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Uncommon Sense in Renaissance English Literature

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UNCOMMON SENSE IN RENAISSANCE ENGLISH LITERATURE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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BY

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CHAPTER ONE

COMMON SENSE AND UNCOMMON SENSE

—What is the end of study, let me know?
—Why, that to know which else we should not know.
—Things hid and barred, you mean, from common sense.
—Ay, that is study’s god-like recompense. (Love’s Labour’s Lost)

Methinks in thee some blessed spirit doth speak,
His powerful sound within an organ weak;
And what impossibility would slay
In common sense, sense saves another way. (All’s Well That Ends Well)

This study rethinks the relationship between neo-Senecan tragedy and Elizabethan satire in Renaissance English drama, especially plays by John Marston and William Shakespeare. Unlike Ben Jonson, for example, who incorporated both Senecan tragedy and Elizabethan satire in his drama but did so in different works (the former in Catiline, the latter in Every Man Out of his Humour), Marston and Shakespeare combined the two traditions in one and the same play, particularly the former’s Antonio’s Revenge (1600) and The Malcontent (c.1603) and the latter’s Troilus and Cressida (c.1601) and Timon of Athens (c.1606). I argue that these plays recognize and exploit a deep compatibility between the two traditions, a compatibility that has gone largely unacknowledged in English scholarship. This compatibility lies in the centrality to both Senecan tragedy and Elizabethan satire of what I call “uncommon sense.”
The meaning of the term “uncommon sense” depends, of course, on what one means by “common sense”: they must be defined mutually. Thus I begin by examining three different historical conceptions of “common sense” in Western intellectual history: an Aristotelian psychological common sense, a Roman rhetorical common sense, and a Kantian aesthetic common sense. The first is a mental faculty in Aristotelian psychology that coordinated the five “special” senses: a “normative structure of perception” (Jackson 137) that organizes sight, sounds, etc., into a coherent whole. The second is a social-rhetorical stance, typically expressed in proverbs, asserting conventional beliefs and values; this is “the Latin rhetorical ideal of ‘good sense’ and ‘sound judgment’ …, which, since Roman times, had also been designated with the term sensus communis” (Heller-Roazen 167). The third is a concept from Immanuel Kant’s Critique of Judgment, which posits a sensus communis as the ground of aesthetic judgment, an “ideal norm” having “exemplary validity” for the evaluation of art (84). This latter is “a properly aesthetic common sense,” a “pleasure which we suppose to be communicable to, and valid for, everyone” (Deleuze 1984, 49).

We can identify various forms of “uncommon sense” by analogy: psychological derangement that disrupts the normal organization of mental faculties, rhetorical extravagance that opposes or obscures conventional language, and aesthetic displeasure that violates the ideal of consensus in artistic taste. Thus, “psychological uncommon sense” refers to mental disturbances such as furor, melancholy, and hallucination; “rhetorical uncommon sense” refers to paradoxical or contentious speech acts that deny consensus, contradicting or obscuring conventional beliefs and values; and “aesthetic
uncommon sense” refers to deliberately repulsive artworks that provoke the opposite of the universal pleasure presupposed in Kant’s *sensus communis aestheticus*. These features, distinctive of both Senecan tragedy and Elizabethan satire, constitute the “uncommon sense” at the heart of plays uniting the two genres. My study thus shows that the relationship between Senecan tragedy and Elizabethan satire in the Renaissance was more dynamic than scholars have acknowledged. While Robert Miola’s *Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy* examines the influence of Senecan tragedy on Renaissance drama but not the influence of Elizabethan satire, and Alvin Kernan’s *The Cankered Muse* examines the influence of Elizabethan satire but not of Seneca, I reveal their mutual influence, a productive interaction of two traditions united by uncommon sense.

Hamlet’s Uncommon Sense

The concept of “uncommon sense” is a key for unlocking some of the richest and strangest wares in the literature of Renaissance England; it gets at what is most distinctively “Elizabethan” in some of the best Elizabethan drama—which means, of course, *Shakespeare*. If it cannot by itself pluck out the heart of Shakespeare’s mystery, uncommon sense can at least put our finger on his pulse where it beats close to the skin. This can be seen in *Hamlet*, for example, whose hero illustrates Shakespeare’s growing tendency to mix Elizabethan satire with tragedy and also hints at the uncommon sense underlying this mixture. From the outset Hamlet is singled out, marked by a revulsion from what is common and an insistence upon the *uncommon*. His first public outburst in the play is a reaction to his mother’s suggestion that, since death “is common” (“Ay,
Madam,” he venomously replies, “it is common”), it should not “seem so particular” with him; in this first heated exchange, Hamlet insists that what is “common” for Gertrude is for him uncommon (“particular”). Then Hamlet’s uncle enters the argument and falls in line with Gertrude on the common-sense side of the binary. In urging Hamlet to master his grief, Claudius bases his argument, as Gertrude does, on an appeal to knowledge that is “common” to human sense:

For what we know must be, and is as common
As any the most vulgar thing to sense,
Why should we in our peevish opposition
Take it to heart? (1.2.98-101)

Here we find a family resemblance in the connotation of the words used by Gertrude and Claudius—common, vulgar, etc.—and this “common” family resemblance is countered by a stubborn black sheep appearing in the form of Hamlet’s “particular” sense of death and his “peevish opposition” to common sense, to “what we know must be.” More specifically, if we listen to Claudius’ phrase “common as any the most vulgar thing to sense” with a wholesome ear, we can hear in it the suggestion of hendiadys, a classical rhetorical figure of which Shakespeare was especially fond. (The standard example is Virgil’s expression “cups and gold” to refer to golden cups.)¹ George Wright argues that this figure, which Shakespeare uses widely in his tragedies and most of all in Hamlet, is

¹ In his article on “Hendiadys and Hamlet,” George Wright explains the origin of the term: “The basic pattern of hendiadys is simple enough. The Latin grammarian Servius, writing about A.D. 400, coined the term to describe a common figurative device in Vergil’s Aeneid: the use of two substantives, joined by a conjunction (et, atque, or -que, all signifying ‘and’), to express a single but complex idea. The most frequently cited example, however, is from the Georgics (II.192): “pateris libamus et auro” ‘we drink from cups and gold.’ English translators normally suppress the oddity of this phrasing (the phrasing and the oddity, we might say) by interpreting one of the nouns as dependent on the other: “we drink from golden cups” (168).
crucial to the meaning of the play. Following Wright, Stephen Greenblatt points out that hendiadys is used by Shakespeare “over three hundred times” and that “this curious rhetorical scheme has something of the quality of a fingerprint” (Norton Shakespeare 62-63). Claudius’ speech offers no construction that exactly satisfies the strict definition of hendiadys, nor is it included in Wright’s thorough examination of that figure in Hamlet; nevertheless, the passage epitomizes the distinctively Shakespearean maneuver, in which a conventional idea is conceived anew through a linguistic reconfiguration, that Wright and Greenblatt see epitomized in his special fondness for hendiadys. That is, we can hear in Shakespeare’s “common as any the most vulgar thing to sense” a circumlocution for “common sense,” just as we hear in Virgil’s “cups and gold” a circumlocution for “golden cups.”

Claudius’ construction is close to hendiadys because the phrase “common sense”—which here applies to mortality—is wrenched out of its usual adjective-noun unity and spread out over twelve syllables, with seven extra words inserted: “common as any the most vulgar thing to sense.” Claudius does not turn the familiar adjective-noun phrase into two nouns linked by a conjunction (e.g. he does not turn “common sense” into “sense and commonness”). Instead, he provides an elaborate paraphrase that separates the adjective from the noun by compounding the former with a simile and a synonym: paternal mortality is as common as a thing that is vulgar to sense. Thus, although it may not be a textbook instance of hendiadys, Claudius’ expression performs essentially the same function: it reconsiders the relationship between the two terms by unsettling their normal linguistic arrangement—something like what Formalists called
“estrangement.” With selective emphasis we can hear in these lines the claim that mortality is “what we know... as common... sense.” This scene, then, and in particular the wicked uncle’s rhetorical flourish, sets up at the outset of the play two different stances toward what Claudius calls the “common theme” of the death of fathers. It is a battle of two against one: on one side is the stance of “common... vulgar... sense” adopted by Gertrude and Claudius, who view death as “common.” On the other side is the pose of “peevish opposition” struck by Hamlet, who sees grief as “particular” to himself. This opposition is a conflict between the royal couple’s common sense and the prince’s uncommon sense.

Behind Claudius’ rhetorical appeal lies a long history of the term “common sense,” which had by 1600 developed a complex range of possible meanings. We can begin to see how this range of meanings is important to Elizabethan tragedy by comparing the treatment of common sense in the first act of Hamlet with its treatment in a contemporaneous revenge tragedy by John Marston, who will assume, between Seneca and Shakespeare, a pivotal place in my study. Interestingly, Claudius’ circumlocution about what is “common to sense” has its doppelganger in a passage from Marston’s Antonio’s Revenge—a play that has, unfortunately for its author, always suffered from comparison to Hamlet. Specifically, Claudius’ phrase “what we know must be, and is...common...to sense” is echoed in Marston’s Prologue, which describes tragic misery as “common sense of what men were, and are, ...what men must be.” Marston invokes this “common sense” in a direct apostrophe to his audience:

Therefore, we proclaime,
If any spirit breathes within this round,
Uncapable of waightie passion
(As from his birth, being hugged in the armes,
And nuzzled twixt the breasts of happinesse)
Who winkes, and shuts his apprehension up
From common sense of what men were, and are,
Who would not knowe what men must be; let such
Hurrie amaine from our black visag’d showes:
We shall affright their eyes. (1:69)

Here, in contrast to the first act of *Hamlet*, common sense is portrayed as the necessary means for understanding tragedy: the prerequisite for any member of the audience to appreciate Marston’s play is the possession of “common sense” about the evil and suffering in human life. In *Hamlet*, on the other hand, it is precisely the hero’s refusal to adopt his mother’s and uncle’s “common” view of death that signifies his tragic understanding of life. Thus where Marston suggests that “common sense” is a necessary condition for the experience of tragic grief, Shakespeare seems to suggest that the two are mutually exclusive: Hamlet’s intense experience of grief prevents him from accepting commonsense wisdom about the universal mortality of fathers.

These two samples from Elizabethan revenge drama raise questions about the place of “common sense” in tragedy. Is common sense, as Hamlet suggests, the antithesis of tragic sensibility, or is it, as Marston’s Prologue boldly asserts, its very essence? Is tragic experience a species of common sense or of *uncommon* sense? To address these questions we must first consider how “common sense” came to mean what it did in late Elizabethan culture. Thus I will begin my literary genealogy of uncommon sense by considering the complex significance of the term “common sense” itself.
Psychological Common Sense

The “common sense” or *sensus communis* began its life as a mental faculty in Aristotle’s psychology, and it played a significant role in Western thought from ancient to modern times, a history described in detail by David Summers: “Aristotle, identifying the ‘common sense’ as something closely linked to sense itself, placed that which immediately reflects upon the data of the five senses at the base of the intellectual powers of the soul” (78). The term originally referred to an organ that integrated the five special senses and made their impressions available to a single consciousness; as such, the common sense was located in a liminal zone between the multiplicity of bodily organs and the unity of conscious subjectivity.²

The Renaissance is an especially fascinating chapter in the story of “common sense,” because in this period we can see, simultaneously, the persistence of this original signification, pointing back to Aristotle, and the emergence of new meanings that gesture forward to the Enlightenment and, beyond that, to our own modernity. We find, for instance, that Robert Burton describes the Aristotelian faculty of sense-perception when he defines “common sense” in his *Anatomy of Melancholy*: “This common sense is the judge or moderator of the rest [of the five senses], by whom we discern all differences of objects; for by mine eye I do not know that I see, or by mine ear that I hear, but by my common sense, who judgeth of sounds and colours...; so that all their objects are his, and all their offices are his” (159). Here Burton is rehearsing the traditional commonplaces of Aristotelian psychology, which posits the “common sense” as a faculty that not only

² See also Daniel Heller-Roazen, *The Inner Touch*. 
adjudicates between the five senses (letting us discern their “differences”) but also presents their activity to a unified self-consciousness (letting me “know that I see”).

The ultimate source of Burton’s description is Aristotle’s *De Anima*, which hypothesizes the existence of a “common sense” as the faculty that performs two functions: coordinating the data of particular senses, and presenting the activity of sensation to a reflexive self-consciousness. With regard to the first function, Aristotle writes, “What says that two things are different must be one; for sweet is different from white. Therefore what asserts this difference [i.e. the common sense] must be self-identical” (Aristotle 585). Here, the common sense accounts for discriminating between the five particular senses (what Burton calls discerning the “differences of objects”).

With regard to the second function, Aristotle proposes that a common sense can explain the self-referential, reflexive character of sensory experience:

> Since it is through sense that we are aware that we are seeing or hearing, it must be either by sight that we are aware of seeing, or by some sense other than sight.... [E]ven if the sense which perceives sight were different from sight, we must either fall into an infinite regress, or we must somewhere assume a sense which is aware of itself. (583)

Here, the common sense is invoked to explain the reflexivity of a mind that is conscious of its own perceptive activity (what Burton describes as the power to “know that I see”).

In a passage from another treatise, *On Dreams*, Aristotle himself puts this matter quite succinctly: “It is not with sight that the mind sees that it sees, but with some organ common to all sensoria” (*De Somniis* 455a17, quoted in Summers 80). Although *De Anima* does not mention the “common sense” *per se*, it deduces such a faculty from the known facts of sense perception. The *sensus communis* is supposed to explain, first, how
the data of the senses become objects of consciousness, and, second, how this sensory activity itself becomes an object of consciousness.

When discussing this mental faculty, Renaissance authors such as Burton follow not only Aristotle himself, but also medieval Aristotelians such as Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas, for example, essentially offers an extended paraphrase of De Anima when he explains the relation between the five “proper” senses and the “common” sense:

The proper sense judges of the proper sensible by discerning it from other things which come under the same sense; for instance, by discerning white from black or green. But neither sight nor taste can discern white from sweet, because what discerns between two things must know both. Hence, the discerning judgment must be assigned to the common sense. To it, as to a common term, all apprehensions of the senses must be referred, and by it, again, all the intentions of the senses perceived; as when someone sees that he sees. For this cannot be done by the proper sense, which knows only the form of the sensible... [T]he common sense...perceives the act of seeing. (Aquinas 334-35).

Like Burton, Aquinas is taking up and elaborating Aristotle’s two basic propositions about the common sense: that it mediates between the individual senses, and that it reflects self-consciously on the experience of sensation. Aquinas calls the former “the discerning judgment” (Burton calls it to “discern all differences of objects”), and he describes the latter as “when someone sees that he sees” (Burton describes it as to “know that I see”). In these formulations, the commentary of Aquinas serves as a bridge from Aristotle to Renaissance English writers.

Numerous Renaissance authors talk about “common sense” in what is clearly this Aristotelian-Thomistic psychological framework. Burton is one such; others include not only professed psychologists but poets and dramatists. For instance, in his poem Ovid’s Banquet of Sense (1595), George Chapman presents an elaborate amorous debate based
on the Aristotelian psychology of sensation, including several explicit references to the common sense as a faculty of sensory apprehension. In stanza 88, Champman mentions “that inward taste of mine / Which makes all sence.” In his own marginal annotation, Chapman explains that his phrase “inward taste” refers to the same faculty described by Aristotle and Aquinas: “He intends the common sence which is *centrum sensibus et speciebus,* & calis it last because it dooth, *sapere in effectione sensuum*” (Chapman 75).

Here, by calling the common sense a “central hub for senses and forms” (*centrum sensibus et speciebus*) and by asserting that it “is aware of the senses in their activity” (*sapere in effectione sensuum*), Chapman is reiterating the two functions of the Aristotelian *sensus communis*: mediation of the particular senses, which helps reconstruct the outward *objects* of sense, and reflection of sensory activity, which helps intuit the self-conscious *subject* of sense experience. In another marginal note, Chapman explains that he has followed the “order [that] Philosophers set downe” with regard to “apprehension” through the “effection of our senses”: “first they affirm, the species of euery obiect propagates it selfe by our spirites to our common sence, that, deliuers it to the imaginatiue part, that to the Cogitatiue: the Cogitatiue to the Passiue Intalect; the Passiue Intelect, to that which is called *Dianoia, or Discursus*...” (Chapman 59).

As in Aristotelian philosophy, then, we find in Chapman’s poem a “common sense” that receives data from the five special senses and presents the data, collected and processed, to the higher representational and rational realms of the mind (from the proper senses to the “imaginative part,” then the “cogitative,” etc.). This Aristotelian common sense stands as an intermediary between physiological impressions and conscious
sensation, and along with the imagination or “fantasy” it allows the material of all
thought to come into being. In some passages of Renaissance English verse, however, the
phrase “common sense” does not allude so directly to the Aristotelian sensory organ. One
reason is that the precise relation between the common sense and the imagination was
never fully articulated in Aristotle, and so later writers, trying to fill in the blanks, gave
contradictory accounts of the two faculties and their respective roles in the process of
sensory apprehension. Partly because of this, and partly because of the multiple terms
that were used for what Chapman calls “the imaginative part” of the mind—phantasia,
imaginatio, fantasy, imagination, fancy, etc.—there was disagreement about exactly how
many faculties were at work in sensory cognition, and exactly how this “working” was
distributed among them. Such disagreement is evident if we turn from Chapman to a
passage in Nosce Teipsum (1599), a long philosophical poem by John Davies arguing for
the immortality of the soul. Several stanzas describe the interplay of mental faculties in
the process of sensory apprehension, in which impressions move from the five senses to
higher realms of the “intelligence” by conveyance of the common sense:

These are the outward Instruments of Sense,
These are the Guards which every thing must passe;
Ere it approch the mind’s intelligence,
Or touch the Phantasie, wits looking glasse.

The Imagina-

tion or common Sense.

And yet these Porters which all things admit,
Them selves perceive not, nor discerne the things;
One Common power doth in the forehead sit,
Which all their proper formes together brings.

For all those Nerves which spirits of Sense do beare,
And to those outward Organs spreading go,
United are as in a Center there,
And there this power those sundry forms doth know.
Those outward Organs present things receive
This inward Sense doth absent things retain;
Yet straight transmits all forms she doth perceive,
Unto a higher region of the brain;

The Phantasie.
Where Phantasie, neare handmaid to the mind,
Sits, and beholds, and doth discern them all;
Compounds in one, things diverse in their kind,
Compares the black, and white, the great and small.

Besides those single forms she doth esteem,
And in her Ballance doth their values trie;
Where some things good, and some things ill do seeme,
And neutrall some in her phantastick eye. (Davies 40-41)

In some respects, the description here fits neatly within the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition: the five senses “Themselves perceive not, nor discern the things,” and, as we have seen, it is precisely these two abilities (the capacity for self-conscious reflection and for discerning mediation) that are conventionally assigned to “one Common power” (i.e. the common sense). However, this harmony is set ajar by the time we reach the stanza describing a power that “doth discern them all” and “Compares the blacke, and white, the great and small”—these are familiar phrases in an unfamiliar context. As we have seen, these activities are traditionally assigned to the common sense, but here they are assigned to the “phantasie.”

Like Chapman, Davies provides marginal annotations for his poem to help readers follow the terminology, but the commentary given by Davies to these stanzas complicates the picture instead of clarifying it; “Phantasie, neare handmaid to the mind” is glossed, rather obviously, as “the Phantasie,” but the “One Common power” is glossed, appositively, as “The Imagination or common Sense.” Here, Davies is remarkable for the
way that he conflates the imagination with the common sense, and distinguishes both of these from the fantasy. However, Davies’ idiosyncratic poem is perhaps not as unorthodox as this description suggests, for there was a long tradition in post-Aristotelian psychology of connecting, and sometimes even conflating, the common sense with the imagination. In terms of Aristotle’s psychology, from the very beginning the “common sense” was mixed up with the imagination, another faculty of “inner sense.”

Aristotle seems to have thought of the common sense as a kind of interior vision (it sees that we see).... As the unifier of special sensation, the common sense is closely related to the image-making faculty [i.e. the imagination or phantasia].... The word phantasia referred both to sensation and to the remembered or transformed sensation of memory and imagination, showing once again the intimate relation of sight, common sense, and imagination. (Summers 80-81)

In comparing Burton and Davies, we have seen that the “imagination” functions as a shifting middle term, being conflated with “fantasy” in the former author and with “common sense” in the latter. The conceptual boundaries become porous, and all three terms are potentially combinable in this period: they share a common ground in the obscure boundary or intersection between the multiplicity of physical sense-organs and the unity of the sensitive soul. They are especially slippery in the hands of such writers because, in the Renaissance, the shifting relationship between the sensus communis and phantasia (“phantasie”) runs the gamut from literal conflation to mutual opposition.

The Oxford editor, Robert Krueger, observes that Davies’ psychology is “unusual for an Elizabethan” (Chapman 344); it presents the “common sense” and “imagination” as synonymous and separable from “fantasy,” whereas more orthodox Aristotelians such as Burton and Chapman distinguish the common sense from the imagination, and treat the latter as synonymous with the fantasy.

See Summers: “the common sense and fantasy were closely related and sometimes identified” (331).
For instance, we find “the word *phantasia*”—the complex Aristotelian term for sensory representation which Summers discusses above, and which lies beneath Davies’ “*Phantasie*”—employed by another Elizabethan author whose work exists at the intersection of common sense and imagination. In John Marston’s *What You Will*, a character named Quadratus offers an absurd yet appropriately “imaginative” defense of being fantastical:

```
Phantasticknesse,
That which the naturall *Sophysters* tearme
*Phantasia incomplexa*, is a function
Even of the bright immortal part of man.
It is the common passe, the sacred dore,
Unto the prive chamber of the soule:
That bar’d: nought passeth past the baser Court
Of outward sense.... (2:250)
```

In the second half of this passage Marston recalls, like Davies and Chapman, the Aristotelian faculty of sensory perception: the “common passe” and “sacred dore” seem largely synonymous for the *sensus communis*, the faculty standing guard between the “baser Court” of external sensation and the “prive chamber” of higher intellectual powers. Furthermore Marston, like Davies, seems to conflate the common sense with the imagination (*phantasia*, the soul’s image-making faculty), yoking the fantasy by the simplest copula to common sense (“*Phantasticknesse*” is translated by the Sophists’ “*Phantasia incomplexa*,” which “is the common passe”). Thus while Marston invokes the Aristotelian common sense in “the common passe,” which is the only path of admittance beyond “the baser Court / Of outward scence,” he simultaneously invokes something quite different: a radically inclusive conception of “Phantastickness” that extends beyond faculty psychology to a broader notion of social and aesthetic style. By moving well
beyond the literal “sense” of Aristotelian faculty psychology and embracing wider, more
cultural and more figurative (in a word, more fantastic) significations for “common
sense” and “imagination,” Marston takes us farther afield and yet, paradoxically, closer to
our ultimate quarry: uncommon sense.

