and 857–8 :

> *ferrum* per ambos tenue *transactum* pedes
> ligabat artus.

In the Greek accounts of the disabling of the baby Oedipus, Euripides' *Phoenissae* 26, *σφυρῶν σιδηρᾶ κέντρα διαπείρας μέσων*, is clearly the origin of *ferro*, but the only indication of an adjective comes at Soph. *OT* 1349 *ἀγρίας πέδας*.

This evidence suggests that *ferro* at *Phoenissae* 254 needs an epithet like *ἄγριος* which stresses the penetrating cruelty of the piercing iron, and that ideas of heating iron are in fact out of place here. I suggest *valido* for *calido*: this adjective is paired with *ferrum* several times (e.g. Lucr. 6.1011), and Tibullus uses it similarly of iron fetters (2.6.25–6):

> spes etiam valida solatur compede vinctum:
> crura sonant ferro, sed canit inter opus.

Hirschberg (n. 1) suggests that *calido* contrasts pathetically with *tenero*, citing Seneca, *Medea* 722 *tenuem cruenta falce deposuit carnem*, a view reinforced by Frank in her commentary: 'The juxtaposition of *calido* and *teneros* stresses the cruel nature of Oedipus' fate.'[2] This contrast would be even more effective with *valido*, since *validus* is often used of the force with which weapons are wielded as they cut through bodies: for *validus* used in similar affective contrasts between penetrating weapon and soft flesh, cf. *Aen.* 6.833 *neu patriae validas in viscera vertite viris*, 10.815 *validum namque exigit ensem | per medium Aeneas iuvenem*.

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[2] M. Frank, *Seneca's* Phoenissae. Mnemos. Suppl. 138 (Leiden, 1995), 148.

THYESTES' BELCH (SENECA, *THY*. 911–12)

At the climax of the ghoulish *cena Thyestea* the hapless victim, still ignorant of the menu he has been served, erupts in a sonorous belch. To Atreus, observing from the wings, this marks the moment of supreme triumph:

> Aperta multa tecta conlucent face.
> resupinus ipse purpurae atque auro incubat,
> vino gravatum fulciens laeva caput.
> eructat. o me caelitum excelsissimum,
> regumque regem! vota transcendi mea. (*Thy*. 908–12)

Commentators have rightly called attention both to the intrinsic grossness and the bizarre incongruity in these lines. On *eructat*, Tarrant aptly remarks that 'this revolting detail is not simply a specimen of Senecan crudity: Thyestes' audible signs of pleasure show that he has fulfilled Atreus' wish, *liberos avidus pater | gaudensque*

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laceret (277–78, cf. also 778–82).'[1] The belch 'è segno della sazietà, che è poi espressamente significata al v. 913 con *satur est*: e la sazietà, a sua volta, importa che Tieste ha mangiato delle carni dei figli più di quanto Atreo aveva sperato: quindi l'esclamazione di esultanza *o me caelitum* . . .'.[2] No less conspicuous is the strident juxtaposition of the vulgar and the sublime. 'Suona perciò tanto piú grottesco il grido di trionfo di Atreo, alla vista del fratello sazio delle carni dei figli: *eructat. O me caelitum excelsissimum* . . .',[3] And again,

> the contrast between 'civilized' luxury (*purpurae atque auro*) and barbaric crudeness is clear: Atreus describes a gleeful, drunken Thyestes burping contentedly as he reclines, barely able to keep his head up. *Eructat*, placed at the beginning of line 911, has a powerful impact. Thyestes' belch lifts Atreus into the throes of exaltation as he rejoices in his victory. The soaring emotion of his exclamation, *o me caelitum excelsissimum* . . . contrasts with the vulgarity and brevity of the preceding sentence, *eructat*. At the beginning of his speech Atreus joyfully claimed that he walked with his head level with the stars (885–86); Thyestes' burp makes Atreus' apotheosis complete.[4]

Multiple backward references, that is, add subtle nuance to a superficially vulgar description. To be sure, Atreus' hyperbolical reaction captures his 'manic glee',[5] but it is also more than that. At this climactic moment and in relation to the drama's tightly woven thematic structure, belch and rapture together pointedly underscore the grand *peripeteia* in a manner whose subtle wit has not been fully appreciated.

Thyestes' belch, more than just an audible sign of satiety and pleasure, signals also his loss of self-control that is then explicitly named by Atreus a few lines further on: *ecce, iam cantus ciet / festasque voces, nec satis menti imperat* (918–19). In the Roman moralizing imagination, gluttony, violation of decorum, bodily eruptions, and abandonment of self-control constitute a tight nexus; all these nuances conjoin in a passage like Cic. *Phil*. 2.63:

> tu istis faucibus, istis lateribus . . . tantum vini in Hippiae nuptiis exhauseras, ut tibi necesse esset in populi Romani conspectu vomere postridie. o rem non modo visu foedam, sed etiam auditu! si inter cenam in istis tuis immanibus illis poculis hoc tibi accidisset, quis non turpe duceret? in coetu vero populi Romani negotium publicum gerens, magister equitum, cui ructare turpe esset, is vomens frustis esculentis vinum redolentibus gremium suum et totum tribunal implevit![6]

Belching is a noisy obbligato in such scenes of dissolute revellry, as for example Cic. *Cat*. 2.10, *Pis*. 13, *Tusc*. 5.99; Sen. *Ep*. 95.25, *Vit. beat*. 12.3; Mart. 1.87.4, 3.82.8–9,

[1] R. J. Tarrant (ed.), *Seneca's Thyestes* (Atlanta, 1985), *ad* 911.

