm connection between his tragedy and Vergil's epic-tragic tale.[30]

Aeneas and Augustus in Senecan prose

In his *De beneficiis*, Seneca writes of Augustus' regrets over his treatment of his daughter Julia. Augustus, however, does not perceive his treatment of Julia as an 'intrinsic' mistake, but rather a mistake because of the further publicity that his treatment of Julia garnered.[31] Of Augustus' reaction, Seneca writes that the emperor was 'too little in control of his anger,' (*parum potens irae*, *Ben.* 6.32.2). Although Wilcox notes the infrequency of which Augustus is portrayed as 'negative exemplar,' I argue that this example is significant.[32] Augustus'

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[29] Fitch (1987), 400. Here too, Hardie's (1997) analysis of Dido as a tragic figure is pertinent, 321-323.

[30] An additional intertext bears consideration here. Just as Dira causes Turnus to miss the mark as he throws a heavy stone at Aeneas, the adjective *dira* occurs eight times in the tragedy, including a relevant example from vv. 1222-1225, '*Dira Furiarum loca | et inferorum carcer et sonti plaga | decreta turbae – si quod exilium latet | ulterius Erebo, Cerbero ignotum et mihi, | hoc me abde, Tellus. Tartari ad finem ultimum | mansurus ibo.' 'Dire haunts of Furies, The dungeon of hell, | The district decreed | For the guilty throng – if some exile hides beyond Erebus, unknown to Cerberus and me, | Hide me there, Earth. I'll go to Tartarus' furthest | End – there to remain*. (transl. Boyle)' See also *Aen.* 4.5, *placidam… quietam* (Boyle 2023).

[31] Wilcox (2020) 28. Degl'Innocenti Pierini (2012) explores the depiction of Augustus in *De brevitate vitae* 4.2-6.

[32] Wilcox (2020) 28.

anger in this scenario only led to greater trouble for himself and his family's reputation. Indeed, both Seneca's Hercules and Vergil's Aeneas act out of anger at the climax of their respective narratives. As Putnam observes, "for Seneca the philosopher, the incompatibility of anger and piety is a subject of some eloquent sentences in *De ira* but perhaps most succinctly phrased at 1.12.5: "Anger on behalf of one's own is a token of a weak, not a pious spirit" (*Irasci pro suis non est pii animi sed infirmi*)".[33]

Aeneas, too, serves as a somewhat ambiguous – if not outwardly negative – exemplar in Seneca's *Ep.* 56. Seneca includes a quotation from *Aeneid* 2.726-730 (*Ep.* 56.12),

> *Et me, quem dudum non ulla iniecta movebant*
> *Tela neque adverso glomerati ex agmine Grai,*
> *Nunc omnes terrent aurae, sonus excitat omnis*
> *Suspensum et pariter comitique onerique timentem.*
>
> And I, whom no hurled projectiles moved,
> Nor Greeks assembled in hostile formation,
> Now all the winds terrify me, every sound
> Burdens me with anxiety, fearing equally for my child and burden.

Seneca then goes on to explain (*Ep.* 56.13) that it is the first, unaffected man who is wise (*sapiens*). The second man, on the other hand, is unwise (*inperitus*), and burdened with fear over his own matters (*rebus suis timet*). Seneca illustrates that it is Aeneas' burdens that cause his fear, (*timidum illum sarcinae faciunt*, *Ep.* 56.14). Seneca then is able to laud Aeneas' heroic piety, while criticizing his lack of Stoic sagacity.[34] This is similar to Seneca's criticism of Augustus in *Ben.* 6.32.2; both Augustus and Aeneas are not in control over their emotions and expose themselves as *inperitus*. Given the similarities between both Augustus' and Aeneas' deficiencies, I argue that in his prose works, too, Seneca establishes a pattern of nuanced critique against Augustus.

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[33] Putnam (1995) 252.

[34] Berno (2004) 23. Berno (2006) argues that by fleeing the city to escape the noise, Seneca establishes himself as a comic counterpart to Aeneas.

Conclusion

In light of this collection of similarities, I conjecture that Seneca makes both deliberate allusions to epic tropes and specific references to Herculean Aeneas in the depiction of his own hero, Hercules. These allusions provide a window to modern readers about the reception of Aeneas into later genres and provides us with greater insight into the ancient interpretation of the character Aeneas and of the emperor Augustus himself. Indeed, Vergil describes his own Hercules in book 8 of the *Aeneid* as 'raging,' (*furens*, *Aen.* 8. 228-230),

> *Ecce furens animis aderat Tirynthius omnemque*
> *accessum lustrans huc ora ferebat et illuc,*
> *dentibus infrendens…*
>
> Look how Hercules arrived, raging uncontrollably,
> Surveying every entrance, whipping his head around,
> Gnashing his teeth.

In this paper, I hope to have shown the way that the characterization of Hercules in Seneca's tragedy both echoes and complicates the image of Aeneas in *Aeneid* book 12. The two books' shared motifs of uncontrollable anger, the slaughter of supplicants, and binding sleep reveal a deeper engagement with the tragic dimensions of Vergil's epic. This suggests that Seneca's portrayal of Hercules as a frenzied, destructive hero may serve as a reflection – if not an outright critique – of Aeneas. The linguistic and thematic parallels between Vergil's Aeneas and Seneca's Hercules, especially in their moments of unbridled fury, establish Aeneas as a problematic hero, who, like Hercules is overcome by a bestial, almost monstrous passion. Although many have noted the similarities between Cacus and Turnus, it is Hercules (and Aeneas), who are revealed to be victims of their uncontrollable passions. This further problematizes the dichotomy between Turnus and Aeneas, as the former becomes victimized and sympathetic, and the latter domineering and oppressive.

More broadly, these intertextual connections encourage us to reconsider the traditional image of Aeneas as a model of Roman *pietas* and self-restraint. If Seneca's Hercules serves as a tragic warning against the consequences of unchecked rage, then Seneca's engagement with the *Aeneid* implicitly invites readers to view Aeneas' final act through a

similar tragic lens. This reading has significant implications for the reception of Augustus, who was so closely associated with Aeneas; if Vergil's hero more closely resembles Seneca's raging anti-hero than Stoic exemplar, then Vergil's epic may contain a more ambivalent or even critical undercurrent regarding the foundations of Augustan power. In this paper, I do not mean to argue decisively for an anti-Augustan reading of the *Aeneid*, but rather to shed light upon the way that Seneca exploits the ambiguities of Aeneas' heroism to further his critique of unbridled passions.[35]

Ultimately, the similarities between Seneca's *Hercules Furens* and Vergil's *Aeneid* emphasize the permeability of epic and tragic genres in Roman literature. Seneca's appropriation of Vergilian material does not only borrow from epic but actively reshapes its meaning, and offers a darker, more tragic vision of heroism–one that complicates our understanding of both Aeneas and the legacy he represents. Additionally, the criticisms of both Augustus in the *De beneficiis* and Aeneas in *Ep.* 56, suggest that the emperor and the hero are both unable to suppress their emotions and fall victim to their own destructive passions.

Kate Hildreth
Rutgers University
katehildreth17@gmail.com

[35] Putnam (1995) argues that "… Aeneas at the end is not acting from *pietas* when he kills but from its opposites, *dolor*, *ira*, and *furor*." 253.

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