Marston bears witness to the potential of literature in this period for conceiving of
a type of sense that could reasonably be called “uncommon.” We see in the very same
scene from What You Will, for instance, that Marston represents fantasticality as the
antithesis of what is “common.” Quadratus, the apologist for the phantasia/common pass,
sharpens his defense of “Phantasticknesse” by using a pointed aphoristic sentence,
declaring, “Tis hell to runne in common base of men” (2:250). Here, the italic type
suggests that this line is supposed to be read as an aphorism or proverbial expression.
This moment is linguistically complex because “Phantasticknesse”—the quality of being
fantastical that we saw earlier conflated psychologically with the “common pass” of the
soul—is now contrasted socially with the “common base of men.” In the first phrase,
“common” refers to the universally shared structure of the soul’s faculty of perception,
but in the second phrase, “common” refers to the lowly social status of cultural
convention. Even from this brief survey, then, it is evident that “common” functions for
Marston as what William Empson would call a complex word. Its meaning ranges from
the hint of sublime transcendence in “the common pass, the sacred door unto...the soul,”
which suggests Aristotle’s “organ common to all sensoria,” to the derogatory connotation
of “common base of men,” which signals low social status and the insignificance of a
run-of-the-mill cultural conformity. The “common passe” is common because it is a
faculty sharing in all five special senses, and shared by all human beings; the “common base of men,” on the other hand, is common because it consists of unexceptional commoners, people who are without distinction in terms of either elevating social status or individuating personal style. In this sense, Quadratus’ scorn for this “common base of men” invokes the same contemptuous snobbery as Hamlet’s peevish opposition to what is “common as any the most vulgar thing to sense”: what is common is vulgar, and therefore below the dignity of these aristocratic personalities.

Social-Rhetorical Common Sense

The connotation of this last type of commonness—everyday social convention—is more like our modern notion of “common sense,” yet it also goes back well before the Renaissance to classical discourse; the idea of a sensus communis, as a normative level of socialized knowledge, was present in ancient Rome. This common sense is what Horace refers to in one of his satires, for instance, describing how a person who commits a social faux pas will be stigmatized: “‘He clearly lacks common sense,’ we say” (Satires 1.3.66: “communi sensu plane caret” inquimus). Glossing Horace’s line, the famous classicist Richard Bentley defines the character lacking sensus communis as one “who, otherwise endowed with good sense, does not know to observe and distinguish time, place, persons” (370, qui cetera bono sensu praeditus, tempus, locum, personas observare et distinguere nescit). In this formulation Bentley is echoing Seneca’s De Beneficiis, which advises: “There should be common sense in a gift: one should observe time, place, persons” (1.12.3, Sit in beneficio sensus communis; tempus, locum observet, personas). As
Summers explains, the grounds for this “common sense” lie outside of the individual psyche and its innate structure:

In Roman writers *sensus communis* also has connotations of community, of being a universally shared virtue. Quintilian writes that it is better to send a youth to school to learn than to have a private tutor because if he is kept away from society at large, he will never learn that ‘sensus which we call communis.’ Here common sense is acquired (which it usually is not said to be) and is a social ‘sense’ necessary for behavior in public life. (105-106)

This Roman *sensus communis* is not simply inborn, then, like the Aristotelian faculty of sense perception, but is rather a public virtue, cultivated through social learning and imitative action. Manifested at the level of character, judgment, and behavior, rather than at the level of sense perception, it has its place in higher, more properly rational cognitive functions.

In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant revives this aspect of the Roman *sensus communis* even as he proposes his own definition of “common sense”:

*Common human understanding... mere sound (not yet cultivated) understanding...has therefore the doubtful honour of having the name of common sense (sensus communis) bestowed upon it; and bestowed, too, in an acceptance of the word common...which makes it amount to what is vulgar—what is everywhere to be met with—a quality which by no means confers credit or distinction upon its possessor. However, by the name sensus communis is to be understood the idea of a public sense, i.e. a critical faculty which in its reflective act takes account (a priori) of the mode of representation of every one else, in order...to weigh its judgement with the collective reason of mankind.* (151-152)

Kant’s new formulation of “common sense” is historically important because it signifies something beyond the traditional conceptions of common sense in the psychological and social spheres. Indeed, semantically his *sensus communis* could be called a form of “uncommon” sense, extending the generally agreed-upon meaning (“sense”) of the term;
that is why Derrida says that in Kant’s text “common sense” lacks the “common” meaning of “common sense” (132, *Le sens commun n’a donc pas le sens commun de ce qu’on appelle en général le sens commun*). Derrida’s postmodern quibble points to one more important connotation of “common sense”: its association with linguistic meaning, with the *sense* of words themselves. Cicero, for instance, appeals to “the language of everyday life... approved by common sense (*communis sensus*)” (*De Oratore* 1.3.12). As this passage suggests, *sensus communis* is tied in particular to proverbial language. The same is true in English: introducing his collections of proverbs and epigrams (1562), Thomas Heywood explains that he occasionally departs from the “common sense” of language to give certain well-worn words additional meanings: “Some words, somewhat from common sense, I dispose / To seem one sense in text, another in glose” (107). Here the exception proves the rule: Heywood must make an apology for straying from “common sense” because his work is based on proverbs, which are assumed to be the manifestation of common sense. And it is precisely *because* they are seen as manifestations of common sense that proverbs carry special authority over not only social convention but matters of taste and aesthetic pleasure.

Similarly, if we turn once again to the Prologue of *Antonio’s Revenge*, we will see that Marston uses “common sense” here to invoke a form of socialized, proverbial, public knowledge rather than a piece of psychic equipment. The unfit audience member is one who “from his birth, being hugged in the armes, / And nuzzled twixt the breastes of

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5 Compare Bentley: “All these passages in which ‘common sense’ occurs are certainly not to be explained as if they had a single ‘common’ sense” (370, *Certe haec omnia loca, in quibus sensus communis occurrit, non sunt uno et communi sensu explicanda*).
happinesse / ...winkes, and shuts his apprehension up / From common sense of what men were, and are.” Although here Marston describes “common sense” in terms of an inner “apprehension” of external reality—which is structurally similar to the Aristotelian faculty—he does so in a *metaphorical* way, to invoke by analogy the idea of a person who is blind and deaf to the harsh realities acknowledged by common opinion, who hides his head in the sand like an ostrich. Living a life sheltered in the bosom of happiness, this person lacks “common sense,” which here simply refers to what anyone who has seen or heard anything of life should be expected to know. This common sense is not Aristotle’s “organ common to all sensoria,” then, but a minimum amount of life experience or social awareness: the person smothered “from his birth” between the breasts of happiness is, like the home-schooled boy in Quintilian, without common sense not because he lacks the psychological apparatus for receiving sensory impressions, but because he lacks *socialization*: his station in life is such that he has been insulated from the painful realities of the human condition.

Aesthetic Common Sense

For Marston, however, “common sense” has in addition to its psychological and social meanings a specifically aesthetic connotation, which prefigures Kant. He straddles the semantic gaps of “common sense,” standing where three different conceptions overlap: psychological, social, and aesthetic. In this section I will draw on Kant’s philosophy to articulate this third dimension of common sense.
Kant introduces his notion of common sense in the *Critique of Judgment* as a way of accounting for the objective validity of artistic taste. He defines “taste” as an “aesthetic common sense,” which he distinguishes from the “common human understanding” that normally goes by the name of common sense (“Taste may be designated as a *sensus communis aestheticus*, common human understanding as a *sensus communis logicus*”):

> I say that taste can with more justice be called a *sensus communis* than can sound understanding; and that the aesthetic, rather than the intellectual, judgement can bear the name of a public sense.... We might even define taste as the faculty of estimating what makes our feeling in a given representation *universally communicable* without the mediation of a concept. (153)

If we turn from this passage to the Induction of *What You Will*, we see that Marston uses the term “common sense” as Kant does, to refer not to the psychological equipment of sensory perception, nor the rhetorical formulation of proverbial wisdom, but to the reflective judgment of a pleasure that is specifically aesthetic. Thus the character Doricus, criticizing an author who would dismiss and contradict the audience’s evaluation of his work, asserts the validity of public judgments:

> Now out up-pont: I wonder what tite braine
> Wrung in this custome to maintaine *Contempt*
> Gainst common *Censure*: to give stiffe counter buffes,
> To crack rude skorne even on the very face
> Of better audience. Slight ist not odious,
> Why harke you honest, honest *Phylomuse*
> (You that indeavor to indeere our thoughts,
> To the composers spirit) hold this firme:
> *Musike and Poetry* were first approv’d
> By common scence; and that which pleased most,
> Held most allowed passe: your rules of Art
> Were shapt to pleasure, not pleasure to your rules. (2:232)
Here Marston suggests an answer to the transcendental question about the origins of poetry by spelling out the necessary condition for the possibility of artistic judgment: “common scence.” To appreciate the significance of Marston’s notion of common sense in this passage, it is necessary to glance back to ancient Rome, and then forward to the Enlightenment tradition of aesthetic philosophy that is anticipated in Doricus’ speech.

As Summers points out, “The association of the common sense with what we might call taste is to be found in classical Latin authors” (105). The competent socialized judgment implied in the Roman sensus communis, its connotation of an evaluative norm, is crucial to the development of aesthetics as a philosophical theorization of artistic taste. Aesthetic “taste” is not just a notion of physiological perception, but a normative ideal of competence and validity in judgments about artistic representations, a competence and validity analogous to those inherent in the notion of “common sense” in the social realm. At the same time, however, Aristotelie’s common sense—the faculty of sentient consciousness—also informs aesthetic theories of taste, because the latter are based on the idea that we enjoy or do not enjoy sensation at the same time that we experience it, and that this enjoyment is rooted in the structure of sensation itself. This is to say not that we simply enjoy what we see, but that we enjoy it insofar as it is in conformity with sensation. Art is in conformity with sensation or it is not. Common sense is thus not just a mode of apprehension, it is also a mode of discrimination. (Summers 132)

Thus, despite its eventual degree of autonomy, the origin of this third, aesthetic form of common sense is continuous with that of the first two (the faculty of sensory perception and the norm of social understanding). The genealogical path connecting the Aristotelian faculty of sense perception to Enlightenment aesthetics is paved through the Roman tradition of a social-rhetorical, cultural, proverbial form of common sense. Indeed, in the
foundational aesthetic philosophy of Hume and Kant, the proverbial wisdom of the
“commonsense maxim” serves as the veritable point of departure for their notion of
aesthetic judgment.

In “Of the Standard of Taste,” Hume situates his discussion of aesthetic taste in
terms of common sense and its contrary testimony through proverbs:

To seek the real beauty, or real deformity, is as fruitless an enquiry, as to
pretend to ascertain the real sweet or real bitter...; and the proverb has
justly determined it to be fruitless to dispute concerning tastes.... But
though this axiom, by passing into a proverb, seems to have attained the
sanction of common sense; there is certainly a species of common sense
which opposes it.... Whoever would assert an equality of genius and
elegance between OGILBY and MILTON...would be thought to defend no
less an extravagance, than if he had maintained a mole-hill to be as high as
TENERIFFE, or a pond as extensive as the ocean. Though there may be
found persons, who give the preference to the former authors; no one pays
attention to such a taste; and we pronounce without scruple the sentiment
of these pretended critics to be absurd and ridiculous. (Hume 257-58)

Hume’s essay begins with this recognition that proverbial “common sense” is
contradictory; his theory tries to reconcile two contrary propositions of common sense—
on one hand, that taste is subjective, but on the other hand, that it is objectively wrong to
judge Ogilby as highly as Milton. In Hume’s theory, then, we see a philosophical attempt
to justify proverbial, “commonsense” ideas about the realm of artistic judgment. But we
also see another tendency in Hume, running on parallel tracks in his argument, which
grounds the authority of aesthetic judgment not in the common or average person’s taste,
but rather in precisely the rarest and most refined specimen of humanity: the elusive and
hypothetical “true judge” of taste. Hume acknowledges that, “though the principles of
taste be universal, and nearly, if not entirely the same in all men; yet few are qualified to
give judgment on any work of art, or establish their own sentiment as the standard of
beauty” (264). Thus, because of their twin prerequisites of fine natural sense and refined cultural education, “men of delicate taste be rare” (265).

For our purposes, an especially important feature of Hume’s argument is that there is an aesthetic dimension to common sense, and that, conversely, proverbial truths somehow have special authority with regard to artistic judgment. These same proverbial truths play a central role in articulating the notion of a properly aesthetic common sense in the *Critique of Judgment*. There, Kant wrestles with the same “antinomy of taste” by acknowledging, like Hume, the contradictory testimony of proverbial common sense regarding aesthetic judgment. Indeed he cites precisely the same *locus communis* as Hume to illustrate the relativistic, skeptical attitude toward artistic taste:

The first commonplace of taste is contained in the proposition under cover of which every one devoid of taste thinks to shelter himself from reproach: *every one has his own taste*. .... Its second commonplace...is: *there is no disputing about taste*. .... Between these two commonplaces an intermediate proposition is readily seen to be missing. It is one which has certainly not become proverbial, but yet it is at the back of every one’s mind. It is that *there may be contention about taste* (although not a dispute). (205)

Kant’s “intermediate proposition” is conceived as a new maxim, one that aims to reconcile the two existing proverbs by filling in the gap between them: *there can be contention about taste*. As with Hume, then, Kant’s conception of taste is a logical supplement added to reconcile common sense to itself, and to account theoretically for the rational “contention” about taste that popular discourse presupposes. This “contention about taste” is a key feature of the more self-consciously experimental Elizabethan literature, particularly the satire which, we will see, becomes a privileged locus of such aesthetic contention.
The compromise between rhetorical ("proverbial") common sense on the one hand and rarified and exceptional judgment on the other, which is central to Hume and Kant’s theories of taste and to the rise of aesthetic philosophy, is not only a facet of Enlightenment intellectual culture; it is a theoretical treatment of a debate that was already well under way in the English Renaissance. The paradox of aesthetic taste as it is highlighted in Hume’s theory of the "true judges"—that an artistic value which is initially proven by the most general, normative taste of proverbial consensus ends up getting determined by and restricted to the most specialized, "delicate" taste of connoisseurs of sense—is also suggested by Elizabethan and early Jacobean authors. Echoes of this paradox can be heard in the authorial statements of Ben Jonson and John Webster about their printed plays, where they express concern about public consensus judging their works good or bad, and yet emphatically dismiss (as Hamlet does) the "common, vulgar" taste of audiences at the public theater. They turn and flatter the

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6 These are people “endowed with good sense and a delicate imagination, free from prejudice,” who are “of delicate taste” and are “easily to be distinguished in society, by the soundness of their understanding and the superiority of their faculties above the rest of mankind” (Hume 264-65).

7 See Webster’s preface to The White Devil: “it was acted in so dull a time of winter… that it wanted… a full and understanding auditory; and… I have noted, most of the people that come to that playhouse resemble… ignorant asses…. I present it to the general view with… confidence…. For, should a man present to such an auditory the most sententious tragedy that ever was written, observing all the critical laws…, the breath that comes from the incapable multitude is able to poison it” (Bevington 1664). See also Jonson’s preface to Sejanus, which “suffered no less violence from our people here, than the subject of it did from the rage of the people of Rome; but, with a different fate, as (I hope) merit: for this hath out-lived their malice, and begot itself a greater favour than he lost, the love of good men” (Wilkes 2:233) and to Catiline, which has one “To the Reader in Ordinary” (“neither praise nor dispraise from you can affect me”) and another “To the Reader Extraordinary” (“to you I submit myself and work”) (4-5).
supposedly more refined and judicious evaluation of an elite readership, who are essentially supposed to be the equivalent of Hume’s “true judges.”

Perhaps the most eloquent testimonials to this contention about taste, however, are the various and hysterically paradoxical credos written by Marston, in which he espouses various, contradictory points of view on the determination of aesthetic value. For instance, in the Prologue to his early play *Antonio and Mellida*, Marston tells the audience that he is offering his work to them with deference to their collective judgment: “we give up / The woorthlesse present of slight idlenesse, / To your authentic censure” (1:11). Elsewhere, however, Marston recognizes not the judgment of this *vox populi*, but a more selective, discriminating audience that is similar to Hume’s “true judges” of taste. For instance, the Induction to *What You Will* presents a very Humean ideal of “three or foure deem’d most juditious”: several select connoisseurs whose judgment is opposed to the “publick verdit” of vulgar consensus (2:232-233). Likewise, for his satiric poems, Marston writes a preface to “those that seem iudiciall perusers,” in which he declares: “If thou perusest mee with an vnpartiall eye, reade on, if otherwise, knowe I neyther value thee, nor thy censure” (*Poems* 100-101). And sometimes, in an even more contentious move, Marston maintains an idiosyncratic and solipsistic principle of judgment that allows for no objective “standard of taste” that is public or common, invoking instead the authority of himself or a hypothetical “nobody.” (*Antonio and Mellida* is dedicated “To the only rewarder and most just poiser of virtuous merits, the most honorably renowned Nobody.”) In these more satirical moments, Marston submits his plays neither to the judgment of the public nor to that of the private theater audiences, nor even to the rarified
taste of an elite readership, but instead dedicates his work “To Himself,” “To Detraction,” “To Nobody”—in short, to anyone except the body politic of his audience.

Is there a means of resolving these swirling contentions about aesthetic value? For Kant, we have seen, the solution to such “contention” lies in his notion of a sensus communis aestheticus—and this notion may help to clarify Marston’s writing as well. When Kant defines this term, he foregrounds the tension between the objective validity of artistic judgments on one hand and, on the other hand, the subjectivity of aesthetic pleasure: the same tension that appears in Marston’s (and Hume’s) debates about taste.

Kant’s “aesthetic common sense” is

a subjective principle…which determines what pleases or displeases, by means of a feeling only and not through concepts, but yet with universal validity. Such a principle…could only be regarded as a common sense. This differs essentially from common understanding, which is also sometimes called common sense (sensus communis).... The judgement of taste, therefore, depends on our presupposing the existence of a common sense. (82-83)

Although Kant’s theory is often considered the foundation of modern aesthetics, we have seen in Marston’s Induction to What You Will a Renaissance conception of “common sense” that prefigures Kant’s, referring to a consensus in judgments of artistic taste. Like Kant, Marston’s Doricus says quite explicitly that a common sense is the necessary presupposition for the validity of judgments regarding artistic representations, that the latter depend on a sensus communis aestheticus: “Musike and Poetry were first approv’d / By common scence.” Such a claim suggests, furthermore, that the consensus of aesthetic judgment is not merely a popular vote adding up the arbitrary manifestations of personal whims, but is an expression of the universal structure of human sensibility, a shared
mental apparatus that produces uniformity among individual judgments. Doricus lectures that “rules of Art / Were shapt to pleasure, not pleasure to your rules,” and we can see in this formulation not only the idea that artistic conventions are designed to answer to audience taste rather than letting scholastic dogma dictate taste, but also the implication that, since “rules of Art” have developed to please human judgment, this human judgment must itself be sufficiently uniform (i.e. with a universal, normative structure) to form the ground for such a prescriptive poetics. If art does not give the rule to pleasure but pleasure rather gives the rule to art, then a universal structure in human sense must be presupposed as the basis for such rules.

However, such a characterization of common sense and popular consensus—as the rightful judge of poetic worth, as the most valid index for artistic value—clashes violently with Marston’s fierce denunciations elsewhere of public taste. The sensus communis aestheticus may work for Kant in theory, but it does not work nearly as well for Marston in poetic practice. Indeed, Kant’s idea of a universally valid common sense, which might ground the “subjective necessity” of judgments of taste, highlights the significance of the gesture in which Marston, who is second to none in his self-conscious sensitivity to the power of consensus in public taste, deliberately publishes his contempt for such popular consensus. For instance, Doricus’ pronouncement about common sense is delivered as part of a larger attack on the arrogant presumption of an author who would scornfully maintain his own judgment as superior to the general opinion of his audience, who would “spit defiance on dislike” (233). It is thus a pronouncement on the relative
authority of singular as opposed to collective judgment when the two are in contention over aesthetic value:

I wonder what tite braine
Wrung in this custome to maintaine Contempt
Gainst common Censure: to give stiffe counter buffes,
To crack rude skorne even on the very face
Of better audience....

There are several things to point out here. First, the contemptuous position being criticized here is Marston’s own; despite his reflexive self-satirizing in such passages, Marston cannot resist the impulse to “crack rude skorne” on the face of his audience, and his work is full of such rude scorn. Second, the conflict portrayed here, between the “contempt” of the individual “tight brain” and the “common censure” of the collective “better audience,” is analogous to the tension in Hamlet between the hero’s “particular” sense and his mother and uncle’s “common” sense. Marston portrays common sense as the collective judgment of the audience opposed by a satirical poet, while Shakespeare portrays common sense as the social consensus of the dramatic community opposed by a tragic character. Indeed, to “maintain contempt against common censure” is exactly what Hamlet does when he counters the censuring consensus of Gertrude and Claudius with his “peevish opposition.” From this point of view, we can see that Marston represents metatheatrically, at the aesthetic level, the same opposition that Shakespeare presents dramatically among his principal characters: an individual judgment self-consciously resists the authority of common sense.
Towards Uncommon Sense

What accounts for such passionate and contradictory attitudes toward common sense? If we look at the contentions and confrontations staged in Marston’s writing between “private sense” and “common censure,” we don’t see any formulation of “common sense” that offers an explicit solution to the apparent contradictions. However, we can see such a solution, I suggest, if we acknowledge in Marston an implicit notion of uncommon sense, a notion which needs to be reconstructed from the contours of his writing itself. In Kantian terms aesthetic common sense is the arbiter of artistic “taste,” and Marston’s tendency to express uncommon sense in his work gains for it the almost universal judgment that it is somehow “tasteless.” Thus if, in the guise of “Doricus,” Marston is an early, pre-Kantian spokesperson for the authority of common sense in the aesthetic realm, elsewhere he is no less remarkable as one of its most vehement antagonists. We have already seen how, in rhetorical gestures such as the sarcastic dedication to “Nobody” for Antonio and Mellida, Marston despairs mockingly of finding a true critic or a fit reader. At such moments Marston is the epitome of uncommon sense in the aesthetic realm, refusing to acknowledge any collective or communal authority over the fantastical, contrary muse that animates his work for judging its value with universal validity.