[2] F. Giancotti (ed.), *Seneca, Tieste* II (Turin, 1989), 201–2. The sated, supine, belching cannibal Thyestes is surely intended to recall also Vergil's Polyphemus *medio resupinus in antro* (*Aen*. 3.624), *nam simul expletus dapibus vinoque sepultus / cervicem inflexam posuit, iacuit per antrum / immensus saniem eructans* . . . (630–2): see P. Mantovanelli, *La metafora del Tieste* (Verona, 1984), 94.

[3] G. Picone, *La fabula e il regno* (Palermo, 1984), 114.

[4] G. Meltzer, 'Dark wit and black humor in Seneca's *Thyestes*', *TAPA* 118 (1988), 314.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Cf. C. Edwards, *The Politics of Immorality in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge, 1993), 192, who well remarks on this text, 'Going beyond the private excesses regularly attributed to Roman voluptuaries—at banquets characterised by the overflow of wine and bodily fluids—Antony's body erupts in public. We catch a glimpse here of the self-presentation expected of Rome's political leaders, who should feel ashamed even to belch in front of others. Antony is criticised both for his lack of self-control and for his promiscuous mingling with low persons in the pursuit of sensual gratification.' Much of this is relevant also to Thyestes.

9.48.8; conversely Trajan is commended at Plin. *Pan*. 49.6 for not belching during dinners. Thyestes' eructation lifts Atreus into sublime ecstasy because, as in these passages, it marks the victim's final and fatal loss of self-control—which in turn produces an effective sense of climax.

For Thyestes, we recall, is depicted from his first appearance as acting reluctantly and against his better judgement (*animus haeret ac retro cupit / corpus referre, moveo nolentem gradum*, 419–20), with the *invitus* motif in particular indexing his progressive psychological ensnarement by Atreus (as at 488–9, 985–6).[7] Thyestes becomes vulnerable to his canny brother's scheme in proportion as he repudiates the quasi-Stoic wisdom he had embraced during his exile (344–90, 412–20, 446–70). For Atreus, conversely, power consists in imposing his will upon his reluctant subjects—and Thyestes' conflict and capitulation will correspond exactly to the tyrant's ideal of enforced counter-volition (*quod nolunt velint*).[8] And this in turn bears on the climactic banquet scene. Thyestes' belch there signals both surrender to the treacherous lifestyle he had earlier eschewed (446–70 ≈ 908–19, 920–37) and loss of the αὐτάρκεια that was his best defence against the tyrant's schemes. The appropriately indecorous physical eruption sonorously endorses his abdication of *veterem . . . Thyesten* (937), his former exilic identity that was the polar counterpart to the present banquet (*o quantum bonum est / obstare nulli, capere securas dapes / humi iacentem!*, 449–51), and thus definitively seals his victim status. Hence Atreus' triumphant *o me caelitum excelsissimum, / regumque regem*. His carefully laid stratagem has come to triumphant fruition. The transcendental self-congratulation, imagistically consistent with the earlier *aequalis astris gradior* (885), does indeed complete the tyrant's paradoxical apotheosis, but the disequilibrium between vulgar and sublime does more than predicate one man's apotheosis on another man's belch. Thyestes' loss is in every sense Atreus' gain. At the very moment when Thyestes audibly abandons his earlier αὐτάρκεια, Atreus in a symmetrical parody (mis)appropriates the Stoic image of the god-like *sapiens* to express his perverse elation.[9] Beyond that the shrill dissonance marks the final triumph of the principle of counter-volition, the tyrannical *quod nolunt velint,* and as such the suggestive juxtaposition, just before the *anagnoris* (1005–6), again underscores Thyestes' total subjection to the tyrant's fiendish 'mind games'.

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[7] See further Tarrant (n. 1), 47, who remarks that these recurrent references to unwillingness pointedly underscore 'the victory of evil over all attempts to resist or evade it'; A. R. Rose, 'Power and powerlessness in Seneca's *Thyestes*', *CJ* 82 (1987), 117–28 at 122–5.

[8] Cf. Rose (n. 7), 123, 'Atreus measures his power by his success in bending subjects to his will'; G. Mader, '*Quod nolunt velint*: deference and doublespeak at Seneca, *Thyestes* 334–335', *CJ* 94 (1998), 31–47 at 36–8.

[9] On Atreus as contrapuntal negation of the Stoic *vir sapiens*, see C. Monteleone, *Il 'Thyestes' di Seneca. Sentieri ermeneutici* (Fasano, 1991), 361–7; E. Lefèvre, 'Senecas Atreus—die Negation des stoischen Weisen?', in J. Axer and W. Görler (edd.), *Scaenica Saravi-Varsoviensia* (Warsaw, 1997), 57–74.