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Seneca HF 47sqq.

By Richard J. Tarrant, Toronto

Effregit ecce limen inferni Iouis
et opima uicti regis ad superos refert.
parum est reuerti, foedus umbrarum perit:
uidi ipsa, uidi nocte discussa inferum
et Dite domito spolia iactantem patri
fraterna. cur non uinctum et oppressum trahit
ipsum catenis paria sortitum Ioui
Ereboque capto potitur et retegit Styga?
patefacta ab imis manibus retro uia est
et sacra dirae mortis in aperto iacent.

Juno describes Hercules' abduction of Cerberus as an act of impious violence which has destroyed the normal separation of the lower and upper worlds. The general sense of the lines is clear, but the flow of thought seems to lack Seneca's usual skill. One reason for this feeling of incoherence has already been identified: Leo noticed that line 49 is out of place. The phrase *parum est reuerti* ought to mark a transition from the fact of Hercules' return to an even more serious charge, but 49 instead comes between Juno's first reference to Hercules' theft of Cerberus (47sq.) and her more detailed account of the same action (50 *vidi* ... 52 *fraterna*). Note in particular the verbal connection of *opima* ... *regis* (48) and *spolia* ... *fraterna* (51sq.), and also the fact that in 50sqq. Juno is speaking of Hercules *in* the Underworld, which makes it difficult for *parum est reuerti* to precede. Furthermore, the phrase *foedus umbrarum perit* can now only refer to Hercules' laying open the Underworld to the sight of those above (50 *uidi nocte discussa inferum*), a fact already implicit in Juno's words *effregit ecce limen inferni Iouis* (47). These signs of awkwardness are removed if 49 is placed, as Leo suggested, before 55. Now *parum est reuerti* and *foedus umbrarum* take on their proper rhetorical function, that of introducing the restatement of Hercules' offence in 55sq. (*patefacta* ... *iacent*).

The reordering of 49, however, does not solve all the problems of the passage. Attention has also been directed to 54, in particular to the words *retegit Styga*. What would uncovering the Styx add to the incursions Hercules has already made on the privacy of the lower world (*effregit* ... *limen* 47, *nocte discussa* 50)? Emendation has been tried (*repetit* Bentley, *relegit* Withof), without convincing results. On closer inspection the entire line, not just its second half, arouses suspicion. The overthrow of hell's rulers (*Ereboque capto potitur*) has

also been mentioned already, note *Dite domito* (51). It looks, then, as though in 54 two actions which Hercules has just been accused of performing (in 47–53) are presented as actions that Hercules has *not* done (*cur non* ... 52). (It might be objected that *potitur* suggests a permanent occupation rather than an isolated victory, but the resulting picture of Hercules reigning in hell is inconsistent with that given in the first part of the sentence (52sq.), of Hercules returning from the Underworld with Dis instead of Cerberus as his captive.) If one adds that the unadorned phrases *Ereboque capto potitur* and *retegit Styga* produce an effect of anticlimax following the effectively developed period *cur non ... Ioui,* suspicion hardens into the suggestion that line 54 is an interpolation. It may not be coincidental that the two misfortunes that this passage has suffered occur at the same point, the original sequence 53 – 49 – 55; the dislocation of 49 might even have been prompted by the intrusion of 54.

With 49 relocated and 54 deleted, the passage assumes a well-arranged structure: 47 – 48 and 50 – 52 (... *fraterna*) each present Hercules' action under two aspects (overthrow of Dis, disturbance of the Underworld's seclusion), then 52 (*cur* ...) – 53 singles out the first of these, and finally 49 – 55 – 56 dwells on the second, ending the section as it began (*effregit ... limen* 47).

Scrutiny of these lines also offers the opportunity for brief observations of an interpretative rather than a textual nature. Juno's emphasis (45. 55sq.) on the physical destruction wrought by Hercules deserves notice. The idea was prompted, it would seem, by Virgil's account of the destruction of Cacus' lair by Hercules (Aen. 8, 233–246), but Juno treats as accomplished fact what in Virgil was only a hyperbolic comparison. Nothing else in the play suggests that Juno's accusations are justified, so their primary function – like that of the prologue generally – is to depict her passionate hatred of Hercules. (Note, for example, the significant difference in tone between Juno's picture of Hercules parading Cerberus in triumph, 58sq. *de me triumphat et superbifica manu/atrum per urbes ducit Argolicas canem,* and Hercules' respectful speech of apology for showing Cerberus to the upper world, 592sqq.).

A moment in the catastrophe of the play, though, brings Juno's words back to mind. When Hercules' family run inside the palace to escape his demented rage, he tears away the obstructing building: *huc eat et illuc ualua deiecto obice/ rumpatque postes; culmen impulsum labet./perlucet omnis regia* (999sqq.). In their context these lines have a pseudo-theatrical purpose – they explain how the «indoor» scene can be treated as though it were taking place in full view – but that does not prevent them from being as well a pointed echo of Juno's earlier vision of Hercules. Thus Seneca links the prologue to the outcome of the drama in a more subtle way than is usually noticed: it is Hercules' madness and its aftermath, not the raising of Cerberus, that bring Juno's words *sacra dirae mortis in aperto iacent* (56) to their tragic fulfillment.