As a self-fashioning author who dramatizes his own personality textually, Marston’s uncommon writing style is predated and rivaled perhaps only by Thomas

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8 Harvey Wood says that “his expression is not merely unintelligible, it is unintelligent, preposterous gibberish” (1: xxxii). Axelrad describes his satires as “une avalanche de gros mots” (38).
Nashe among the Elizabethans. Like Nashe, Marston continually treats the page as a stage upon which he may strike postures through language, postures that distinguish and separate him from other authorial personalities. And yet although Marston may strike this pose perhaps more forcefully than any other Elizabethan poet, opposing his peculiar self to the common crowd of anonymous writers, he also performs as spinelessly as anyone a self-effacing capitulation to popular opinion, to the generic transparency of convention. Marston vacillates between opaque idiosyncrasy and transparent conventionality. He vacillates between uncommon and common sense. Marston’s authorial personality walks the line between a posture of grandiose individuality and cowering self-effacement, between a fantasy of self-assertion and a fantasy of self-negation. Indeed he does not so much walk this line as veer wildly back and forth across it like a drunk driver over the yellow median. However, in the end it is common sense that wins out with Marston. In the arc of his literary career, Marston’s early satires feature the most violent opposition to common sense, and in his later works the respect for, rather than contempt of, the sensus communis aestheticus becomes more and more predominant. First (after *The Scourge of Villainie*) Marston stops writing verse satire; then (after *The Malcontent*) he stops writing absurdly “tasteless” plays in favor of more decorous and tasteful fare; eventually he becomes a clergyman and quits “poesy” altogether. For better or worse, Marston gives in to common sense.

With Shakespeare it is a different story. His most uncommon and (which is nearly the same thing) his most satirical work comes not at the beginning but in the middle and later part of his literary career, emerging in Jaques from *As You Like It* and the title
character from *Hamlet*, and finding its most forceful expression in *Troilus and Cressida* and *Timon of Athens*. Thus we find in *Hamlet*, to return to my opening discussion, the same two forms of uncommon sense that we have identified in Marston. We see this in the two roles that Hamlet himself plays: (1) the tragic individual who embodies an alternative to common sense (what Claudius calls Hamlet’s “peevish opposition”), and (2) the satiric commentator who provides a sort of chorus on the proceedings (“You are as good as a chorus, my lord,” says Ophelia during the Mousetrap scene). The former draws on the alienated personality represented in classical tragedy, especially in Seneca’s tragic heroes. The latter draws on the contemptuous voice that emerged in Elizabethan verse satire. The hybrid flavor of uncommon sense in satirical tragedies such as *Hamlet* comes from mixing these two sources of uncommon sense in one dramatic entity: Hamlet embodies both the tragic Senecan individual suffering outside the bounds of common experience, and the bitter voice of an Elizabethan satirist offering choric commentary on the content of the play.

Satirical tragedies such as *Hamlet*, however, can only go so far before qualifying the hero’s uncommon sense with the heroic affirmation proper to Shakespearean tragedy. If early on *Hamlet* opens up this uncommonly satirical avenue for English tragedy, by its conclusion the play turns into something of a dead end for uncommon sense. Among the significant changes in the hero’s character when he returns to Denmark in Act 5, Hamlet’s “peevish opposition” to common sense has essentially evaporated, and in its place there appears a desire for reconciliation with the *sensus communis*, for the embrace of what Marston calls a “publick verdit.” In the tragedy’s final scene, Hamlet implores
Horatio to “tell my story” for posterity: in other words, he wants a post-mortem ambassador, an apologist to explain his side of things, to “report me and my cause aright” to the public. Likewise, in his last speech act he casts his vote in the royal ballot and thus helps forge a new political *sensus communis* around the figure of Fortinbras: Hamlet has changed his tune and adds his “dying voice” to the governmental chorus—a *vox populi* of sorts—in the royal election. On his way to the “flights of angels” singing in heavenly chorus, Hamlet craves the approval of, and an alliance with, a public consensus in Denmark. In these respects Hamlet the character, like Marston the author, eventually capitulates to the *sensus communis*. But other, more satirical Shakespearean plays offer the example of tragic characters who ultimately refuse to cast their lot in with common sense, characters who, for better or worse, will not capitulate to consensus. The result is a different genre: not satirical tragedy, but tragical satire.\(^9\) Whereas in plays such as *Hamlet* and *Othello* there is a final attempt to reconcile the hero and public opinion, in *Troilus and Cressida* and *Timon of Athens* this opposition is made more intense and radical at the end of the play. Thus, where Hamlet courts the *sensus communis* of public opinion at the moment of his death, Timon scorns all communal evaluation and authority. It is the latter kind of character—the tragical satirist—that I want to explain in this study.

Of course, this tragical-satirical stance neither begins nor ends with the Elizabethan age; the expression of aesthetic uncommon sense in Marston or Timon is similar to that of later historical figures such as the “tragic philosopher” Nietzsche, who

\(^9\) The subgenre of tragical satire (e.g. *Troilus and Cressida*) is thus distinguishable from satirical tragedy (e.g. *Hamlet*) on the one hand and comical satire (e.g. *Every Man Out*) on the other. On using such adjective-substantive labels for subgenres, see Fowler.
declares that his work speaks of experiences so exceptional as to be incomprehensible to his audience and only appreciable by a hypothetical readership after his death, or the narrator of *Notes From Underground*, who declares that he writes knowing he “shall never have any readers” (Dostoevsky 28). As the example of Dostoevsky implies, the conundrum in which uncommon sense is opposed to the aesthetic *sensus communis* of public taste is especially marked in works that mix tragedy and satire. While this poetics of uncommon sense in Marston and Shakespeare prefigures later tragic satirists such as Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, I will argue that it is inspired by a fusion of two earlier traditions: Senecan tragedy and Elizabethan satire. Thus, when Shakespeare combines tragedy with satire in *Troilus and Cressida* and *Timon of Athens*, he is not simply capitalizing on two popular genres but recognizing, as does Marston, the uncommon sense central to the traditions of both Senecan tragedy and Elizabethan satire, and drawing out this basic compatibility to produce the lively hybrid genre of “tragical satire.”

**Something Old, Something New**

I will conclude with a few words about critical method. In the context of the English Renaissance, my Kantian approach to the aesthetic meanings of “common sense” may appear somewhat anachronistic (although, as we have seen, there is evidence from texts of the period that such usages were then current). However, this specter of

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10 It is not a coincidence, I think, that Dostoevsky’s narrator, a tragical-satirical connoisseur of uncommon sense, repeatedly heaps contempt on “all that is beautiful and sublime”—the two principal Kantian aesthetic values.
anachronism does not make these meanings irrelevant for analyzing the literature of this period. First, the fact that a word may be anachronistic does not necessarily mean that its corresponding concept necessarily is. The tendency to argue that modern concepts were “unthinkable” in earlier periods, based on the historical usage of a given word, is perhaps too blindly encouraged. (An example of this might be Greenblatt’s discussion of “atheism” in his essay “Invisible Bullets.”) Although the modern definition of common sense as “everyday understanding” is a post-Renaissance development—or at least, circa 1600, an emergent rather than dominant meaning—this notion of “everyday understanding” is not foreign to the Renaissance, nor is the Kantian notion of a sensus communis aestheticus that accounts for consensus and universality in artistic judgments. If I have here organized a constellation of concepts (sensory awareness, social competence, aesthetic appreciation) under one umbrella term (“common sense”) which did not always-already have such a range of meanings in the Renaissance, that does not mean that these very concepts did not exist in the Renaissance, nor does it mean that the same connections between these concepts were not present in that period.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, if an intellectual development such as the emergence of Kant’s sensus communis has theoretical value outside of the curiosity of a museum piece, it should have a scope of application—both backwards and forwards—beyond its own immediate historical horizon. Indeed, this truth is necessary for any of the wildly proliferating “theoretical” interpretations of Renaissance drama to have any value (studies by Greenblatt, Jonathan Dollimore, Catherine Belsey, etc.). An awareness of historical context is certainly helpful in understanding past ideas; however, if the
conceptual work of abstraction doesn’t ever get beyond historical particularity, this contextual grounding is little more than a castle built of sand. The ideal of “putting ideas in context” can easily become a mad rush to construct a context instead of an idea, as if that were a sign of profundity. Is it truly an “idea in context” if the idea is reduced to an historical object, a label for a fragment of material culture, an index to some mechanism of social practice? The valuable aspects of Kant’s aesthetic theory, for instance, are valuable not just for understanding Schiller’s essays or the notebooks of Coleridge, but also for reading plays by Seneca and Marston. (In a sense, I am saying nothing controversial here, but simply invoking the categorical difference between aesthetic theory and literary criticism: the former is abstract and hence has a more general scope of application than the latter, which is devoted to particular works.)

As much as possible, however, I inform my analysis of the authority and subversion of common sense with a historicized, “Renaissance” perspective. The need for such a perspective is evident in works such as Catherine Belsey’s Critical Practice, which champions postmodern theorists who (mis)treat “common sense” as something to be at best ignored and at worst “demystified.”¹¹ While my dissertation likewise involves a critical questioning of “common sense,” this questioning is developed within the framework of early modern rather than postmodern thought. I unpack the multiple meanings that “common sense” acquired over time—treating it as what William Empson

¹¹ Belsey’s first chapter (“Traditional Criticism and Common Sense”) simply conflates “common sense” with “traditional” criticism, which is dismissed in favor of post-structural approaches. She writes that “recent work…, stimulated above all from France, has called in question not only some of the specific assumptions about common sense…, but the authority of common sense itself” (2-3).
would call a “complex word” or Raymond Williams a “keyword”—before constructing a new critical term, “uncommon sense,” in relation to this range of historical meanings. In this respect my dissertation joins recent trends in the discipline that have been called “New Aestheticism” and “Historical Formalism,” because it considers simultaneously the formal concerns of close reading, the theoretical concerns of Kant’s aesthetic philosophy, and the generic concerns of literary history.\(^\text{12}\)

Indeed, Kantianism and formalism have long tended to go hand in hand, and their coincidence is evident in the resurgence of aesthetic or formalist criticism. For instance, Heather Dubrow’s essay “Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner,” from *Renaissance Literature and its Formal Engagements*, offers an explicitly Kantian take on formalism in the process of its critical re-reading of English country-house poems. On the other hand, in the same collection Richard Strier provides a rousing defense of formalist methodology in his afterword on “How Formalism Became a Dirty Word,” and he does so without mentioning Kant. Yet I would suggest that, if we have recourse to Strier’s explication of “literary value” in his book *Resistant Structures*, we find (without reading “against the grain”) an implicitly Kantian stance in his formulation. There, Strier “assumes that if a work can be shown to address a significant issue in a substantial way..., and if the work is, at the same time, interestingly written at the micro-level, it is a work of genuine literary value” (204). In its double insistence on both substantial content at the global level and engaging form at the local level, Strier’s definition of *literary value*—“a concept that I believe in” (203)—is suggestive of Kant’s conception of the “aesthetic

idea” in works of artistic genius, which “attach to a concept a representation of the imagination belonging to its presentation, but inducing solely on its own account such a wealth of thought as would never admit of comprehension in a definite concept” (Kant 177, my emphasis). Strier’s definition is not identical to Kant’s, especially with respect to Kant’s emphasis on the dialectical tension between the “concept” (Strier’s “significant issue”) and the “representation” (Strier’s “micro-level”). Nevertheless, to a significant degree I think it is conceived in the same spirit. Like most formalist conceptions of literary quality, Strier’s description shares with Kant the sense of unfinalized play between the conceptual “issues” of an artwork and its representational “micro-level.” Indeed, Kant is for my project—as for much aesthetically minded criticism more generally—what Strier would call a “guiding figure” or a “guiding spirit” (7-8). Kant may not take us to Paradise himself, but he can lead us by the hand to figures such as Seneca, Marston and Shakespeare, who are waiting at the lower steps of the next realm.

The design of my dissertation is essentially chronological. This first chapter has presented an historical survey of “common sense” and established the main terms of my argument. The second chapter interprets Seneca’s tragedies in these terms, showing how the plays represent the contradiction and domination of common sense by “uncommon sense” in the realms of psychology, rhetoric, and aesthetics. The third chapter turns to the English Renaissance and discusses the satire that flourished in the 1590s, showing how the defining features of such Elizabethan satire—obscurity, harshness, and bitterness—represent forms of rhetorical and aesthetic uncommon sense analogous to those of
Senecan tragedy. The fourth chapter offers a reading of John Marston, showing how his work combines the traditions of Senecan tragedy and Elizabethan satire through a highly idiosyncratic yet historically significant style, epitomized in the notion of “phantasy” and animated by a tension between common and uncommon sense. The fifth chapter is devoted to Shakespeare, showing how the perplexing “problem plays” *Troilus and Cressida* and *Timon of Athens* not only participate in the same two literary traditions and dramatize similar tensions within common sense but, as the ultimate and ideal fusion of Senecan tragedy and Elizabethan satire, embody a focused *poetics* of uncommon sense in the dramatic form of “tragical satire.”
CHAPTER TWO
UNCOMMON SENSE IN SENECAN TRAGEDY

This chapter presents a fuller vision of uncommon sense in tragedy through a reading of Seneca’s plays. The foundational place of Seneca in this study is both historically and theoretically motivated: historically, because he is the most important classical inspiration for English Renaissance tragedy, and theoretically, because Seneca presents in an almost chemically pure state the three forms of uncommon sense that I have identified.

Seneca’s heroes can be described as “uncommon” in the rather loose sense in which most tragic protagonists in European drama are uncommon: they are extraordinary individuals, marked out in some way like Oedipus with his scarred feet and his exceptional cleverness, who seem to exist outside the norm or beyond the common bounds of humanity. As Shakespeare’s Glyndwr says, they are “not in the roll of common men” (Henry IV pt. 1, 3.1.41). Seneca’s heroes are shown “escaping the common order” (Croisille 299), and it is ironically this “escape” from commonness, this extra-ordinariness, that singles them out for destruction.¹³ Northrop Frye says, “Nietzsche’s mountain-top air of transvaluation clings to the tragic hero: his thoughts are not ours any

¹³ “échappant à l’ordre commun.” This tragic convention may derive partly from Sophocles; his typical hero, as the classicist Hugh Lloyd-Jones puts it, is one “whose strength, courage, and intelligence exceed the human norm. In a dire crisis only such persons as these can protect common human beings; yet they suffer, to use a French expression, from the defects of their qualities” (Lloyd-Jones 1:1).
more than his deeds, even if, like Faustus, he is dragged off to hell for having them” (207-08). The hero’s Herculean distance above—or if one prefers, his Nietzschean contempt for—the common mass of humanity belongs both to the over-reacher’s elevated status and to his necessary fall. “Tragic heroes are so much the highest points in their human landscape that they seem the inevitable conductors of the power about them, great trees more likely to be struck by lightning than a clump of grass” (207). This is a traditional commonplace about tragic individuals; in fact, here Frye echoes a trope used by Seneca in the chorus of Phaedra, which also warns of the tragic dangers in being uncommonly lofty: “Rarely are the blows of lightning felt by the misty valley; but the bolt of Jove high-thundering staggers the mighty Caucasus and Mother Cybelle’s Phrygian grove” (1132-35).14 As this locus communis suggests, Senecan drama gives fodder for the conventional view that tragic individuals are “uncommon” in the loose sense of having high distinction. More specifically, however, they are defined by the ways in which they come into collision precisely with “common sense” as we have defined it.

First, there is the psychological disturbance of his main characters, in which the faculties of the soul are at war with one another, and the two main functions associated with Aristotle’s common sense—to mediate separate impressions into unified sensation, and to provide the reflexive self-awareness of conscious subjectivity—are manifested in disordered perversions of themselves. Second, there is the rhetorical opposition that his tragic heroes present to the proverbial consensus of the chorus and advisor figures, whose

14 Quotations from Seneca’s plays are cited by line number. Translations are mostly from the Loeb edition by Fitch.
sententious nuggets of traditional wisdom are upended, parodied, and vivisected in
Seneca’s famous tirades and his signature scenes of stichomythic argument. Third, there
is the aesthetic perversity of certain generic conventions associated with Senecan tragedy,
especially the image and horror of his tragic crimes, in which acts such as the self-
blinding of Oedipus or the cannibalistic preparation of the Thyestean feast are presented
in all their gory detail, and with much more deliberate and protracted grotesqueness than
in his Greek predecessors (compare, for instance, his Oedipus with that of Sophocles).
Gruesome masterpieces conceived and executed through the hero’s tragic genius, his
tragic plots seem calculated to produce the exact opposite of the universal pleasure that
Kant calls the “aesthetic common sense” of judgments of taste.

Faculty Psychology in Senecan Tragedy

What is the Atreus of Euripides? His sense-impression. The Oedipus of Sophocles? His
sense-impression.... What are those men called who follow every impression of their
senses? Madmen. (Epictetus, quoted in Stevens 170)

The psychological uncommon sense of Senecan tragedy is most obvious in the
case of Oedipus, that tragic myth prominent in Aristotle’s Poetics and subsequent
theories of tragedy. It features “sense” in the most literal of ways: the story of Oedipus is
one whose central catastrophe takes the form of the hero’s changing relationship with his
own organs of sensation. As does Sophocles, whose Oedipus the King and Oedipus at
Colonus are extant, Seneca offers us two plays featuring this character: like the former,
Seneca’s Oedipus tells the story of the hero’s realization of his crimes (parricide and
incest) and of his self-blinding; like the latter, Seneca’s *Phoenissae* (sometimes titled *Thebais*) represents the exiled hero in the aftermath of his downfall. In the opening scene of the latter play, the blind former king is outside of Thebes with his daughter Antigone, his only companion in banishment and only “guidance for [her] blind parent” (1). This scene presents a “Passion-Restraint” dispute very typical of Seneca’s plays (Fitch 2002, 276), in which a faithful assistant tries to reason with the deranged main character. Here, the tormented Oedipus wants to end his life, and begs his daughter to leave him alone to perish, or to give him some means of dying; for her part, Antigone argues against this suicidal impulse and prays that he will preserve his life: “change your thinking (*flecte mentem*), summon up your courage of old, and vanquish your troubles with sturdy resolve” (77-78). Perhaps most importantly, Antigone insists less emphatically on the ultimate nature of his fate than on her absolute resolve to share it, whether it be life or death: “If you die, I go before; if you live, I follow” (76).

In his rebuttal, Oedipus warns his daughter that she is wasting her words (140, *Quid perdis ultra verba?*) and that he is “set” (141, *sedet*) on dying, which he considers an inalienable right that no one can take away from him: “Anyone can deprive a person of life, but no one of death” (153, *nemo mortem*). He considers by what physical path his life should be spilled, declaring emphatically that the means don’t matter, only the end: “I do not fix on any one place for wounding; all of me is guilty, exact death where you will” (157-58). However, Oedipus then goes on to consider this question in detail, cataloguing

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15 “The encounter between an impassioned protagonist and a confidant who vainly counsels restraint is one of Seneca’s favorite dramatic situations.... The ultimate inspiration for these scenes may have been Euripides’ *Medea* and *Hippolytus*, where Nurses play a somewhat comparable role” (Tarrant 116).
his body-parts in a list of possible targets for capital punishment: “tear out this heart (cor)...lay bare all my coiling guts....smash my throat...tear my veins.... Or else direct your anger as before; pull open these wounds...” (159-64). The last suggestion invokes his eye-sockets, once the site of his eyes and now the site simply of “wounds” (vulnera).

At this moment, revisiting his earlier self-blinding and recollecting the logic of that punishment, Oedipus delivers a speech addressed to his dead father, Laius:

And you, my father, wherever you stand to witness my punishment: I did not believe that such a crime as mine could be properly expiated by any punishment, ever; I was not satisfied with this much death (ista morte), I did not redeem myself by partial payment (parte): I wanted to die for you limb by limb. But now at last exact your debt. Now I am paying the penalty, then I gave you a funeral offering. Stand close and press my feeble hand further in, plunge it deeper! Slight and timid the libation it poured from my head then: it scarcely drew out the eyes (oculos) that were eager to follow. My spirit is hesitating, as it hesitated when my eyes thrust themselves upon my reluctant hand. You will hear the truth (audies verum), Oedipus: you plucked out your eyes (lumina) less boldly than you offered them. Now plunge your hand into the brain (cerebro). Bring death to completion through that part (hac parte) where I began to die. (166-81)

In these lines it is as if Oedipus is conducting an imaginative autopsy or dissection of himself: he has numbered all his bones. The catalogue of body-parts is terrifically, brutally detailed, and yet it concludes with a climax focused on one item that is alone unspecified: it is simply “that part” (hac parte) through which Oedipus wants to “bring death to completion.”16

What is this “part” that is mentioned at the end of the speech? Its identity is, of course, narrowed down by context: it is identified with the skull or brain (cerebrum), and

16 Neville’s translation has: “Now, by those Eyeholes thrust thy hand into the very braine: / That part where death attempted was, let death be sought againe” (Newton 109).
it is described as the part where Oedipus first “began to die.” The very word *parte* seems important, appearing twice in the quoted passage: Oedipus says “I did not redeem myself by partial payment (*redemi parte*),” and he wants to bring death “through that part (*parte*) where I began to die.”17 The two most obvious candidates for this “part” seem to be (1) the eye-sockets, continuing the path of destruction initiated in the last play when he began to die by gouging out the organs located there, and (2) the brain itself, which as the site of his cleverness (*ingenium*) was the organ that destroyed Oedipus (by helping him solve the Sphinx’s riddle, thus winning the hand of Jocasta, and also by helping him piece together the clues of his true identity—destroying himself through reconstructing himself, as it were). However, there is another possible interpretation: rather than the eyes or the brain, this “part” can be understood as the hero’s common sense.

Let us first consider the word *cerebrum*, which is usually translated as *brain*: “you plucked out your eyes (*lumina*) less boldly than you offered them. Now plunge your hand into the brain (*cerebro*)....” Here, the speech suggests a distinction between sensation and intellect: Oedipus is shifting focus from his visual organ (eyes) to his cognitive organ (brain), from his sense to his genius. However, the Latin *cerebrum*, the “part” at which Oedipus wants to strike with his hand, refers not only to “brain,” “skull,” and “the seat of intelligence” but also to “the seat of the senses” (*OLD*)—which means that it occupies the same place as the *sensus communis*, likewise the “seat of the senses.” Thus, the speech points to the difference between attacking an organ specific to one sense and attacking

17 Regarding the former, one commentator observes: “By the metaphor from debt-repayment (*redemī*), Seneca, with grim wit, represents Oedipus’ self-blinding (*parte* refers to his eyes) as being the payment of the first instalment of his limb-by-limb suicide” (Frank 127, sic).
what Aristotle calls the “organ common to all sensoria.” Here, in a very literal way, Oedipus threatens his common sense by following with his violent hand the path of sense-data as it passes in from outside, through the visual organs, to the brain’s common center of sensation. This reading is strengthened when we examine the project that Oedipus is trying to complete, the project begun by his self-blinding in the first play. The “partial” (parte) death repeatedly mentioned in Phoenissae—the “this much death” (ista morte)—refers back to Oedipus where the hero says, “You die: this is enough for your father. What then will you offer your mother, or your children, so wrongly brought into the light?” (938-40). For Oedipus, the simple death penalty—the “common” form of capital punishment—is enough to satisfy justice for his crime of parricide (patri sat est), but is not sufficient for his crime of incest (quid deinde matri?). His solution is the mors longa: “Use your cleverness (utere ingenio)... pick out a lingering death (mors longa). Search for a way to wander without mixing with the dead, and yet removed from the living” (947-51). Oedipus then tears out his eyes. Therefore, regardless of the ambiguity surrounding the word parte, in Phoenissae the phrase “where I began to die” clearly refers to the execution of his self-punishment in the earlier play where, willing but unable to die multiple deaths as a penalty for his crimes, Oedipus decides that “what cannot happen often must happen slowly,” and resolves that a “long” death must be stretched out

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18. The common sense is “the ‘center’ to which common sensations is properly related” (Summers 85), the “centrum omnium sensuum” (Summers 92); “the common sence… is centrum sensibus” (Chapman 75).

19. I am assuming that the order of composition matches the chronology of the story, and that Seneca composed Oedipus before Phoenissae—an assumption supported by Fitch’s efforts in relative dating (a Freudian slip!). See Fitch 2002, 12-13, and Fitch 1981, “Sense-Pauses and Relative Dating in Seneca.”
(948-49). So the self-blinding is required to punish the crime of incest (in Freudian interpretation, the blinding is symbolic castration), and it aims to produce a unique and paradoxical condition, in which the culprit will be separated both from the community of the dead and the community of the living (*nec sepultis mixtus et vivis tamen exemptus*).

Oedipus wants to remove himself from the presence of his mother/wife and sisters/daughters (the living victims of his incest), without at the same time thereby joining the presence of his father (the dead victim of his parricide).

The word “daring” (*audax*) is another significant verbal connection between the two plays. The negative comparison in the *Phoenissae* speech—“less boldly” (*minus...audacter*)—recalls the blinding scene in *Oedipus* where the hero is described as “boldly violent” (960, *violentus audax*). In the first play, the hero is defined by this bold audacity: his bulging eyes “hardly stayed in place” (959) and “met their wounds halfway” (964). In *Phoenissae*, however, Oedipus tells himself, “you plucked out your eyes less boldly than you offered them” (*minus eruisti lumina audacter tua, / quam praestitisti*). The best way of interpreting Oedipus’ critical self-evaluation, the feeling that his execution of self-punishment did not live up to its daring moment of conception, is to say

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20 The Latin here is ambiguous. In her textual commentary, Frank translates the line as “you dug out your eyeballs less boldly than you undertook to do,” and comments: “The conceit is puzzling: Seneca must mean that when Oedipus drove his fingers into his eye-sockets, he did not do as thorough a job as he had pledged to do in that he did not kill himself, but, of course, suicide was not Oedipus’ aim at that stage” (129). This gloss is rather unconvincing, however, and other translators seem nearer the right track when they construe the passage as contrasting how Oedipus “pulled out” (*eruisti*) his eyes with how he “stuck out” (*praestitisti*) his eyes: he pulled them out with less boldness than he stuck them out. The Newton translation has: “Thy stoutnes then was not so great when eyes thou pulledst out / As was thy manhood, when thou threwst them from thee round about” (109).
that he did not go deep enough, because he only struck the organ of a particular sense, rather than the “organ that makes all sense.”

This reading is supported by the hero’s words elsewhere. In *Oedipus* he describes Jocasta’s voice as replacing his eyes: “What restores my eyes? The sound of my mother, of my mother! I have wasted my efforts” (1013-14, trans. modified). Likewise in *Phoenissae* he makes the same point: “my ears force on me all that my eyes have spared me” (232-33). These complaints clarify his dissatisfaction because we now see how the punishment of blinding has not fulfilled the conditions it was supposed to. Oedipus is tormented by the social recognition that comes through sensory perception: the destruction of one sense (sight) is negated by the persistence of another sense (hearing). However, sound is only one of a whole catalogue of items that torment him. After Oedipus vocalizes his impulse to “plunge his hand into” his *cerebrum*, Antigone counters with an exhortation to face life bravely without running away from fears, concluding with the question “Whom, father, do you flee?” to which Oedipus responds:

I flee myself, I flee this breast conscious of all my crimes (*conscium scelerum omnium / pectus*), I flee this hand and these heavens and gods, and I flee the terrible crimes (*sCELERA*) I did in innocence. Am I still burdening this earth, where fruitful crops arise? Am I breathing this air with my pestilential mouth? Do I slake my thirst with draughts of water, or enjoy the gifts of our kindly mother? Do I lay my hand on this chaste hand, though evil, incestuous, accursed? Do my ears take in any sounds through which I can hear the name of parent or son? If only I could cut off these pathways, drive in my hands and root out every avenue for voices, every narrow passageway open to words! Then, daughter, your ill-fated father would have escaped this sense of you (*sensum tui*), who are part (*pars*) of my crimes (*criminum*). (215-231, trans. modified)

Oedipus inventories huge swaths of reality, both macrocosmic and microcosmic, cataloguing the order of the external world along with the order of his internal bodily
functions. His complaint moves from natural benefits (air, water, food) to social relations (daughter, son, father), and involves both in the nexus of pathways for sensory communication between the inward self and the outside reality of the natural world, including the other people and social networks within it. Oedipus lists benefits of the nose (“breathing this air”), of the mouth (drinking “draughts of water” and consuming the earth’s “fruitful crops”), of the skin (feeling his daughter’s “chaste hand”), of the ear (hearing “the name of parent or son”): thus, he invokes each of his surviving senses in these lines: smell (*auras ore pestifero traho*), taste (*laticis haustu satior*), touch (*manum..attrecto*), and hearing (*ullos aure concipio sonos... / audiam*).

This passage conveys what Seneca elsewhere calls the “sense of benefits.” In his prose treatise *De Beneficiis*, Seneca asks a rhetorical question: “do you call that man unhappy who has lost his sight, whose ears have been closed by some malady, and yet do not call him wretched (*miserum*) who has lost all sense of benefits (*sensum beneficiorum*)?” (Basore 3:157). Oedipus is a strange combination of the two men hypothesized, the one who has lost his sense of sight, and the “wretch” (*miserum*, the same term Oedipus that applies to himself in the blinding scene: “utere ingenio, miser!”) who has “lost all sense of benefits.” “Am I to have the benefite of any Element? / Of Ayre for breath, of water moyst, or Earth for nourishment?” (Newton 110). He has gained an *uncommon* “sense of benefits” insofar as his consciousness of receiving gifts from the world has become a form of torment. His senses are illicit means of contact, physical bonds tying him to the living products of his incest, and it is precisely these bonds with

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21 See Frank on 222-24: “ego castum manum / ... / attrecto”: “*attrecto* means ‘touch’, particularly in a religious sense” (142).
the living that his self-mutilation is aiming to sever. Oedipus implies that he flees the normal forms of sensation—the five senses—not only because they are the means of his knowledge of his crimes, but also because they are in themselves a “part” of his crimes. Although he says that he wants to escape the “sense” of his daughter because she is part of his crimes (pars meorum es criminum), he also suggests that he wants to escape sense itself. Thus his frustration in trying to fix on the ideal target in his aim for self-destruction is inevitable: there is no punishment Oedipus could direct at his external sense-organs that could achieve his objectives.

The first body-part in his list—“conscium...pectus”—invokes the common sense. The common sense was according to some ancient philosophers located in the breast, and it is his “breast conscious of all of my crimes” (215-216, conscium scelerum omnium / pectus) that Oedipus wishes to flee. He is tortured by the reflexive self-awareness in conscious sensation that is part of the traditional function of the Aristotelian common sense. Oedipus has blinded himself in order to leave the realm of the living without joining the realm of the dead, to destroy the “normative structure” that links his sensations (through both contiguity and continuity) with his fellow creatures. Thus, while in Phoenissae Oedipus acts on the surface as if he simply wants to die, given the context of his whole career in Senecan drama, it is clear that what he really wants is not mere

\[^{22}\text{Summers says that the sensus communis/hegemonikon of the Stoics “was variously located in the head, following Plato and the physiologists, or in the heart, following Aristotle” (92); thus Oedipus covers both possibilities by planning to attack both a “part” of his cerebrum and his “conscious breast” (pectus conscium). See also Voelke: “Pour les stoïciens l’âme est une réalité matérielle, un ‘corps,’ comprenant huit ‘parties’: une partie maîtresse ou hégémonikon, localisée le plus souvent dans le coeur et jouant le rôle principe directeur, et sept parties subordonnées ayant leurs organes respectifs (les cinq sens, la voix, la partie génératrice)” (20).}\]
death but a form of suffering outside of the normal forms of sentience promised by the *sensus communis* of classical psychology. This reading matches the implicit means-end logic in all of Oedipus’ self-violence, which, pursuing the pathways of sensation, first attacks and overpowers the outward “messengers” of sense, then moves its battering-ram onward to what Marston later calls the “common pass” and “sacred door” of sensation: the common sense. This is the proper context for understanding his impulse in *Phoenissae* to “cut off these pathways” (*rescindere has...vias*) of communication. Having already disabled one of his five senses—sight—Oedipus remains dissatisfied. “Would God it were within my power my Senses all to stop, / Would God I could these Eares of myne, even by the stumps to crop. / If that might bee, then (daughter) I should not have heard thy voyce...” (Newton 111). Here, the Elizabethan translator spells out a desire implicit in the speech: a wish to debilitate *all* of the senses. What Neville renders as “thy voice” is “sensum tui,” and this more general Latin term, referring as it can to *any and all* of the senses, fits the hero’s wider ambition “my Senses *all* to stop.”

In her commentary on this passage, Frank compares Seneca’s hero to that of Sophocles, who in *Oedipus the King* says, “if there had been a means of blocking the stream of hearing through my ears, I would not have hesitated to shut off my wretched self, making myself blind and deaf” (Lloyd-Jones 1:469). “Seneca characteristically embellishes the Sophoclean version: Sophocles’ Oedipus wishes only to block up his source of hearing, whereas the Senecan Oedipus desires actually to rip out the passages along which sounds travel” (Frank 143). But we can go even further: given its context, the referent of “these pathways” (*has...vias*) in Seneca’s speech is not only the ear canals
but *all* the senses insofar as they can be a means of sensory intercourse. The comparison of these parallel moments in the two dramatists’ representations of Oedipus emphasizes the way that Seneca’s character wants to go farther and deeper than his Greek predecessor in accomplishing self-punishment: the impulse to attack his auditory organs is not only more gratuitously violent in Seneca, but also more generalized towards all “pathways of communication,” a paradigm shift that corresponds to the turning away from the special senses and toward the common sense. The logic of his self-punishment is mimetic (as when Iago says “strangle her in her bed, even the bed she hath contaminated”): Oedipus’ crimes were unnatural and like nothing anyone else had done; therefore his punishment should be to suffer like no one else. If “typical” suffering is experienced through a “normative structure of sensation,” he inflicts his self-punishment by attacking this normal structure of sensation. Perhaps he does this not in order to be *incapable* of sensation but in order to be capable of *uncommon* sensation, to experience pain and suffering whose unnatural form fits the perverted nature of his crimes. As Oedipus himself insists, “Nature, who alters her fixed laws in regard to Oedipus alone, by inventing unheard-of procreation, must change yet again to provide my punishment” (*Oedipus* 942-45).

Oedipus displays, like most of Seneca’s tragic heroes, a mental disorder or derangement, marked by the discord rather than coordination of the special senses, and by the self-conscious reflection on one’s own mental impairment and dysfunction, rather
than the reflexive self-awareness of functioning sensation. This is tragic uncommon
sense in the psychological realm—the inverse of the traditional common sense which lets
one “see that one sees.” Put in terms of Aristotle’s formula, the symbolic meaning in his
blinding is that Oedipus wants to see that he doesn’t see: his common sense turned inside
out. It embodies an impossible wish simultaneously to see not and to see that one sees
not: “he sees that all is gone, both light, and sight, and all” (Newton 226, my emphasis).
This is the Elizabethan rendering of lines 972-73 of Oedipus—“cavisque lustrans orbibus
caeli plagas / noctem experitur”—which Fitch translates, “scanning the sky’s expanse
with hollow orbs he tested the darkness.” The verb experior means to try, to test, to
experience. Here the best translation in colloquial English is the expression “try and
see.” Oedipus wants to try seeing and to see himself trying and failing—that is, failing
in the usual sense of seeing, while succeeding in another way. “Noctem experitur”: he
wants to “experience the night.” In the earlier ghostly visitation, Creon declared that he
saw “true night” (585, noctem...veram), and it is this nox vera that Oedipus now wants to
gaze into. He wants neither to have his eyes nor to lose them, but rather to tear them out,
open them up, and stare deeply. People tell Oedipus that he should remain blind to his
past, that he won’t want to know what lies hidden from him. And they are right: suffering
is essentially knowledge of his own condition, consciousness of his crimes (conscium

23 Critics have agreed that Seneca’s heroes share some psychological anomaly, but have
differed on how to define it. Thus, Herington describes an “explosion of evil,” Braden, an
insanely autarkic “anger,” Rosenmeyer, a “rage to embrace nature,” and Dupont, a furor
by which human beings become “monsters.”

24 Wright discusses similar expressions—“try and do better” and “go and see”—as
possible examples of “verbal hendiadys” in English speech (170).
sclerum omnium) and also of his former ignorance (realizing “all the crimes I did in innocence”). But he chooses to suffer, and his suffering is knowledge. Thus, his misfortune lies neither in the fact of his initial ignorance of his identity, nor in his eventual knowledge of it (each of which is necessary but by itself insufficient): it lies in the narrative sequence that weaves both together into the horrifying conjunction which alone suffices for what Aristotle calls tragic recognition. Oedipus *knows now* that he didn’t know who the man was at the crossroads; he *knows now* that he didn’t know who the woman was in his marriage bed. The tragic catastrophe is a violent attempt to collapse this temporal gap in the criminal consciousness of crimes committed unconsciously: the parricide tries to crush his present awareness against his past ignorance. The tragic ignorance within Oedipus’ crime was not so much that he didn’t know who he was, but that he did not *know* that he didn’t know who he was: the fundamental blindness to the fact of one’s blindness.25

Considering the whole career of Seneca’s Oedipus, such an interpretation makes the best sense of his tortuous path through time and space, tracing his multiple and paradoxical turnings and reversals. The senses, in particular the act of seeing, are brought up persistently in *Oedipus*. In the play’s first choral interlude, the chorus bewails the plague which has descended on every part of their world—not just the city but the “forests” (*silva*), “hills” (*montibus*), and “fields” (*rura*)—and it laments, “All things have felt our bane” (154-59). More literally this line says that “all things have sensed our evil”...

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25 “In…classical psychoanalysis, blinding not only symbolizes castration, but symbolizes castration as *symbolization*, as the recognition, transcription, and assumption of and by one’s history in its alterity, the coming to be there where one’s past was. Blindness as figure, however, casts out—is itself blind to—blinding” (Lupton 212).
(omnia nostrum sensere malum), and thus the plague is figured by the chorus as a malevolence that all the organisms of Thebes—people, animals, plants—sense in common. Although the whole world can literally sense the crime behind the plague, the true agent of this crime, Oedipus—whose very first words in the tragedy are, ironically, “Now darkness is driven off” (Iam nocte...expulsa)—alone cannot perceive it and remains in the dark, “left darkling” as Shakespeare would say (Tragedy of King Lear 1.4.200). Here Oedipus unconsciously acknowledges the whole trajectory of his tragic career, moving from the darkness of ignorance to the daylight of knowledge: “day will reveal (ostendet) the havoc that night has wrought (nox fecit)” (5). This first scene contrasts the common sense of the plague in the chorus with an uncommon sense of the plague in the hero: the “widespread havoc,” Oedipus observes, “spares me alone,” and he wonders: “What evil (malo) am I being saved for?” (30-31). The malum that “all things” feel in common is not felt by Oedipus, who senses a different malum impending, one to be felt by no one but him. Just as he sees himself as the exception to the common fate, so he predicts that he is being saved for a special, uncommon fate.

In addition to this phenomenon of a shared “sense,” the first chorus also introduces sight as a particular sense that can mistake its objects, asking: “does my sick mind see (videt) false for true (falsa pro veris)?” (204). Ironically, the chorus expresses this doubt in its perception when it is actually correct, in contrast to the hero who expresses confidence when he is gravely mistaken. Later, Oedipus declares, “Kings regularly take unproven fears for certainties (Dubia pro certis)” (699-700). The

26 “[T]he disease is an epidemic, spreading to the whole nation. Vegetables, animals, and humans, young and old, male and female, fall indiscriminately” (Boyle 144).
formulation of misrecognition, of mis-taking, in the two passages is identical in its linguistic construction: to take “false things for true” (falsa pro veris) and to take “doubtful things for certain” (dubia pro certis). But where the chorus expresses its own self-perception of mistaking, Oedipus focuses on the mistaking of others: the solver of riddles does not recognize his own fallibility. While declaring that kings tend to misrecognize things, and are blind to ambiguities, he insists that “to know the meaning of ambiguities is Oedipus’ gift alone” (ambigua soli noscere Oedipodae datur) (216). Thus, the chorus doubting its own powers of perception finds its reverse image in the hero, who sees that others may be mistaken but not himself. In the language of Aristotle’s common sense, Oedipus sees that others don’t see, but he does not see that he himself doesn’t see. The common sense’s capacity for endowing sensation with self-conscious reflexivity has failed him.

This dysfunction of the “common sense” in Seneca’s Oedipus is further highlighted by the recurrent framing of the hero in terms of other mythical figures, in particular Agave and Tiresias. When Oedipus is groping for some source of punishment worthy of his crimes, he appeals to the site of his botched infanticide: “You who encompass crimes, accursed Cithareon, send beasts against me from your forests, send ravening hounds—now send back Agave (redde Agaven)” (930-33). This speech brings up two prior mythical victims of the same mountain: Actaeon, transformed to a stag and mauled to death by his own hounds, and Pentheus, torn to pieces by his own mother

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27 This line of course refers to the monster’s riddle that he solved; elsewhere Oedipus brags that “I did not bolt from the Sphinx when she wove her words in dark measures (caecis...modis)” (92-93). Literally the words are woven in caecis modis, “blind knots,” implying an ability to see his way with his fingers, so to speak.
(Agave) and her frenzied band of Bacchants. In both stories the tragic crime is committed because the victim has become unrecognizable: as with Oedipus’ transgressions against father and mother, a figurative blindness. Such mythological allusions help to situate the place of sensory recognition for Oedipus between Agave and Tiresias. Agave joined the Bacchants and with them killed and dismembered her son in a blind frenzy, only to realize later she was carrying around his head as a trophy. She had visual perception but not recognition—she did not know what she saw and only grasped too late what she had torn apart with her own hands.28 According to the chorus in Oedipus, Agave and the maenads “looked on the atrocity as something unknown” (velut ignotum videre nefas) (444). This description corresponds exactly to the hero’s own atrocities, in which Oedipus looked first on his father and then on his mother as “something unknown” while committing the crimes of parricide and incest.

The figurative blindness in Agave’s frenzy is counter-pointed by the literal blindness of Tiresias. It is ironic understatement when Tiresias says, “For one lacking sight, much of the truth lies hidden” (295, visu carenti magna pars veri latet). He has no visual perception but does have recognition—he has insight into that which he cannot literally see, such as the cattle entrails. Tiresias instructs his daughter Manto: “You, daughter, who guide your father, light-deprived, must recount the visible signs given by the ritual of divination” (301-02). (This foreshadows Oedipus in the next play, depending on his daughter as a guide to read visible signs for him.) In Tiresias the special sense (sight) is absent, but he possesses a deeper sense which lets him know about what he

28 The chorus compares Jocasta to “the frenzied Cadmean mother when she tore away her son’s head, or when she recognised her theft” (1005-07).
cannot see, a sense that is “uncommon.” Thus we can gauge Oedipus’ transformation measured against the fixed poles of these two mythical figures: he is in the first play more like Agave, in the second more like Tiresias. In *Oedipus* he depends on the sacrificial entrails-reading of Tiresias (who depended in turn on the eyes of his daughter, Manto) and Creon’s report of the necromancy and the ghost’s words. In *Phoenissae*, however, Oedipus can see his father’s ghost *himself* instead of relying on second-hand relation. He declares “ego video” (I see), and the object of this vision is the paternal ghost that only appeared to others in the first play. “Daughter, can you see (*vides*) my father? I can see him!” (43-44).²⁹

Thus, a central thread of Oedipus’ career is his transition from the unconscious parricide, oblivious to his father’s true identity, to the blind exile who despite his useless eyes is able, like Tiresias, to see into the heart of mysteries. The blinding becomes an opening-up of uncommon sense; his moment of hallucination, of visionary blindness, is at least as much a manifestation of tragic insight as it is a symptom of his mental derangement. Taking Oedipus as an exemplum, we can more generally define the tragic *furor* of Senecan heroes as a paradoxical form of “uncommon sense” in which blindness comes to see itself. On this issue the formulation of Florence Dupont, a modern classicist, is especially helpful. She follows Cicero in describing tragic madness as a form of mental

²⁹ Maricia Frank writes that “the whole point of the question, *nata, genitorem vides?*, and the emphatic assertion, *ego video*, is to indicate to the audience that Oedipus sees Laius but Antigone does not. Clearly, Laius is no more than a figment of Oedipus’ sick imagination...” (91). However, Frank sounds too much like Gertrude in the closet scene of *Hamlet*, lecturing her son not to “bend your eye on vacancy.” After all, it is obvious from the necromancy scene in *Oedipus*, where Laius’ ghost appears, as well as similar hauntings in *Troades*, that Seneca’s dramatic world is “clearly” one in which such visitations are to be taken *seriously*.
blindness: “furor is a general blindness of the mind—mentis caecitas” (71). Furthermore she defines the Latin mens as “the intelligence, the sense of discernment, the capacity to distinguish the categories of culture common to all of the citizens” (72). Thus it is the equivalent of what we might call cultural common sense, for it is precisely “the capacity to distinguish the categories of culture common to all of the citizens” that is seen to be lacking in Oedipus’ crime of incest. A “blindness of the mind,” then, is an inability to see these distinctions, an inability to discern these cultural categories.

Dupont’s definition of furor is echoed in Seneca’s diction. For instance, the account of the necromancy episode includes a gruesome parade of personified figures: “grim Erinys and blind Rage (caecus Furor) and Horror... Grief... Disease” (590-93). The figure of “caecus Furor” is especially significant. Besides the obvious connection with other figures of blindness in the play—Agave, Tiresias, Oedipus—we see that the epithet given here to furor reinforces Dupont’s formulation: “a blindness of the mind.” We also find this conception of furor in Thyestes. In the opening scene, the Fury—described by G. K. Hunter as “furor... personified” (184)—commands the ghost of Tantalus: “Proceed,

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30 “Le furor est un aveuglement général de l’esprit—mentis caecitas.” See Cicero, Tusculan Disputations III.v.11: “frenzy (furorem) ...they regarded as a blindness (caecitatem) of the mind (mentis)” (King 239).

31 There is a particular fitness to construing Oedipus’ incest in terms of the common sense. As neo-Aristotelians from Aquinas to Robert Burton reiterate, one crucial function of the common sense is categorical distinction: to “distinguish white from sweet.” This is analogous to the ability, in the cultural realm, to distinguish mother from wife. In both cases, it is a question of being able to recognize a different species of relation: familial love is chaste or “white” (casta, as Oedipus calls Antigone), and spousal love is erotic or “sweet” (dulce, as the nurse defines her mistress’ amorem in Phaedra 130-35). In these terms, the crime of incest was simply Oedipus’ lack of the socio-cultural equivalent to common sense, for he took his mother to be sweet rather than white.
loathsome shade: goad this unnatural house into vengeful rage. …let blind rage
(caecus...furor) incite their minds (mentes)…” (23-27). Here again furor is conceived as
a blindness that afflicts the mind. 32 Later the chorus bewails this furor, which has seized
the royal house of the Tantalids, and contrasts it with the mens bona, which the chorus
sees as the seat of “true” royalty. The chorus recalls how “this famed royal house” has
been plagued by “brothers’ threats,” and asks: “What is this frenzy (furor) that drives you
to spill your blood?” (339-40). It criticizes the Tantalids’ furious, bloodthirsty species of
royalty, declaring that “you mistake the place where kingship (regnum) lies” (342-43).
True kingship lies not in “wealth” or “the sign of royalty” or “ambition” (344-50), but in
the mens bona: “good sense (mens... bona) secures the throne (regnum)” (380, trans.
modified). Thus, in contrast with the “blind” and frenzied vision of royal power exhibited
by the Fury (and, in the main plot, by Atreus), the chorus expresses what Pratt calls “the
common man’s view,” according to which “violent rivalry for the throne is furor..., whereas true kingship lies in the mens...bona” (104). 33

This contrast—between “good sense” (mens bona, the clarity of the reasonable
mind) and “madness” (furor, the blindness of the impassioned mind)—has been a
tempting hermeneutic for interpreters of Senecan drama. 34 With it, one can simply import

32 The connection between furor and blindness also appears in Aeneid 1.348-49, where
“frenzy” (furor) appears in the form of a character “blinded (caecus) by lust of gold”
(Fairclough 1:264).

33 Stevens says that the chorus presents the “philosophy of the common man” (212).

34 Croisille describes how “on a pensé que Sénèque exposait dans ses pièces des idées
stoïciennes, dont la principale concerne l’opposition, en l’homme, de la raison et des
passions, de la mens bona et...furor” (277).
the reason/passion binary from Seneca’s philosophy, imposing it on the tragedies as a grid to help map out their supposedly didactic moral coherence. This view constructs the typical tragic hero after the pattern presented in Phaedra’s famous complaint: “What could reason (ratio) do? Madness (furor) has conquered and rules me” (184). As Hunter puts it, “reason has struggled with furor and lost” (185). Thus, the common sense of the sound mind—“la mens, le sens commun des valeurs” (Dupont 82)—is overturned in the deranged psyche of the tragic hero. Such a binary—mens vs. furor—can be applied to the psychological conflict within Seneca’s characters, but it is insufficient to explain the social conflict between them, such as the fierce contentions between the tragic heroes on one hand, and the chorus or advisor characters on the other. No simple opposition between “reason” and “passion” can account for the powerful interpersonal conflicts in Senecan tragedy, the social tensions manifested in rhetorical attack and counterrattack. The latter conflicts, framed in terms of a specifically Roman sensus communis, take center stage in the following section.

The last point I wish to make in this “psychological” discussion of Senecan tragedy is that there is good reason to refer to a neo-Aristotelian “common sense,” even though the term is not mentioned in Seneca’s dramatic texts. There are two sides to this fact. On one hand Seneca is an author in the Stoic tradition of philosophy, a tradition which employs a monistic theory of the psyche “instead of the squabbling tripartite model” of Plato (Braden 20) or Aristotle’s faculty psychology with its “common
sense.” On the other hand, Aristotle’s common sense has an important place in Stoic psychology because it helped to establish this monistic conception of the soul:

“Aristotle’s central principle of sensation became fused with the Stoic idea of the *hegemonikon*, which was defined as the highest part of the human soul.... For the Stoics the common sense became unambiguously the principle of self-awareness and self-identity” (Summers 92). The Stoic’s *hegemonikon*, then—the “ruling reason” so central to Senecan philosophy—is in part simply the Aristotelian common sense under a different name. Given this conflation of the two psychological terms (*sensus communis* and *hegemonikon*), we might say that what is usually described in criticism of Senecan tragedy as the breakdown, disorder, or inversion of the Stoic ruling reason—the corruption of the logical *hegemonikon* through pathological emotion—can also be described as the tragic overthrow of the common sense.

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35 See also Voelke: “Même si, dans le cas de la colère et, plus généralement, de toute passion, cette tendance fait figure de force irrationnelle, elle ne constitue pas, selon la psychologie mise en œuvre dans le *De Ira*, un élément irrationnel par nature. En effet dans ce traité Seneque admet le monisme psychologique de Chrisippe, selon qui la passion ne procède pas d’une faculté irrationnelle en soi, mais consiste en une modification affectant l’hégémonikon tout entier.... [R]aison et passion n’ont pas des sièges séparés et distincts...” (164).
Social Rhetoric in Senecan Tragedy

_Hoc primum philosophia promittit, sensum communem, humanitatem et congregationem_ [Philosophy promises this first of all: common sense, humanity and togetherness]. (Seneca, Epistles 5.4)

_Philosophy is revealed not by good sense but by paradox. There are several kinds of paradox, all of which are opposed to the complementary forms of orthodoxy—namely, good sense and common sense._ (Deleuze, DR 227-28)

In the psychological context explored in my previous section, “common sense” implied an accord between the mental faculties—“common sense as a _concordia facultatum_” (Deleuze DR 133)—and a proper organization of sensory perception. In the rhetorical sphere so prominent in Seneca’s Roman culture, however, the term has fundamentally social connotations such as tact, prudence, and sympathy: “common sense” implies a competence in negotiating public life, a firm possession of popular beliefs and traditional values, and perhaps most importantly, a feeling for the “common good.” This section, on “uncommon sense” in the social realm of rhetoric, examines how Seneca’s tragic relationships are embodied in language, largely in terms of the tragic hero’s opposition to (and arguments against) the popular wisdom espoused by the chorus and advising characters. While the opposition between the Senecan tragic hero and the advisor or chorus has usually been defined as a debate between reason and passion—a debate mirroring the inner conflict between _mens_ and _furor_ in the soul of the hero—it can more usefully be defined as a debate between common sense and uncommon sense. This

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36 Common sense as a “normative structure of perception” (Jackson 137).

37 _sensus communis_ is defined as “feeling for others in the same community” (_OLD_).
is evident from a more detailed comparison of the two Roman concepts: *mens bona* and *sensus communis*. The former has a largely psychological connotation, belonging to the context of individual minds, whereas the latter has a largely social connotation, belonging to the context of interpersonal communities.

*Mens bona* is a complex term that can be translated variously depending on context (examples from the Loeb translations of Seneca include “good settled purpose,” “upright mind,” and “wisdom”), but the term I prefer is an English phrase that approximates the loose richness of the Latin: “good sense.” Here “good” has the same ambiguity as the original, meaning both “healthy” and “virtuous,” implying both structural soundness and moral integrity. This interpretation is supported by Voelke, who describes the Senecan *mens bona* as the fruit of a marriage between “good will” and the habitual work of self-discipline: “‘Good will’ must by dint of perseverance become wisdom and spiritual perfection (*bona mens*)” (168-69). In this definition Voelke follows Pierre Grimal, who characterizes the *bona mens* as a “complex notion, designating at once both moral purity and rational thought” (quoted in Voelke 169).

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38 In his commentary on “mens...bona” in the chorus of *Thyestes*, Tarrant glosses as “‘good sense,’ nearly equivalent to ratio” (145). In Seneca’s Epistle 94, Gummere translates “bona fortuna et mens bona” as “good fortune and good sense” (3:59).

39 “‘Bonne volunte’, elle doit à force de persévérance devenir sagesse et perfection spirituelle (*bona mens*)” (Voelke 168-69). As Voelke explains, the term *bona voluntas* (“good will”) is also ambiguous: “La rôle de la volonté dans la réalisation du bien est souligné par l’expression *bona voluntas*, qui apparaît souvent chez Sénèque, mais dont le sens est mal fixé” (180).

Obviously, it is precisely these two features—moral purity and rational thought—that are obliterated in the *furor* of the Senecan tragic hero. Thus, *mens bona* is probably the term that comes closest to “psychological” common sense: it is the right ordering of the sound mind. However, while *mens bona* is Seneca’s preferred term for good psychological sense, his favored term for good *social* sense is *sensus communis*—a quality inherent in interpersonal relations rather than the individual psyche and largely defined through social discourse. *Sensus communis* is not defined according to the individual psyche’s structure and function, but according to how the subject meshes with a larger community: one’s place in the social fabric. If psychological common sense is “a kind of interior vision” that “sees that we see” (Summers 80), social common sense is something closer to *literacy*, a kind of “public language” with which we say “what everyone knows.”

Therefore a social/cultural/rhetorical nexus underlies Seneca’s use of the term *sensus communis*. Although the phrase “common sense” is found nowhere in his drama, it appears repeatedly in his philosophical prose. In Epistle 5, which supplies this section of my chapter with its epigram, Seneca says that philosophy aims to provide “common sense” (*sensum communem*) to everyone (Gummere 1:21-23). This *sensus communis* is social glue, an empathetic bond strengthening the human fabric of a community. The connotation is similar to a sentence from Juvenal’s satires (8.73-74), criticizing the cold

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41 See Cicero, *De Oratore* 1.3.12: “the whole art of oratory lies open to the view, and is concerned in some measure with the common practice (*communi...usu*), custom, and speech of mankind, so that, whereas in all other arts that is most excellent which is farthest removed from the understanding and mental capacity (*sensu*) of the untrained, in oratory the very cardinal sin is to depart from the language of everyday life (*vulgari genere orationis*), and the usage approved by the sense of the community (*communis sensus*)” (Sutton 1:11).
indifference of the wealthy: “It’s pretty rare that you’ll find considerateness (*sensus communis*) in people of that class” (Braund 329). It implies not only kindness but *propriety*. Richard Bentley defines the character lacking *sensus communis* as one “who, otherwise endowed with good sense, does not know to observe and distinguish time, place, persons” (*qui cetera bono sensu praeditus, tempus, locum, personas observare et distinguere nescit*) (Bentley 370, my translation). This passage distinguishes “common sense” (*sensus communis*) from “good sense”: the former is a sense of social propriety above and beyond the latter, which is simply a well-ordered psyche.42

The social connotation of *sensus communis* is developed further in Epistle 5 as Seneca discusses the *congregatio* promised by his Stoic philosophy. He recommends “fellow-feeling (*sensum communem*) with all men; in other words, sympathy and sociability (*congregationem*). We part company with our promise if we are unlike other men. We must see to it that the means by which we wish to draw admiration be not absurd and odious” (Gummere 1:21-23). Here, the emphasis is on collective over individual values—on “responsibility” rather than “merit,” we might say. However, he also exhorts his audience, “let men find that we are unlike the common herd (*vulgo*), if they look closely” (1:23). Thus Seneca recommends that the philosopher at first glance resemble the average person and, on the surface, conform to the crowd—but nevertheless be, upon closer inspection, superior to ordinary human beings. “Let us try to maintain a

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42 Compare with Descartes: “ceux qui, bien qu’ils ayent un sens commun assez bon, n’ont pas toutefois grande opinion de leur suffisance” (*Passions* 120), a description that makes explicit the semantic overlap of “common” (*commun*) sense and “good” (*bon*) sense. “*Sens commun* n’a pas ici son usage technique le plus fréquent (faculté généralisatrice des sensibles), mais est simplement synonyme de *bon sens*” (120, note).
higher standard of life than that of the multitude, but not a contrary standard” (1:21). This ethic would fit the ideal oarsman: row hard, but don’t rock the boat. To strike this ideal balance, Seneca recommends a sort of golden mean: “This is the mean of which I approve; our life should observe a happy medium between the ways of a sage and the ways of the world at large; all men should admire (suspi\(\text{c}i\text{ant}\)) it, but they should understand (\text{agnoscant}) it also” (1:23). This epistle, then, presents Seneca’s moral philosophy as a project for awakening in us the capacity for a social form of “common sense.”\(^{43}\) Conversely, one way to define Senecan tragedy is as a project for representing in human beings the capacity for an antisocial form of \textit{uncommon} sense.\(^{44}\) The Senecan tragic hero is, because of his elevation, separated and alienated from the rest of humanity; in contrast, the ideal Stoic in Epistle 5 avoids this alienation by maintaining an external conformity with his society: “what would happen if we should begin to separate ourselves from the customs of our fellow-men? …[O]ur exterior should conform to society. Do not wear too fine, nor yet too frowzy, a toga” (1:21).

Although at odds with the typical features of the Senecan hero, this epistle’s theme of an approved “mean” or “happy medium” accords well, as might be expected,\(^{43}\) On this theme in his philosophy, see also Epistle 95: “Let us possess things in common (\textit{in commune}); for birth is ours in common. Our relations with one another are like a stone arch, which would collapse if the stones did not mutually support each other, and which is upheld in this very way” (Gummere 3:91).

\(^{44}\) See Stevens: “the fact that the tragedies invert the ‘message’ of the prose works need not lead us to facile conclusions such as tragedy presents an ‘exemplum which one should avoid,’ \textit{exemplum quod vites...}. The plays engage us more directly than that by testing our faith in common sense. The Senecan chorus, like the Greek chorus, presents a voice of conventional wisdom, a voice sometimes so wise that it can be mistaken for that of the sage.... [T]he common sense of the chorus is not only inadequate to the needs of the dramatic situation, it is ‘incorporated’ into the designs of the tyrants” (325).
with conventional sentiments expressed by the Senecan chorus. In *Oedipus*, for instance, the chorus—using the contrary flight-plans of Daedalus and Icarus as examples—praises the “middle path” (*medium...iter*) of the prudent father and warns against the son’s reckless overreaching: “All that strays from the mean (*modum*) is poised in an unsteady place” (899-910). (This advice also recalls the choric commonplace in lines 1132-35 of *Phaedra*, contrasting the safety of the low-lying valley with the lightning-struck heights of oak trees and mountaintops.) The same theme also appears in the oft-imitated chorus from *Thyestes* about the “slippery slope” of royal power: “Who wishes may stand in power on a palace’s slippery peak (*culmine lubrico*): [...] Set in an obscure place let me bask in gentle leisure; [...] let me die an old plebeian man” (391-400).⁴⁵ In Epistle 94, Seneca offers a similar warning, and promotes the idea of an “advocate of good sense” (*advocatum bonae mentis*) (Gummere 3:49), who can dissuade us from the “slippery slope” of power. This advisor should point out persons, happy in the popular estimation, who totter on their envied heights of power…. That which others think elevated, is to them a sheer precipice. [...] For…there are various ways of falling and…the topmost point is the most slippery (*in sublimi maxime lubricos*). [...] Then at last you may see them studying philosophy amid their fear, and hunting sound advice (*sana consilia*) when their fortunes go awry. For these two things are, as it were, at opposite poles—good fortune and good sense (*contraria sint; bona fortuna et mens bona*); that is why we are wise in the midst of adversity. (3:57-59)

The concluding opposition between *bona fortuna* and *mens bona* goes a long way towards explaining the conjunction of elevated status and mental blindness in Seneca’s tragic heroes. Indeed, earlier in the same epistle Seneca points to the powerful popular

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⁴⁵ See Hunter, who reprints eight Renaissance imitations of this choral passage, including by Thomas Wyatt, Jasper Heywood, and Andrew Marvell (209-13).
wisdom of precepts that are “condensed into prose proverbs” and “oracular-like replies”; one of his examples is the saying, “Know thyself!” (te nosce) (3:31). This is the sort of proverbial common sense or “good sense” that the tragedies’ chorus and advisor characters see lacking in the extremely rich and powerful; thus the second chorus of Thyestes, contrasting the mens bona with the “slippery peak” (culmine lubrico) of politics, concludes with an indictment of “one who, too well known to all (notus nimis omnibus), dies unknown to himself (ignotus moritur sibi)” (402-03). This scathing portrait presents the same phenomenon as Epistle 94: the antipathy between “good fortune” and “good sense” which, like oil and water, simply refuse to mix.

Like the chorus, the advisor in Senecan drama—as Dupont puts it, the porte-parole or “spokesperson for humanity” (140) representing a “common sense of values” (82)—recommends the commoner’s life as opposed to the tragic dangers of the lofty, exceptional position. Thus the nurse who plays the advisor role in Phaedra promotes the safety of an “average” lifestyle, and counsels against the reckless extremes invited by high status: “Why is it that chaste love dwells beneath lowly roofs, that average folk (medium...vulgus) have sane affections and modest status is self-controlled, while the rich and those bolstered by royal status seek more than what is right?” (211-14). Such criticisms are aimed at Seneca’s tragic heroes, characters who constantly transgress all boundaries and limits. These individuals break every measure and exceed every mean in their furious pursuit of what Atreus calls “something greater, larger than usual, beyond normal human limits (fines moris humani)” (266-67). The exhortations of the chorus and advisor characters aim, in a spectacularly unsuccessful manner, to curb the wild and
essentially *antisocial* stance of these tragic characters.\textsuperscript{46} For some readers, the agreement between the counsel of Seneca’s prose philosophy and that of his drama’s choric and advisor characters implies that we can find, in the latter, mouthpieces for the former: that we might locate, in the collective wisdom of the dramatic community, the good sense of the philosophical tracts (the *mens bona* to counter the *furor* of the tragic heroes).

The truth is not so simple, however. In an essay on “Lieux Communs, *Sententiae* et Intentions Philosophiques” in *Phaedra*, J.-M. Croisille contrasts the popular wisdom expressed through the commonplaces of Seneca’s drama and the philosophical stance formulated in his prose. Croisille maintains, along with Pierre Grimal, that “one cannot consider the choruses as spokesmen for the *bona mens*” (278, note).\textsuperscript{47} She notes the prevalence of “banal philosophical ideas” issuing from the mouths of the chorus and advisor-figures in Senecan tragedy, ideas which are “the fruit of popular good sense” and which, as a philosopher, Seneca does not himself endorse, but rather relegates “to the common people, to the *stulti* [fools]” (300).\textsuperscript{48} Croisille argues convincingly that the chorus and nurse in *Phaedra* should be counted among the *stulti*, the silly crowd bursting with second-hand opinions. Their borrowed ideas are like fool’s gold in comparison to

\textsuperscript{46} “The spokesman for humanity is in the position of *consilium*; he intervenes... to remind the madman where he is, what he is, and the duties he owes to himself and others. But this position of communication does not work, it only serves to outline the positions, because the madman does not hear, does not understand the other’s words as advice. He systematically sends them back, in order to make his own rules of conduct. There is no debate or attempt at persuasion on either side” (Dupont 140-41, my translation).

\textsuperscript{47} “*on ne peut considérer les choeurs comme porte-parole de la bona mens!*”

\textsuperscript{48} “...idées philosophiques banales. Celles-ci sont, comme on l’a vu, le fruit du bon sens populaire: Sénèque les laisse aux gens du common, aux *stulti*.\)”
the nuggets of wisdom embedded in Stoic doctrine. Their popular wisdom reflects a sort of Roman equivalent to pop psychology: “The nurse’s tirade against Hippolytus picks up on the idea of the chorus, sharpening it and applying it to the particular case of Hippolytus. The love instinct is natural, it is a law common to all beings. To try to repress this instinct is therefore to go against nature: such is, in the eyes of popular wisdom represented here by the nurse, Hippolytus’ mistake” (280). In replying to the nurse’s “tirade,” Hippolytus spouts Stoic-flavored wise words on the ideal of the ascetic man: “The madness (furor) of a greedy mind (avareae mentis) does not inflame him...; nor the air of the crowd (aura populi), nor the unfaithful herd (vulgus infidum)…. He does not serve a throne or strive for a throne...; he is free from hope and fear (spei metusque liber)…” (486-92, trans. modified). The Stoic inflection of the language is unmistakable; this speech sounds like a parodic pastiche of Seneca’s philosophy, especially in its moralist praise of the sapiens rising above the vulgus.

Ironically, then, some of Seneca’s tragic individuals, whose frenzied thoughts breathe the rarified air of their mountain-top perspectives, seem closer to the ideal Stoic sapiens than the chorus and advisor characters, whose commonplace “good sense” springs from the fertile bottomlands of the vulgar stulti. Hippolytus, for instance, expresses—with a scorn worthy of the Stoic sage’s sense of superiority over the “common herd” of fools—unbridled contempt for the nurse’s proverbial defense of sensible pleasure, an argument bolstered “with a great deal of popular maxims” (Croisille 49).

See also Stevens: “The chorus is no longer the voice of democratic Athens, but the voice of the mass of ignorant men.... The chorus is made up of perfectly ordinary citizens, but the ordinary voice of conventional wisdom is no longer noble; it speaks the folly of common opinion” (331).
281), such as “let Bacchus lighten your heavy cares” and “Enjoy your time of life, it runs swiftly away” (445-46).\(^{50}\) However if the nurse’s popular wisdom reveals itself to be rather shallow, Hippolytus’ misogyny also falls short of Stoic wisdom: it goes beyond any rational asceticism and reveals itself as pathology, as irrational passion bordering on tragic madness. Defending his hatred of women, Hippolytus tells the nurse, “Be it reason or nature or dire madness (furor), I am set on hating (odisse placuit) them” (567-68). His blind misogyny, casually linked to madness and stubbornly defended even as senseless furor, is manifested (like Phaedra’s own erotic frenzy) in a rhetorical posture that is explicitly opposed to the “common sense” of the nurse’s proverbial expressions (and by extension, opposed to the sensus communis represented by the chorus).

As this scene suggests, then, one discrepancy between Seneca’s prose and his drama is that where the former dreams of combining the virtues of both the common and the exceptional man while succumbing to the pitfalls of neither,\(^ {51}\) the latter presents an inexorable opposition between the two. Seneca’s philosophy aims at the best of both worlds in its twin requisites that “all men should admire” the wise Stoic way of life and “they should understand it also.”\(^ {52}\) This is quite different from the admiration granted to a

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\(^{50}\) The last maxim (aetate fruere) resembles another of the sententiae from Epistle 94—“Be thrifty with time” (tempori parce)—one of Seneca’s examples of a proverbial sentence (Gummere 3:31).

\(^{51}\) “The Stoa’s use of paradox and ‘common conceptions’ appear to conflict with one another as the Academics charge. Seneca [in his philosophy] employs various rhetorical slights of hand to show that paradox and common sense need not conflict” (Stevens 312).

\(^{52}\) The first half of this dual maxim recalls the universal admiration belonging to the tragic hero (admiration is the first term in Sidney’s neo-Aristotelian definition of tragic affect: “admiration and commiseration”).
tragic hero, who is respected but at the same time acknowledged to be essentially separate, not a part of “the rest” of humanity. Where the heroes of Seneca’s philosophy are supposed to be admirable but also intelligible, the heroes of his tragedy are admirable in large part because they are unintelligible: a character like Hippolytus is inscrutable, opaque to normal human understanding. Against the advice of Epistle 5, Hippolytus refuses to “conform to society” (populo...conveniat) (Gummere 1:21) and denies any middle path, as if there were no modus or golden mean available between absolute misogyny and total submission to the powers of Venus. His lines to the nurse make perfectly clear that, when push comes to shove, he feels no great compunction to establish a common ground of understanding with his interlocutors, to present a rational basis on which others might share his stance in life. He simply says, “I am allowed to hate (odisse) all women” (579). It is this groundless, antisocial “hatred” of women that makes Hippolytus reject his stepmother’s advances so vehemently, which in turn engenders Phaedra’s vengeful hatred of him, and her rape-accusation that sparks Theseus’ hate-filled curse: hence the ensuing destruction of their whole family. It is an explosive chain-reaction of hatred.

In Seneca’s philosophy, “hatred” (odium) is set up against “common sense” (sensus communis). In Epistle 105, Seneca discusses “how to live more safely,” listing five human threats—“hope, envy, hatred, fear, and contempt”—and explaining how to avoid them. He says that we can avoid hatred with the help of sensus communis: “Hatred

53 Frye says that “tragic heroes are wrapped in the mystery of their communion with that something beyond which we can see only through them, and which is the source of their strength and their fate alike” (208).
(Odium) comes either from running foul of others: and this can be avoided by never provoking anyone; or else it is uncalled for: and common-sense (sensus communis) will keep you safe from it” (Gummere 3:213). Gummere glosses this common-sense as “tact,” like the communis sensus mentioned by Horace in his satires—“He is quite devoid of social tact (communi sensu)” (1.3.66)—which Fairclough describes as “social sense, a sense of propriety in dealing with our fellows” (37, note). If this “social sense”—sensus communis—is supposed to protect one from hatred, then the prevalence of odium in Senecan tragedy is another yardstick for gauging the lack of common sense (or indeed the presence of its opposite) in its main characters. A character such as Hippolytus illustrates how a colossal lack of social “tact” can inflame hatreds of tragic proportions. Indeed, one of the most striking recurrent features of Senecan tragedy is the moment where the hero expresses an “appeal for judgment”: an overwhelming awareness of oneself as the target of a cosmic, universal hatred.\(^\text{54}^\) For instance, upon learning the true nature of his birth (and hence the true nature of his impious crimes), Oedipus delivers a series of commands: for the earth to “split open,” for the “ruler of the shades” to take him down “to the depths of Tartarus,” and for the citizens of Thebes to “attack me with the sword,” to “take arms against me,” and to “seize firebrands from the pyres to hurl at me” (868-75). His justification for this litany of self-abuse is that he is an “abomination of the gods” (876). This “abomination” is the same “hatred” against which Seneca above pits “common sense”: the Latin is “odium deorum,” which the Elizabethan translator, Neville, renders as “hate of Gods above” (Newton 222).

\(^{54}\) As Braden observes, “the appeal for judgment is hard to separate from the speaker’s triumphant awareness that he is now the center of cosmic attention” (51).
Oedipus is not alone in his extreme sense of odium: Hercules is hated by Juno; Thyestes is hated by Atreus; Medea’s love for Jason is transformed into poisonous hatred; Phaedra is hated a priori by Hippolytus, and then comes to hate him in turn.

Odium is present not only in the main outline of plots, but explicit in the verbal matter of the texts: the noun appears forty-two times in Seneca’s plays (Denooz 263-64). Hercules Furens, for instance, is essentially one long final act in the story of Juno’s hatred for her heroic stepson. Juno warns, “my hatred (odia) will not just evaporate” (27), Hercules’ step-father says, “Believe Juno’s hatred!” (Iunonis odio crede) (447), and the hero himself declares, “For Juno’s hatred (Iunonis odio) the earth is not broad enough” (605-06). In Thyestes the Fury instructs the ghost of Tantalus: “summon hatred (odia), slaughter, death, fill the whole house with Tantalus” (52-53); the main plot of the play follows from this infernal infestation, manifested in the inveterate hatred of Atreus for his brother. In Phaedra the nurse, advising Phaedra about Hippolytus, wonders whether a special (“uncommon”) hatred for one particular woman—Phaedra herself—may lie behind his apparently general (“common”) hatred for all women: “For you will he drop his hate (odium), when hate (odio) of you perhaps makes him harry all women?” (238-39). Likewise, Medea says “my hatred burns” (952, fervet odium). Her hatred for Jason is a tragic passion that rages, as did her former love for him, without mean and beyond all measure. She tells herself: “If you wonder, poor wretch, what limit (modum) to put on your hatred ( odio), copy your love (imitare amorem)” (397-98).  

55 In this passage Medea sounds somewhat like Othello, who says, “Yield up, O love, thy crown and hearted throne / To tyrannous hate!” (Othello 3.3.452-53).
In light of such characters, I want to make three main points here. First, the interpersonal conflict in Senecan tragedy is best understood not as a battle between reason and feeling but rather one between different forms of feeling (common sense vs. uncommon sense). Second, this conflict results in the social alienation of the hero (isolation from the sensus communis). Third, this social alienation in Seneca’s plays shows itself largely through paradoxical rhetoric (contradicting proverbial “common sense”). On the first point: regardless of the pieties of Stoic philosophy, the main distinction evident in Seneca’s dramatic conflicts is not between “reason” and “passion” but between common and uncommon pathos. Here the drama clearly diverges from the prose. It is conceivable that in Seneca’s philosophy all the Stoic sapientes might very well be senseless wooden “stocks,” hyper-rational beings without human feeling. Such a conception is impossible in his drama, however; all of the characters are passionate, and the differences among them are based not on which characters have passions (they all do), but instead on which passions they have (or what form their feeling takes). To pick up the theme of odiyum, for instance, we can observe that Seneca’s tragic heroes are marked by an uncommon sense of hatred. When they are the object of hatred they want, like Oedipus, to be the singular target for all external reality (sole victim of the gods, the civic community, the natural world, etc.). Likewise when they are the agent of hatred, they want this hatred to be theirs alone, not to be shared (and thereby “diluted”) by anyone else. Thus Megara (the wife of Hercules) tells the usurping tyrant, Lycus: “You have stolen my father, kingdom, brothers, home, country. What else is there? One thing is left to me, dearer than brother and father, kingdom and home: hatred of you (odium tui),
which I share (*commune*) to my sorrow with the people” (379-83). The speech is wonderfully emphatic: for Megara, her *odium* towards Lycus is all she has left, and all she wants now is to have this hatred *all to herself*: she bewails the fact that “she must ‘share’ it” (Fitch 1987, 224). This attitude provides the logical explanation for the despairing exclamation with which she concludes her protest: “how small a portion (*pars*) is mine!” (383).\(^56\)

Megara’s declaration serves also to illustrate my second main point: like the Roman *sensus communis* in general, which has an essentially *social* rather than psychological tenor, tragic uncommon sense takes on a social form in Seneca’s drama. When Megara says that her dearest possession is her *odium*, she invokes an uncommon sense of “hatred” which is defined precisely as that which one does not share with other members of the society, that which is not “common” in the sense of belonging to “the people” in general (*cum populo... commune*). This social alienation is a major family resemblance among Seneca’s tragic characters; indeed, we might say that Megara does not fully qualify as a tragic heroine because she fails to achieve a hatred which is *truly* uncommon—as she says, she wants the *odium* all to herself but knows that it will remain public property. In the same vein, Dupont’s conception of Senecan tragic heroes as characters who self-consciously exile themselves—passing “from the world of men into the mythological world of monsters”\(^57\)—highlights not only the importance in Senecan

\(^{56}\) Compare the lines of the Fool in Shakespeare’s *King Lear*: “If I had a monopoly out, they would have part on’t, and ladies too, they will not let me have all the fool to myself—they’ll be snatching” (*History* 4.147-50).

\(^{57}\) *du monde des hommes dans le monde mythologique des monstres* (Dupont 160).
drama of the opposition between the tragic hero’s madness and the good sense (mens bona) or common sense (sensus communis) of the community, but also clarifies the way in which this conflict is social as much as psychological.⁵⁸ As Dupont puts it: “the heroic individual leaves a human collectivity—the society of his city or of his human family, which defined him entirely through the relations that he maintained with the group as a whole and its members in particular—for another collectivity, where he will define himself in the same manner, but in relation to monsters. His body is the site of this passage, a body likewise totally immersed and defined according to its belonging to the one or the other society” (160-161). Although Dupont focuses here on the individual body, she charts its movement in terms of the larger spheres of a communal, social body. Indeed, she goes to some length to clarify that the “secret world” of myth, with its “hidden depths” and its “ghosts” (“un monde des profondeurs et du secret, le monde des fantômes”) is still first and foremost a communal and collective world: “this world of depths is not hidden in the midst of the individual.... These secrets of existence belong to

⁵⁸ In her account the hero’s psychological disturbance turns into a social fracture. “Furor, the temporary loss of mens, ...leads the madman to act in defiance of the laws of society, of morality and of humanity more generally” (74). The tragic hero “loses his mens, his human bearings,” and does so voluntarily (77, “le furor devient un mode volontaire de comportement”); tragic furor serves as “a strategy for leaving, voluntarily, the world of human beings. The madman of tragedy manipulates his passions in order to free himself from the moral and social bearings that constitute him as a human being; in particular he dispenses with pietas, his familial attachments” (77). Dupont’s account overlaps with critics such as Hunter, who writes: “When Seneca’s slaves of passion are taken over by inhuman or anti-human emotions they are released from human responsibility...; they become the vessels or instruments of the furor which is personified by the Furiae we meet in the infernal prologues” (184).
Thus, the tragic heroes’ alienation from the human social community (or their initiation into a monstrous mythical community) possesses its meaning in relation to our second form of “common sense,” which is defined through social discourse.

This brings us to my third main point: the social alienation of Seneca’s heroes is manifested rhetorically through verbal confrontations that pit, against proverbial common sense, the rhetorical uncommon sense of paradox. Their alienation takes the form of dramatic rhetorical battles, widely imitated by Renaissance authors of dramatic dialogue, where the commonsense maxims and proverbs offered by an advisor character are contradicted by the paradoxical rhetorical parries of the monstrous antagonist. Dupont says that “the tragic hero fashions his furor by means of paradox. Faced with an

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59 “ce monde des profondeurs n’est pas caché au fond e l’individu.... Ces arcanes de l’être, sont ceux d’une collectivité, d’une cité, d’un clan....”

60 The “mental blindness” of furor can be put in social terms: “The solitude of the madman, since he no longer communicates with those around him, renders him blind to the image of himself that others will reflect to him; he is insulated from social regulation, he will no longer want to be loved by his kin or admired by his fellow-citizens. Atreus, Oedipus, Medea, Phaedra: they defy public opinion” (Dupont 77-78, my emphasis).

61 “Stoic monistic psychology lends itself to paradox” (Stevens 151-52). The traditional association between Stoic thought and paradox is witnessed by ancient writers such as Cicero (whose Paradoxa Stoicorum offers a collection of Stoic paradoxes) and Plutarch (who wrote treatises attacking the “self-contradictions” of the Stoics), and also by modern writers such as Deleuze (who grounds his analysis of “nonsense” in Lewis Carroll with a discussion of paradox in ancient Stoicism). Seneca mentions “paradoxes” in Epistle 81—“surprising statements such as we Stoics are wont to make and such as the Greeks call ‘paradoxes’” (Gummere 2:225-27)—and Epistle 87—“Stoica paradoxa” (2:322)—and also De Beneficiis: “This, in my opinion, is the least surprising or least incredible of the paradoxes of the Stoic school (paradoxis Stoicæ sectæ): that he who receives a benefit gladly has already returned it” (Basore 3:113).
interlocutor—nurse or courtier—who opposes him with the precepts of common morality in the form of maxims, he systematically adopts the contrary position and returns the formulas that are proposed to him” (78).\(^2\) One might say about such scenes that, where the advisor’s rhetoric is *sententious*, the hero’s rhetoric is *contentious*. The hero counters the social consensus of rhetorical common sense—the collective judgment of the body politic—with the perverse maxims of rhetorical uncommon sense.\(^3\) The nurse in *Hercules Oeateus*, for instance, tells Deianira, “A person is not guilty unless guilty by intent” (886, *haut est nocens quicumque non sponte est nocens*), a commonsense moral and legal precept.\(^4\) While the nurse’s conventional morality is presented as a proverbial

\(^2\) “le héros tragique construit son *furor* par le paradoxe. Face à un interlocuteur, nourrice ou courtisan, qui lui oppose les préceptes de la morale commune sous forme de maximes, il prend systématiquement le contre-pied et retourne les formules qui lui sont proposées.”

\(^3\) See Dupont: “In order to recover the logic of *furor*, Atreus once again employs paradox” [*Pour retrouver la logique du furor, Atrée de nouveau use du paradoxe*] (145); Medea “discovers the key by paradox” [*elle découvre la clef par le paradoxe*] (147); Phaedra, “having progressed in her amorous *furor*..., moves on to the grand thrusts of paradox” [*Phèdre après avoir progressé dans son furor amoureux..., avance à grands coups de paradoxes*] (148).

\(^4\) More literally, “Whoever is unintentionally guilty is not guilty.” The ethical theory behind this maxim is the intent-based view that J.-P. Vernant and others see as central to Greek tragedy, a view that mitigates the guilt of crimes that are committed unintentionally, due to ignorance, insanity, etc. “A new idea of crime emerges…. Intention now appears as a constitutive element of the criminal action, especially in the case of homicide” (Vernant 40). This view is debated repeatedly in Senecan tragedy: e.g. *Oedipus* 1019, *Hercules Furens*, 1201, 1237 and 1300, and *Phoenissae* 218, where Oedipus mentions “the crimes I did in innocence” (*scelera quae feci innocens*). The latter complicates Antigone’s straightforward claim, “you are innocent” (205, *innocens es*), with a tragic paradox. Frank comments that “even a guilt-ridden Oedipus could not have considered that he was *legally* guilty of crimes which he had committed in ignorance.... The point of the verse seems to be the very Senecan paradox created between *scelera*, which implies culpability of some sort, and *innocens*” (203-05).
maxim, the tragic heroine’s radical “transvaluation” of morality is expressed as a paradox. Deianira exhorts her son to kill her by saying “the crime will be an act of piety” (986, *haec erit pietas scelus*). Set against the argument of the nurse, the tragic paradox is illuminating: where the *nutrix* argues conventionally that crime carries no guilt if committed unintentionally (i.e. “but you didn’t mean to do it!”), the *domina* argues for a contrary view, according to which the agent will be innocent (in fact “pious”) precisely by self-consciously intending crime. Indeed, for Deianira the guilt is not simply neutralized, as with the theory of “innocence due to ignorance,” but is actually transvaluated into its opposite: *scelus* becomes *pietas*. As Stevens says, “The common sense view of the world... is refuted by paradox” (316).

This is what Dupont entitles “*La parole du furieux,*” where *furor* assaults communal wisdom in “a confrontation pitting the madman against another character, who for him embodies the laws of humanity regarding prudence as well as morality”; the result is “a spectacle of words, a formal contest where the retorts fly back and forth” (140-41). These linguistic war-games are verbal shows of force, half *ludus* and half *agon.* “This playing with language... helps the madman to create his anti-world, where all values are inverted: hate takes the place of love, impiety the place of piety, injustice the place of justice, *nefas* the place of *fas*” (142). Another example of such paradoxical inversion (where “la haine remplace l’amour”) is provided by Medea who, in trying to unlock her unique capacity for tragic crime, “discovers the key by paradox and inversion: *Imitare amorem*” (147). The quotation comes from the scene in which Medea wonders what “measure” (*modus*) to give to her hatred, and concludes that it should “mirror her
love,” meaning of course that her hate for Jason should be like her former love for him in its boundless extremity: she killed her family in eloping with him, and soon she will kill her family in divorcing him. The speech is paradoxical because in it “hatred,” usually defined in binary opposition to “love,” is formulated as a mimesis of love.

Paradoxical rhetoric is also evident in the stichomythic argument with which Phoenissae ends. In a line delivered by Eteocles, we find the social uncommon sense of tragic hatred (odium)—the opposite of the “fellow-feeling” implicit in the sensus communis—fused with political power (regnum). These contraries are folded up neatly in the rhetorical uncommon sense of a perverse maxim: “He who fears to be hated has no appetite for ruling. The god who created the world set these things together: hatred and kingship (odium atque regnum). I think it is the mark of a great king, actually to press on (premere) hatred” (654-57 trans. modified). As with the “common” hatred for the tyrant Lycus, invoked by Megara in Hercules Furens, for Eteocles being the agent of exceptional power is essentially bound up with being the object of collective hatred.

“Eteocles develops a... paradox, that a ruler’s power is increased by the hatred of his people” (Tarrant 121). More generally, the tyrant’s “uncommon sense” is suggested by

65 I have changed Fitch’s “crush hatred” to “press on hatred,” which conveys not only the primary meaning of premere, “to exert a steady and continuous force against,” but also important secondary meanings such as “to grip tight,” “to insist on,” and “to seize on” (OLD). Like other Senecan tyrants, Eteocles believes that hatred “comes with the territory”: it is directly proportional to the amount of power one possesses. Thus his point is that one should, far from obliterating hatred as “crush” implies, actually embrace it with open arms.

66 Eteocles’ maxim is echoed by other Senecan tyrants. Oedipus says, “One unduly afraid of being hated is incapable of ruling (regnare nescit): a throne is safeguarded by fear (regna custodit metus)” (Oedipus 703-04). Lycus observes, “The first art of kingship is to endure unpopularity (in invidia pati)” (Hercules Furens 353).
his self-conscious lack of “fellow-feeling” and disregard for the “general good,” two values central to the definition of sensus communis in Roman culture: he is on one side of an asymmetrical equation, in which the hatred shared by an entire community is directed at him alone. As this perverse maxim illustrates, then, where in Seneca’s philosophical prose sensus communis protects one from hatred, in his tragic drama uncommon sense not only allows for hatred but clearly invites it as the true “mark” of tyrannical power.

A similar idea is found in the argument about “kingship” between Atreus and his advisor (the satelles). The latter says, “When fear compels them to praise, fear also turns them into enemies. But one who seeks the tribute of sincere support will want praise from the heart rather than the tongue” (207-10). Atreus responds, “Sincere praise often comes even to a lowly man; false praise comes only to the mighty. They must want what they do not want!” (211-12). The final, paradoxical line is close to a formal contradiction: let \( x \) (what they want) be not \( x \) (what they don’t want). The tyrant’s strict speech is, strictly speaking, contradictory: a sententious paradox. Of course, for Atreus it is the paradox which captures his whole point, and it must be our essential point as well. The Senecan tyrant is the one for whom such a paradox makes sense, and when we try to resolve the contradiction we find that its paradoxical nature is not only present at the surface of style but also at the foundation of the thought. Atreus is saying that it is not “sincere” praise but “false” praise that is reserved as the mark of the powerful: because it is precisely the falsity of such praise that bears witness to power—in the form of the tyrant’s “ability to command it” (Braden 31). As Braden says, “Absolute power inserts itself between words and their significations and rewrites them as their opposites: ‘quod nolunt velint’.” Thus,
implicit in this ironic encomium there is a contradictory claim: that for the power-greedy tyrant, false praise is the truest form of praise. A tyrant’s subjects “must want what they do not want” both because their tongues must contradict their hearts and, at a more profound level, because their wills must negate themselves in obeying a contradiction whose very impossibility testifies to a power that tramples over the limits of logic itself.

Seneca’s tragic language tends to contradict not only the claims of other characters but even its own claims: it enacts paradoxical, self-negating speech acts. The heroes “break down’ the customary use of language.... [T]heir lecta, the verbal expressions of their rational judgments, are always expressed in double entendre” (Stevens 294). Atreus has a sort of genius for these paradoxical sententiae, especially in his moment of triumph over his brother. In the last scene, Thyestes (who has already eaten the meal made of his sons’ flesh) is suddenly presented with their severed heads; realizing the children are murdered, he demands all of the body-parts from his brother, so that he may lay their corpses to rest: “I ask you brother to brother: let me bury them.” Atreus replies with a cruel double-entendre, ambiguously referring both to the openly severed heads in front of Thyestes, and to the secretly cooked flesh already consumed and lying inside of him: “All that remains of your children you have, all that does not remain you have” (1030-31). It is not enough for Atreus merely to do the deed, nor merely to proclaim the crime outright; he must also savor its revelation by means of perverse hints and riddling contradictions: by means of paradox. He must compress all of the play’s physical and emotional laceration into this single hammer-blow of rhetorical uncommon sense, which essentially says: You have x, you have not-x. This is the feature
of Senecan tragedy that T. S. Eliot had in mind when he wrote, “In the verbal coup de théâtre no one has ever excelled him. […] Again and again the epigrammatic observation on life or death is put in the most telling way at the most telling moment” (58-59). This talent or compulsion is shared by all of Seneca’s antagonists: the same “genius” (ingenium) that Oedipus exercised in interpreting the Sphinx’s riddle is on display in Atreus. In each case it is a talent for manipulating language in the shape of uncommon meanings.

The idea that Seneca’s dramatic language—especially in the speech of his heroes—takes the form of paradox is not new: in their different ways, interpreters as various as Rosenmeyer, Dupont and Stevens make this point. What is new, however, is the way we have framed paradox as one aspect of a larger, multi-faceted opposition between common sense and uncommon sense in his work. In general, we can say that paradox is a form of “uncommon” sense because it violates the normal signification of language: it departs from the “common” sense of the words. In order to see in paradoxical sententiae some significance beyond the logical stalemate of formal contradiction (“nonsense”), one must go beyond the normal sense of the words to reach their uncommon significations, in which the true meaning of the paradoxical statement consists.67 Take, for instance, a line that Medea delivers to Jason: “tibi innocens sit quisquis est pro te nocens” (503). Translated literally, it sounds like a perfect contradiction: “Whoever is guilty for you should be, for you, innocent.” But the dramatic

67 Stevens says that “while Stoics do derive the ‘seeds’ of their system from ‘common conceptions,’ …they do not associate these simply with ‘common opinions,’ …which are often false. Those conceptions which are both true and contrary to common opinion, …are accordingly, paradoxes” (309-10).
situation reveals it to be a profound expression that condenses the broad scope and weight of the story and sharpens it, like the blade of an axe, into a concentrated and devastating point. The context of this utterance is that all of Corinth condemns Medea as a murderer while Jason is approved to marry the King’s daughter, and she feels that—just between the two of them—these judgments should be reversed. “Though everyone condemns your wife as infamous, you alone should defend her, you alone call her guiltless; one who is guilty for your sake should be innocent in your eyes” (501-03). Medea’s point is that, although she killed her family members and Jason did not, and although therefore everyone considers her guilty of the murders and him innocent, nevertheless because she committed the killings in order to escape with Jason, he alone should consider himself guilty of them and her innocent of them. She caps her argument with a single exclamation, framed in universal terms, that contradicts itself. *Someone guilty for you is innocent for you.* She is calling on Jason, with this paradoxical maxim, to contradict the consensus of their society and its collective judgments.

Ultimately, the Senecan tragic paradox is best understood as a dramatic speech act, one whose significance lies not so much in the truth or falsity of its claims as in the social impact of its utterance.68 Employing the same universal terms as conventional maxims, the tragically “uncommon” or paradoxical aphorism demands—although it may

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68 See Austin’s philosophy of speech acts, especially “constative” and “performative” utterances, and “illocutionary” and “perlocutionary” acts. “With performative utterances are contrasted, for example and essentially, ‘constative’ utterances: to issue a constative utterance... is to make a statement. To issue a performative utterance is, for example, to make a bet” (6, note). “[T]he perlocutionary act... is the achieving of certain effects by saying something.... Illocutionary acts are conventional acts: perlocutionary acts are *not* conventional” (121).
not receive—the same general assent and universal application. Such aphoristic violations of common sense imply that *while tragic experience is an exception to the rule, the exception is a rule in its own right*. Rather than combat an expression of common sense with another proverbial expression, Seneca’s tragic heroes fight rhetorical common sense with rhetorical uncommon sense. This makes clearer the important fact that such alienated characters are not aiming simply to express a personal disagreement with another individual, nor simply to highlight a contradiction between two particular sayings within the collective voice of proverbial wisdom in their society.⁶⁹ Instead, they are aiming to express, on behalf of tragic uncommon sense, a fundamental discord with the voice of common sense *as such*. This last point implies an abstract, theoretical opposition between common sense and paradox.

Such an opposition has been developed by the philosopher Gilles Deleuze, who contrasts good sense or common sense, on one hand, and paradox or “para-sense” on the other. His analysis of “paradox” fleshes out its etymological origin from the ancient Greek *doxa*—“that fragmentary, unreflective collection of prejudices and opinions which is *doxa* or common sense” (Eagleton 96).⁷⁰ Deleuze asserts that “good sense and common sense complete each other in the image of thought; together they constitute the two halves of the *doxa*” (*DR* 134). He treats “paradox” as a complex word whose multiple meanings

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⁶⁹ See Kenneth Burke: “Proverbs are *strategies* for dealing with *situations*.... Another name for strategies might be *attitudes*. People have often commented on the fact that there are contrary *proverbs*.... The apparent contradictions depend upon differences in *attitude*, involving a correspondingly different choice of *strategy*” (296-97).

⁷⁰ Like common sense, *doxa* refers to what “everybody naturally thinks that everybody is supposed to know” (Eagleton 133).
stand aligned in mutual opposition to these “two halves” of the *doxa*: “There are several kinds of paradox, all of which are opposed to the complementary forms of orthodoxy—namely, good sense and common sense. [...] Paradox breaks up the common exercise of the faculties and places each before its own limit [...]. At the same time [...], paradox communicates to the broken faculties that relation which is far from good sense” (*DR* 227). Thus Deleuze pits paradox in opposition to both key terms that we have discussed in Senecan psychology and rhetoric: good sense (*mens bona*) and common sense (*sensus communis*). Paradox is that which expresses their internal contradictions: “Good sense and common sense... are overthrown from within by paradox” (*LS* 117). Or as Rosenmeyer observes, in the context of Senecan tragedy: “The Stoic paradoxes win out over the Stoic sermonizing” (79). In Seneca’s drama, unlike in his prose, tragic uncommon sense refutes and overwhelms the wise words of the *sensus communis*.

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71 Deleuze continues: “Objectively, paradox displays the element which cannot be totalized within a common element, along with the difference which cannot be equalised or cancelled at the direction of good sense. [...] It is correct to say that the only refutation of paradoxes lies in the good sense and common sense themselves, but on condition that they are already allowed everything: the role of the judge as well as that of party to the case, the absolute along with the partial truth” (*DR* 227-28). This goes some way toward explaining the unresolved sense of futility in so many of Seneca’s tragic dialogues.

72 “Paradox is opposed to *doxa*, in both aspects of *doxa*, namely, good sense and common sense” (*LS* 75).
Aesthetic Judgment in Senecan Tragedy

The judgement of taste...depends on our presupposing the existence of a common sense.... Only under the presupposition, I repeat, of such a common sense, are we able to lay down a judgement of taste. (Kant, CJ 83)

Latin literature provides poets for several tastes, but there is no taste for Seneca. (Eliot 52)

This final section addresses the “uncommon sense” of Seneca’s plays in specifically aesthetic terms. Obviously, their artistic merit has received various scores over the centuries, in accordance with the extreme highs and lows of esteem in which Seneca has been held. His drama was adulated in the sixteenth century, largely dismissed by the end of the nineteenth century, and then revived in the twentieth century.

Nevertheless, there are certain qualities inherent to Senecan tragedy: permanent, ineradicable features that, whether praised or condemned, will always inform its artistic reputation. One of these qualities is its appeal to what I call “aesthetic uncommon sense,” a phrase best explained in terms of Kant’s third Critique and his theory of a sensus communis aestheticus. I will argue that the aesthetic uncommon sense of Senecan tragedy is a form of the sublime that inverts the aesthetic common sense of Kant’s beautiful. We recall that Kant posits an aesthetic form of common sense, presented as a necessary presupposition for the universal character of aesthetic judgment (the judgment “this is beautiful” implies that everyone should find the object beautiful).

73 “The judgement of taste is paradoxically both subjective and universal (‘subjective universality’). It is subjective because it is particular to a perceiving subject, it is universal because it makes a claim on the agreement of all” (Martindale 18). Kant defines the judgment of beauty in accordance with his fourfold scheme of logical “moments”:
The function of Kant’s “aesthetic” common sense remains sufficiently parallel with the psychological and rhetorical forms of common sense to justify his using the same term in a new context. Like the former (the Aristotelian common sense), it is a mediating concordance of different mental faculties. “It is a free and indeterminate accord between faculties. This agreement defines a properly aesthetic common sense (taste)” (Deleuze KCP 49). And like the latter (the Roman sensus communis), it facilitates a normative consensus between various individual judgments; it is “a requirement of reason for generating... consensus” (Kant 85). “The assertion is not that every one will fall in with our judgement, but rather that every one ought to agree with it. Here I put forward my judgement of taste as an example of the judgement of common sense” (84).74 While the Kantian judgment of the beautiful therefore implies an “aesthetic common sense,” the judgment of the sublime postulates a radically different state of mind. The beautiful is characterized by an “accord” among the mental faculties, the sublime by their discord: “just as in the estimate of the beautiful imagination and understanding by their

quantity, quality, relation, and modality. He introduces “aesthetic common sense” in relation to the last moment, the “modality” of the judgment of beauty, in order to explain the paradoxical way in which this judgment is conceived as necessary—its modality is one of “subjective necessity.” Kant declares in the title of section 22, “The necessity of the universal assent that is thought in a judgement of taste, is a subjective necessity which, under the presupposition of a common sense, is represented as objective” (84).

74 This “common sense” makes aesthetic judgments “universally communicable.” Section 21 of the Third Critique proposes that “judgements must, together with their attendant conviction, admit of being universally communicated” (83), and concludes that “the universal communicability of a feeling presupposes a common sense” (84). See also Deleuze: “Natural good sense or common sense are thus taken to be determinations of pure thought. Sense is able to adjudicate with regard to its own universality, and to suppose itself universal and communicable in principle” (DR 132-33).
concert generate subjective finality of the mental faculties, so imagination and reason do so here by their conflict” (Kant 107, my emphasis). As Deleuze observes, this makes his theory of the sublime “the only case in which Kant considers a faculty liberated from the form of a common sense.... [T]hought and imagination here enter into an essential discordance.... [I]n the case of the sublime, the recognition model and the form of common sense are found wanting in favour of a quite different conception of thought” (DR 320-21). This is why the “quality” of judgments of the beautiful is a disinterested form of pleasure, whereas that of judgments of the sublime is a kind of displeasure. “The quality of the feeling of the sublime consists in its being... a feeling of displeasure at an object” (Kant 108). However, this first-order feeling of displeasure exists in conjunction with a second-order feeling of pleasure. “The feeling of the sublime is, therefore, at once a feeling of displeasure, arising from the inadequacy of imagination..., and a simultaneously awakened pleasure, arising from this very judgement of the inadequacy of the greatest faculty of sense” (106). Thus Kant defines the aesthetic pleasure of the sublime by means of a paradox: it is a form of displeasure that is on account of that very fact a form of pleasure.

The beautiful and sublime, then, constitute for Kant the two basic forms of pleasurable aesthetic experience. These two “aesthetic” pleasures fit into his broader conception of pleasure, which he divides into categories: sensory pleasure (the

75 “In effect, the schematic imagination in the Critique of Pure Reason is still under the logical common sense; the reflective imagination of judgements of beauty is still under the aesthetic common sense. Yet with the sublime, according to Kant, the imagination is forced or constrained to confront its own limit, its phantasteon, its maximum which is equally the unimaginable, the unformed or the deformed” (Deleuze, DR 320-21).
agreeable), aesthetic pleasure (the beautiful and sublime), and moral pleasure (the good).

Kant assigns bilingual labels to these four objects of pleasure: “In relation to the feeling of pleasure an object is to be counted either as agreeable, or beautiful, or sublime, or good… (iucundum, pulchrum, sublime, honestum)” (117). Thus he equates his “beautiful” and “sublime” with the Latin terms pulchrum and sublime. If we turn to Seneca’s drama, we can see some rough parallels to Kant’s theory of judgments about what is beautiful in Phaedra, and about what is sublime in Troades. Some of these parallels are superficially evident in the Latin keywords that Seneca shares with Kant. Pulchrum, Kant’s preferred term for “beautiful,” only appears in Phaedra among all of Seneca’s plays (Denooz 312). Furthermore the Latin forma, meaning both “form” and “beauty,” also appears nine times in Phaedra, more instances than any of his other plays. This is no accident—Phaedra is a tragedy about beauty, especially the beauty of Hippolytus, a cruel, “savage” beauty that ravages Phaedra and drives her into a passion “escaping the common order” of human experience. In fact we find both Kantian terms for beauty (pulchrum and forma) together in the same line, where the chorus praises the supremely beautiful young man: “your form (forma) shines out more beautiful (pulchrior) by far” (743).

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76 This chorus might be read in Kantian fashion: Hippolytus’ beauty is recognized by all, in accordance with the sensus communis aestheticus; however, Phaedra does not recognize his beauty in a “disinterested” Kantian manner, but in a most interested fashion: she passionately desires to possess him, and her love becomes tragic furor and achieves the grandeur of the sublime. In her suicide speech, Phaedra says, “We could not unite our spirits, but at least we can unite our deaths” (1183-84). Now—after failing to seduce Hippolytus, framing him for sexual assault, and causing his fine figure to be torn into pieces—she abandons pure sensual pleasure (Kant’s “agreeable”), pure aesthetic pleasure (Kant’s “beautiful”), and pure moral pleasure (Kant’s “good”): she appeals to
As *Phaedra* is largely a study of beauty, so *Troades* is the most obvious candidate among Seneca’s plays to be counted a tragedy of the Kantian sublime. Certainly it is the play that would be most suited to Kant’s taste—to his aesthetic theory as well as his prudish and sentimental moralism. To begin with, it offers a complex portrayal of “supersensible” ideas such as the post mortem fate of the soul. More importantly, *Troades* represents horrible physico-natural dangers that threaten tender but ultimately free moral agents, which reinforces Kant’s opposition between the “phenomenal” and “noumenal” realms (the opposition on which his theory of the sublime is largely based). This is Kant’s “dynamically” sublime, featured in the twin examples of Trojan children fearlessly facing death. The two innocents—the boy Astyanax and the girl Polyxena—are both executed with cold-blooded deliberation by the Greeks after the fall of Troy, the boy thrown from the height of the city walls, the girl sacrificed by sword on the tomb of Achilles. (These settings also suggest the “mathematically” sublime insofar as the latter is associated with great size, scale, magnitude, height.) Kant’s term appears here: Ulysses leads the boy in a “sublime walk” (*sublimi gradu*) up “to the high walls” (1088-91). The site of Polyxena’s death is also lofty and imposing—the tomb of Achilles where she must be slaughtered by Pyrrhus: “she reached the height of the steep mound, and the young man took his position on the high-raised summit of his father’s burial place” (1148-50). Such lofty locations serve as a literal *locus* of the sublime. At the top of the parapet, the supersensible realm of a death that lies after life and beyond the bounds of society and nature (Kant’s “sublime”).

77 The chorus beginning “Is it true, or a tale to deceive the faint-hearted, that spirits live on after bodies are buried?” (371-72), prefigures Hamlet’s “To be, or not to be?” speech.
Astyanax displays what Kant calls the “dynamically” sublime: a disregard of physical dangers through the noumenal greatness in the supersensible soul. “When he stood forward on the top of the tower, he turned his alert gaze this way and that, fearless in spirit” (1091-93). The ultimate proof of this triumph of noumenal freedom over “phenomenal” danger is the boy’s dying act of defiance—“he leapt down of his own accord (sponte)” (1102)—a gesture backed up by the girl: “the dauntless (audax) heroine did not step back: she stood facing the blow, frowning defiance” (1:151-52).

Significantly, the spectacle of two noble souls braving their deaths is viewed from a safe spot: the mixed audience of the vulgar and the elite (1076-77, ducum / plebisque) surrounds the lofty tower, and sits on hilltops and in trees to watch the executions. This aspect of Seneca’s description is distinctly Kantian insofar as the “dynamically” sublime requires protection or “insulation” for the observer—a safe distance from danger—to be aesthetically appreciated. “[W]e must see ourselves safe in order to feel this soul-stirring delight” (Kant 112). These words exactly capture the emphasis in the last act of Troades: to see the boy, “one callous spectator (spectator) took his seat on Hector’s tomb” (1087); to see the girl, multitudes flock to a “rising valley-side” which “slopes up in the form of a theatre (theatri more)” (1123-25). The observers also respond to these tragic spectacles uniformly, recognizing a sublimity that is “universal,” as Kantian

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78 Like Kant, Seneca portrays this supersensible power of the soul going “beyond nature” conjoined with the radical susceptibility of the body, which is inevitably destroyed by natural forces: “His neck was broken by the impact against stone, the skull split with the entire brain forced out. He lies a shapeless corpse” (1115-17).

79 Kant says: “provided our own position is secure, their aspect is all the more attractive for its fearfulness; and we readily call these objects sublime, because they raise the forces of the soul above the height of the vulgar commonplace...” (110-11).
aesthetic judgments are supposed to be. The bravery of Astyanax touches both the
groundlings and the upper-crust; it is not just caviar to the generals. “He moved the
people (vulgum) and their leaders (duces) and Ulysses himself‖ (1098-99). Likewise,
Polyxena is admired by some for her beauty (formae decus) and by others for her youth
(mollis aetas), but all of the spectators are moved by her “animus...fortis”: “The whole
crowd was awestruck. Some were moved by her beauty, some by her tender years, some
by life’s shifting changes; all were moved by the braveness of her spirit (animus...fortis),
facing death head-on (leto obvius); they marveled (mirantur) and felt pity (miserantur)”
(1143-1148). With the last phrase, we have reached not only the universal judgment of
Kant’s dynamical sublime, but also the dual aesthetic experience of tragic affect: fear and
pity.\footnote{It may be Seneca’s “mirantur ac miserantur” that inspires Sidney’s variation on the
Aristotelian formula in his \textit{Defence of Poetry}: “admiration and commiseration.”}

Both \textit{Phaedra} and \textit{Troades} present the beautiful and sublime conflated with social
decorum and ethical nobility, rather than in their “pure” form. Indeed, to put the plot of
\textit{Phaedra} in Kantian terms, one might say that the tragedy dramatizes the disasters that
follow from the \textit{interested} quality of pleasure that the title character seeks from an object
of beauty—her stepson—rather than the disinterested quality of Kant’s “pure” aesthetic
judgments. Likewise, in \textit{Troades} the sublimity of the two young victims is almost
entirely conflated with tenderhearted moralism in the sentimental appeal of their pathetic
deaths. In this respect, however, \textit{Troades} is not representative of Senecan tragedy—most
of Seneca’s “sublime” moments are focused not on objects of such unanimous moral
admiration, but on objects of extreme \textit{revulsion}. Indeed, the aesthetic sublimity of
Senecan tragedy is linked, as a rule, with the monstrous grandeur of the tragic criminals rather than the moral fortitude of their victims. A brief survey of several passages in which Seneca uses the term “sublime” helps to show both how it works with Kant’s theory to go beyond sentimental moralism and also how it presupposes an aesthetic experience essentially different from the “aesthetic common sense” implied in the beautiful. In *Hercules Furens*, the chorus criticizes the “sublime” grandeur of fame with a typical contrast between insecure lofty status and secure lowly status: “garrulous Rumour may praise him through every city, and raise him equal with the starry (*astris*) heavens; another may ride high (*sublimis*) in a chariot. For me, let my own land hide me in a safe and secluded home” (1193-97). This image of sublimity, conjoining itself to the heavenly company of the stars, is echoed later by Hercules himself when tragic madness seizes his mind: “I must travel on high (*sublimis ferar*) to the lofty expanses of the cosmos, and make for the sky: the stars (*astra*) are my father’s promise” (958-59). Here the Senecan overreacher is “sublime” in almost purely descriptive terms.81

This overreaching is also defined in opposition to good sense. Seneca repeatedly portrays the “sublime” as an imbalance of, or even a threat to, the *bona mens*—a weakness or lack of the “good sense” that is (as Voelke, Summers, and Deleuze point out) continuous with the Aristotelian common sense and the Stoic *hegemonikon*. For

81 Compare *Aeneid* 1.259-60: “thou shalt raise on high (*sublimemque feres*) to the starry heaven great-souled Aeneas” (Fairclough 1:259) and *Thyestes*: “Peer of the stars (*astris*) I stride, out-topping all, my proud head reaching to the lofty sky” (*Thyestes* 885-86). The latter is freely translated in Ben Jonson’s *Sejanus*: “My roof receives me not; ’tis air I tread: / And, at each step, I feel my advanced head / Knock out a star in heaven!” (5.7-9, quoted in Zamir 29). A more famous Renaissance parallel is Marlowe’s *Faustus*, who also exhibits “the overreaching of a restless spirit storming the heavens” (Weimann 184).
instance, we recall how Epistle 94 recommends an “advocate of good sense” (*advocatum bonae mentis*), an advisor who will dissuade us from climbing the “envied heights of power” where “the topmost point is the most slippery” (*in sublimi maxime lubricos*).

Here, Seneca uses the word *sublime* to characterize the “topmost point” of the whirling Wheel of Fortune. And it is this literally “sublime” (*in sublimi*) position, the condition of *bona fortuna*, that constitutes the first term in his binary opposition between “good fortune and good sense” (*bona fortuna et mens bona*). Similarly, in a passage from *On Tranquility of Mind*, Seneca formulates “sublimity” of linguistic expression—amped-up verbal energy—as a breakdown of good sense, a sort of short-circuit in the *bona mens*:

> “when my mind has been uplifted by the greatness of its thoughts, it becomes ambitious of words, and with higher aspirations it desires higher expression...; forgetful then of my rule and of my more restrained judgement, I am swept to loftier heights (*sublimius feror*) by an utterance that is no longer my own. [...] I am in all things attended by this weakness of good intention (*bonae mentis*)” (Basore 2:211). The last line of the passage might also be translated: “this lack of good sense plagues me in everything.” This prose speaker who is “swept to loftier heights” is exactly parallel with the overreaching hero in *Hercules Furens* who “must travel on high” (958). It is only the vagaries of English translation that obscure the essentially identical Latin phrase in both texts: “sublimius feror” (I am carried higher); “sublimis ferar” (I will be carried high).

This “sublime” sense of being swept away by an alien part of oneself is parallel to Seneca’s tragic heroes who are seized and dragged away by unruly passions. It is also parallel to the notion of going “beyond” the bounds of humanity, as Dupont describes
Seneca’s “monsters” leaving human society by means of a tortured, metaphysical form of upward mobility. The figurative portrayal of sublimity as being “carried away”—which is merely metaphorical and delusional, respectively, in the quotations from On Tranquility of Mind and Hercules Furens—is made literal in the figure of Medea, who at the end of Seneca’s play literally raises herself into the air and rides off towards the stars. After murdering her last surviving son before the eyes of his father, Medea employs her magical self-reliance and summons a chariot borne by demonic serpents: a tragic witch pulling herself up by her own bootstraps. “A path has opened to heaven,” she declares; “I shall ride (vehar) through the air in my winged chariot.” In his reply, which concludes the play, Jason describes this flight of his ex-wife as “sublime”: “Travel on high (sublime) through the lofty spaces of heaven, and bear witness where you ride that there are no gods” (1026-27). These verbal images offer, in momentary glimpses, an outline of Seneca’s notion of the sublime. We can read such passages as reflexive or meta-theatrical insofar as they describe the aesthetic effect of Seneca’s own art on his reader or audience. At such moments, Seneca’s “sublime” coincides with the artistic sublime of Longinus as well as the aesthetic sublime of Kant, both of which are identified with the “absolutely great” and going “beyond nature.” Longinus defines sublimity as “the resonance of greatness of mind” and as “what is beyond nature” (52-53); in the same

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82 The view of Seneca as a “sublime” author has a long and respectable pedigree. St. Jerome himself, in the Institutio Principis Christiani, describes Seneca’s texts as producing a “sublime” effect, “carrying the mind of the reader into the heights (in sublime), far above the base concerns (sordidis curis) of men” (quoted in Hunter 181). During the reign of Elizabeth—who herself translated part of Hercules Oetaeus—Thomas Newton declared that Seneca’s “whole wrytinges” are “penned with a peerless sublimity and loftinesse of Style” (5).
fashion, Kant says that the sublime reveals “a faculty of mind transcending every
standard of sense” (102), and “is founded upon the feeling of a sphere of the mind which
altogether exceeds the realm of nature” (120). Both of these aspects are applicable to
Seneca’s heroes who go “beyond nature” or invert nature.  

As with the Kantian sublime, the Senecan “going beyond nature” is associated not
with pleasure and goodness but with suffering and evil. Thus, Deleuze singles out
“Seneca’s extraordinary tragedies” as the “tragic thought which stages for the first time
beings devoted to evil, prefiguring thereby with such precision Elizabethan theater” (LS
131). Comparatively, the importance of “pleasing” examples of the beautiful and sublime
in Senecan drama (where they simply point to “the good and the true,” so to speak) is far
outweighed by the centrality of artistic representations that are clearly meant to produce
not the pleasure of judgments of “taste” (Kant’s sensus communis aestheticus), but rather
aesthetic judgments that are grounded in displeasure. Such displeasure, however, can still
be usefully put in Kantian terms as long as we maintain several important distinctions.
First, the distinction between judgments of the beautiful and judgments of the sublime:
the former are defined as a form of pleasure, while the latter are defined as a form of
displeasure (or “negative pleasure”).  

Second, the distinction between aesthetic

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83 Longinus describes an upward impulse, parallel to the psychological flight in
Seneca’s essay and the physical flight at the conclusion of Medea: “by true sublimity our
soul somehow is both lifted up and—taking on a kind of exultant resemblance—filled
with delight and great glory” (42). Likewise Kant defines the sublime as aesthetic
experience that goes “beyond the sensible world,” a “thrusting aside of the sensible
barriers” (127).

84 Kant says that “delight in the sublime... is only negative (whereas that in the beautiful
is positive)” (120).
judgments about objects of *nature* and aesthetic judgments about objects of human *art*:

although much of Kant’s analysis is focused on the former, his discussion of the latter
introduces a different set of relations between the beautiful and sublime, and frames the
value of art and the work of artistic genius in terms of a new notion, the “aesthetic idea.”

The latter appears in Kant’s discussion of genius. He says that while the *sensus communis aestheticus* ("taste") is required to *judge* what is beautiful, in order to *produce* what is beautiful (i.e. to create art) one needs not merely taste but “genius” (172). Kant associates genius with “spirit” (*geist*), which he defines as “the faculty of presenting *aesthetic ideas*” (175). The “aesthetic idea” is a “representation of the imagination which induces much thought, yet without the possibility of any definite thought whatever, i.e. *concept*, being adequate to it” (175-76). Furthermore, “an aesthetic idea is the counterpart (pendant) of a *rational idea*, which, conversely, is a concept, to which no *intuition* (representation of the imagination) can be adequate” (176). In such formulations, Kant connects the aesthetic idea not only with the beautiful, which pleases “without a concept,” but also with the sublime, which—like the “rational idea” that is the “counterpart” of the aesthetic idea—is also defined as a thought that goes beyond sensible intuition, that cannot be adequated to any possible “representation of the imagination.” Here it is clear on the theoretical level—as it is also clear on the empirical level in his observation that the genre of *verse tragedy* combines the beautiful and sublime—that, for Kant, literary drama requires aesthetic judgments that are not based merely and simply on the *sensus communis aestheticus* and its “taste” for pure beauty in
nature. Thus, although Kant posits an “aesthetic common sense” with reference to the pleasure of pure aesthetic judgments such as the free beauty of nature, when it comes to artistic works such as Senecan tragedy, his theory of the sublime and the concept of “aesthetic ideas” reinforce the notion of displeasure or “negative pleasure” that I am calling aesthetic uncommon sense.

In particular, Kant’s conception of how artistic genius produces “aesthetic ideas” offers important parallels to the aesthetic qualities of the “magnum opus” of the Senecan tragic hero: the nefas or scelus, the tragic crime that is a product of the hero’s ingenium. Both genius and ingenium derive from the verb gignere, which means to “bring forth” or create. While Kant’s artistic genius is defined as giving free rein to nature—“Genius is the innate mental aptitude (ingenium) through which nature gives the rule to art” (168)—the tragic genius of Seneca’s hero is defined as perverting nature—“Nature, who alters her fixed laws in regard to Oedipus alone, by inventing unheard-of procreation, must change yet again to provide my punishment” (Oedipus 942-45). Indeed, the implicit alignment of Kant’s “natural” genius with the concordia facultatum of psychological common sense—“nature in the individual (and by virtue of the harmony of his faculties) must give the rule to art” (168)—is literally overthrown by the ingenium of Senecan tragedy: “natura versa est” (Oedipus 371). Nevertheless here the difference proves the

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85 In Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime, Kant suggested that the two main forms of aesthetic experience correspond to the two main forms of drama: “Tragedy is distinguished from comedy, according to my view, chiefly in that in the first the feeling for the sublime is stirred, and in the second, that for the beautiful” (52). In the maturity of his third Critique, however, Kant significantly revises this view and associates tragedy with both the sublime and the beautiful: “the presentation of the sublime...may be brought into unison with beauty in a tragedy in verse...and in this combination fine art is even more artistic” (190).
similarity: the tragic hero is also a kind of artist, and his extraordinary “innate talent” is analogous to Kant’s notion of genius: both unleash nature’s super-human power.\textsuperscript{86}

Oedipus relies on this \textit{ingenium} to come up with a brilliant form of self-punishment: “Wretch, use your genius (\textit{ingenio})!” (947, trans. modified). He insists on his creative capacity to “invent,” like a writer facing the blank page, trying to force an idea out of his brain that might do justice to his high reputation: “A fine devise. For thee a worthy fall. / Invent thou monstrous beast forthwith: a fall even worthy for / Thy self invent” (Newton 224). The Elizabethan translation renders well the specifically \textit{artistic} flavor of this speech. The tragic hero must, like the laboring poet or rhetorician, find some means to inspire this early stage of creation: an \textit{invention}.\textsuperscript{87}

Oedipus is a blind artist using his uncommon sense (his \textit{furor}) to shape a masterpiece, the crowning achievement of his life’s work. Nor does he get it right the first time. His initial idea (his “first draft”) is a fantastic vision of living and dying repeatedly, thereby paying for his crimes with countless deaths in a gradual accumulation of punishment: “O that I might a thousand times, my wretched lyfe renewe, / O that I might revyve and dye by course in order dewe / Ten hundred thousand times and more: then should I vengeance take / Upon this wretched head” (Newton 225). This idea of a unique fate “always to be reborn”—\textit{renasci semper}—is a transhistorical slogan worthy of Nietzsche’s “tragic” philosophy with its vision of eternal recurrence. Indeed, the same

\textsuperscript{86} See Ferry on Kant: “il faut qu’à travers le génie nous reconnaissions dans le produit fini \textit{l’oeuvre de la nature}” (171).

\textsuperscript{87} “Après avoir repris vie par la parole, en donnant des mots à sa passion, le héros transforme cette passion en fureur par un effort de volonté, puis cette fureur lui permet d’inventer son \textit{nefas}” (Dupont 123).
topos appears in *Othello*, where the hero says, “O that the slave had forty thousand lives! / One is too poor, too weak for my revenge” (3.3.447-48). And a short time later, Othello promises, “I would have him nine years a-killing” (4.1.174). This shift—from a revenge-punishment taken through multiple lives and deaths to one taken through a single long and excruciatingly drawn-out process of dying—is the same one that takes place with Oedipus, who first conceives of punishment through many lives and deaths, then settles for a *mors longa* which is “stretched out” as long as possible: “What cannot happen often must happen slowly...” (948). Either way, however—whether through multiplied repetition or prolonged extension—this conception of punishment goes beyond the realm of human comprehension, and therefore gestures toward Kant’s “mathematical” sublime. In the latter, according to Kant, the mind’s sensory capacity (which he terms the *comprehensio aesthetica*) is “pushed to the point at which our faculty of imagination breaks down” (101); therefore it “betrays its limits and its inadequacy” (106). This description fits Oedipus’ successive visions of punishment by means of death—a death that is first infinitely repeated, then infinitely prolonged. In their numerical or temporal expansion, these “mathematical” ideas stretch the imagination to its breaking point. Oedipus’ spectacle of self-blinding is attached to the concept of a “lingering death” (*mors longa*) and is certainly supposed to function as an embodiment of that concept; yet it takes on such complexity that its representation induces more thought than is reducible to a notion such as the “*mors longa*.”

Like Kant’s aesthetic idea, then, the Senecan tragic crime is a representation that is associated with a particular concept, but that achieves spectacular effects through the
details of its manifestation, which goes beyond anything contained in the concept. The representation is related to a concept but not reducible to it, and likewise the concept is (as with Kant’s sublime) never fully equivalent to its sensuous representation. The same may be said of Medea’s manifestation of “revenge” and “hate,” each of which is embodied in actions and representations that are somehow measureless and that go well beyond what is contained in those concepts. This is evident when Seneca’s heroine wonders how she might take vengeance on Jason for betraying her, and then seems to catch in her nostrils the first whiffs of her own children’s blood as the ultimate criminal sacrifice, the ultimate means to injure their father: “children.... My revenge is born, already born: I have given birth” (24-26). We might compare her moment of inspiration to Iago, hatching his murderous plot in Othello: “I ha’t. It is ingendered. Hell and night / Must bring this monstrous birth to the world’s light” (1.3.395). Of course, Iago’s conception of revenge is merely like the process of reproduction, whereas Medea’s birthing metaphor is justified because it is not only metaphoric: her children are the literal means of her revenge. Nevertheless, in both “revenge” passages the plotting of death (murder) is perversely formulated in terms of the genesis of life (pregnancy). The idea is thus paradoxical, like Medea’s later line in which she says that hate is formed in the same mold as love (imitare amorem!): it is another example of the contradictory language of rhetorical uncommon sense. But it is also her conception of the tragic crime around which the whole drama is structured, which will lead through magic, murder, and poison, to the play’s final image of a husband and wife, flanked by scaly serpents on one side and their son’s warm body on the other, with nothing more to say to each other. In
this sense, then, her “brainchild” is also a “representation of the imagination which induces much thought..., and which language...can never get quite on level terms with or render completely intelligible”: according to Kant, an “aesthetic idea” (175-76).

For Kant, the aesthetic idea combines features of the beautiful and sublime, and thereby in its very conception involves a rearrangement of the concepts of pleasure and displeasure involved in “pure” aesthetic judgments. Similarly, the Senecan tragic crime keeps a foot in both camps: it shares something of the beautiful insofar as it provokes a universal judgment in which everyone “ought” to agree, in the modality of “subjective necessity” that Kant calls “taste” and associates with the sensus communis aestheticus. And yet the nature of this universal judgment is not one of positive and disinterested pleasure, as with the beautiful, but rather one of displeasure (or “negative pleasure”), as with the sublime. As Atreus puts it, the tragic crime must be an outrageous “j’ne sais quoi” (267, nescioquid), a something-or-other that “no future age will endorse, but none fail to talk about” (192-93). It also shares something of the sublime insofar as it provokes ideas of the supersensible through the failure of the sensory faculties—in the case of Oedipus, a very literal failure. The tragic “invention” gestures at a noumenal reality, and this gesture entails, in its very attempt at representation, a breakdown in the sensory construction of the phenomenal realm. Like the sublime, the Senecan crime must be “immense” (ingens), so different from the accustomed (solitus) in degree that the criminal becomes singular (solus) in kind. Perhaps the purest expression of this aim is Atreus’ unformed, primordial desire for a crime that is “greater, larger than usual (solito

88 “quod nulla posteritas probet, / sed nulla taceat.” Jonson translates this line also in Sejanus: “which no posterity / Shall e’er approve, nor yet keep silent” (Wilkes 2:263).
amplius), beyond normal human limits” (267). His advisor asks him, “What new scheme is your rage devising?”, and Atreus replies: “Nothing conforming to the measure (modum) of ordinary resentment. I shall leave no crime undone and none is enough (nullum est satis)” (255-56, trans. modified).

“Nullum est satis”: the claim proves prophetic. Just after feeding his nephews to his brother, he declares “this is enough (sat est) now, even for me” (889). But as Braden points out, the sat est is no sooner uttered than it no longer seems to be “enough,” and Atreus’ perennial dissatisfaction returns full force: “But why should it be enough?” (890, sed cur satis est?). He immediately makes another try: Atreus says he would like to seize the gods “and drag them all to see this feast of vengeance. But it is enough (sat est) that the father sees it” (893-95). This continual impulse—each new moment of satisfaction a sand-castle quickly piled up before the relentless waves of furor—is similar to the self-blinding of Oedipus, who wants to see that he doesn’t see, or to see what is “gone,” when all that is really possible for him is to see that he didn’t see, a perception lacking the pure presence of reflexive self-awareness. The same is true for Atreus, who in exercising punishment wants his victim (Thyestes) to recognize the abominable cannibalism in its very enactment, rather than in retrospect. This is the grounds for Atreus’ final fit of dissatisfaction, second-guessing himself about his execution of the crime as soon as he reveals the cannibalism to his brother: “Even this is too little for me. Straight from the wound I should have poured the hot blood into your mouth, so you could drink their lifeblood while they lived” (1053-56). The crucial issue for Atreus here is not the physical actions that Thyestes has performed (Kant’s “phenomena”) but the intentional
status of those actions (Kant’s “noumena”): he bemoans the unconscious nature of his brother’s abomination. “He tore his sons in his sacrilegious mouth, but he did not know it, they did not know it” (1067-68). Precisely the same issue is alive in Oedipus, where the parricide and incest are not strictly speaking intentional acts. (Following the formulation of Atreus, we might say, “He murdered his father and impregnated his mother, but he did not know it, they did not know it.”)

These examples suggest a necessary failure in the attempt of the tragic genius to find a perfect objective correlative for the aesthetic idea or, to use Sidney’s term, “fore-conceit” of their initial inspiration. Like a perfectionist author tortured by the desire to make further revisions when the book has already gone to press, the typical Senecan hero is plagued by a critical sense of self-conscious evaluation, of aesthetic dismay. “For the last hundred lines or so Atreus seems to be searching for some crowning touch that never really turns up” (Braden 61). He or she longs unrequitedly for a satisfying conclusion or completion, to utter those words of finality so prominent in several Senecan tragedies: peractum est, “it is done.” But the Senecan tragic crime is like the Great American Novel that is never fully finished. This “unfinalized” sense of failure is sublime because, in Kantian terms, it expresses the inherent inability of finite physical (“phenomenal”) representations to satisfy the absolutely great (“noumenal”) aspects of the soul. Thus

Senecan heroes are not merely evildoers; they are also virtuoso stylists with the ambition

89 Kant’s “aesthetic idea” is analogous to what Sidney nominates the poet’s “fore-conceit.” But their theoretical formulations are very different: Sidney defends literature in ethical and epistemological terms (the true and good). Kant, on the other hand, defends aesthetic experience as intrinsically valuable (i.e. beyond truth and goodness, beyond pure reason and practical reason, and beyond Sidney’s “philosophy” and “history”).
of artists striving to produce an impeccable “masterpiece.” They create and recreate themselves by seizing and shaking the very foundations of their identity and the links that connect them to the world and people around them: they invent their crimes in order to reinvent themselves. And more than anything it is these crimes, conceived and executed through tragic furor, that provoke the aesthetic uncommon sense distinctive of Senecan drama.

In this chapter, I have argued that the best term for describing certain key features of Senecan tragedy is “uncommon sense,” which I have discussed in the same three contexts through which “common sense” was defined in the prior chapter (faculty psychology, social rhetoric, aesthetic judgment). In the realm of faculty psychology, Senecan uncommon sense takes the form of tragic furor (a “blindness of the mind”), a discord among the mental faculties that opposes the mens bona and inverts Aristotle’s “common sense.” In the realm of social rhetoric, Senecan uncommon sense takes the form of paradoxical speech acts, an antisocial use of language that contradicts the communal values and conventional truths of proverbial discourse as embodied in the Roman sensus communis. And in the realm of aesthetic judgment, Senecan uncommon sense takes the form of a universal displeasure or disagreement (marked by ugliness, alienation, perversion, violence, the “otherwordly,” etc.), which Kant might call a “judgment of the sublime” or an “experience of aesthetic ideas,” and which is defined by a feeling that is essentially other than the pleasing “taste” that governs the experience of the beautiful—and hence essentially contrary to the sensus communis aestheticus.
When I turn to the tragical satires of the English Renaissance, I will argue that “uncommon sense” is also the best term for describing the quality of influence that Senecan drama exercised on writers such as Marston and Shakespeare. Before we get there, however, we must consider another literary tradition, a genre that profoundly influenced Elizabethan drama during the revival of Seneca and that partly determined the form in which Senecan tragedy was revivified: the genre of satire. Elizabethan satire functioned as a kind of midwife, overseeing the conditions under which Senecan tragedy was reborn. Because if Elizabethan tragic drama was a Senecan whelp, satire was the bear that licked it into shape.
CHAPTER THREE
COMMON AND UNCOMMON SENSE IN ELIZABETHAN SATIRE

As I turn from ancient Rome to Renaissance England, my subject will shift from Seneca’s relatively “pure” tragedy to the generic hybridity of Elizabethan drama, in particular the tragical satire that emerged in the first decade of the seventeenth century. The reception of Seneca’s tragedy in the English Renaissance involved a broad spectrum of genres, and his impact on Elizabethan drama cannot be confined by any narrow notion of tragedy per se. My special interest is in the way that plays such as The Malcontent, Troilus and Cressida, and Timon of Athens embody a fusion of two literary traditions: Senecan tragedy and Elizabethan satire. Where my last chapter dealt with the former, this chapter deals with the latter.

On one hand, satire is a natural topic through which to approach generically mixed drama, since a defining feature—if not the very definition—of satire lies in the concept of generic mixture (the term itself derives from Latin satura, a mixed dish). In another sense, however, jumping from Senecan tragedy to Elizabethan satire is a rather

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90 “Le problème de l’apport de Sénèque dans le drame populaire élisabéthain ne peut...se restreindre à la tragédie” (Habicht, in Jacquot 178).

91 Satura “suggests a medley or a hodgepodge,” a “virtuoso offering..., something like a platter or bowl displaying mixed fruits or food dishes” (Quintero 6). “Varro saith, that in ancient times, men called by this name, a certain sorte of pie or pudding, into which men put diuers kindes of hearbes, and of meates” (A Satyre Menippized 202).
large, even dizzying, leap in critical perspective. I aim to avoid scholarly vertigo by easing the transition, focusing on some of the connections between Seneca and satire early in this chapter. I will argue on empirical and theoretical grounds that the uncommon sense of Senecan tragedy is shared by Elizabethan satire. One empirical connection is the satirical parody of Seneca in the Renaissance. The Elizabethan play *Lingua* satirizes Senecan tragedy by portraying it as a direct assault on psychological “common sense”: all the characters are mental faculties, and the mock-Senecan plot follows the rebellion of the faculty of speech, Lingua, against the “judge” of the senses, Communis Sensus. Another empirical connection is the influence on Renaissance satirists of the *Apocolocyntosis*, Seneca’s Menippean satire on the emperor Claudius. In addition to such empirical connections, a theoretical connection between Seneca and satire is evident in Elizabethan satire’s defining features: obscurity, harshness, and bitterness. The tension between “obscure” and “plain” writing styles in Elizabethan satire parallels the opposition in Senecan tragedy between the paradoxical language of the heroes and the proverbial language of the minor characters. Likewise, the sadistic “harshness” and “bitterness” of Elizabethan satire are analogous to the deliberate inventions of cruelty in Senecan tragedy. The “bitter” quality ascribed to Renaissance satire follows a literary tradition in which genres were associated with pleasing or displeasing flavors; while the “taste” that Kant defines through his *sensus communis aestheticus* gives universal pleasure, the “bitterness” associated with Elizabethan satire is inherently displeasing. This literary sadism implies the “negative pleasure” of Kant’s sublime, which links the bitter abuse in satire with the sadistic violence in Seneca.
As a dramatic document, the play *Lingua* (c.1602, pub. 1607) testifies to the way that the Renaissance explicitly thought about drama in terms of a neo-Aristotelian "common sense," and also illustrates how the term was involved in satirical parodies of Senecan tragedy. The play is a farcical academic comedy written for the same private, learned university audience as Marston’s satirical dramas, and it shows an awareness of this satirical milieu.\(^92\) Its main characters are all organs or faculties of the soul, and its plot follows the interaction of these abstract figures as they embody various conditions of intra-psychic discord and eventual harmony. Thus the play is a political-psychological allegory of the microcosmic "little state of man." The central dramatic conflict stems from the ambiguous place of the title character (Lingua) in relation to the officially recognized senses: the five "outer" senses (Tactus, Visus, Auditus, Olfactus, Gustus) and the three "inner" senses (Phantastes, Memoria, and Communis Sensus). The figure of Lingua represents the faculty of the tongue in its linguistic, rhetorical capacities (whereas the sense of taste, which we might also locate in the tongue, is embodied not in her but the character Gustus).

Lingua opens the play disputing with Auditus, the sense of hearing, about which of them is greater. Lingua demands a promotion and reclassification as one of the special senses along with the canonical five, all of whom are united against admitting her as their

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\(^{92}\) Phantastes says, “O tis Comedus, tis so, but he is become now a daies some thing humerous, and too too, Satyricall, up and downe, like his great grand-father Aristophanes” (4.3).
equal.\footnote{Lingua says, “You five among us subjects tyrannize, / Making the sacred name of common sense, / A cloake to cover your enormities: / Hee beares the rule, hee’s iudge but judgeth still, / As hee’s informed by your false evidence...” (1.1).} She wants to “increase the number” of senses, and, as Auditus puts it, “up-start / To our high seates, decking your babbling selfe / With usurpt titles”—i.e., the title of sense. Lingua requests a hearing before the neo-Aristotelian sensus communis, who because of his “sound wisdom” is the “vice-governor” of the senses.\footnote{“Why do you dayly subtile plots devise, / To stop me from the eares of common Sense, / Whom since our great Queene Psyche hath ordain’d, / For his sound wisdome, our Vice-governour.”} Communis Sensus, the judge and moderator of the special senses, is invested with the power and authority to hear both sides of the dispute and declare sentence over the case. As he himself says, he will hold court “by the power of Iudgement our gratious soveraigne Psuche hath given mee” (4.7, sic).

We can excavate from several layers of this play the sedimentary meanings that “common sense” accumulated over the centuries.\footnote{Tactus praises himself by borrowing a traditional metaphor from the Stoic version of the sensus communis: “I am the root of life, spreading my virtue / By sinews that extend from head to foote, / To every living part. / For as a sattle Spider closely sitting, / In center of her web that spreddeth round: / If the least Flie but touch the smallest thred, / Shew feeles it instantly: so doth my selfe, / Casting my slender nerve and sundry netts, / Over every particle of all the body, / By proper skill perceive the difference, / Of severall qualities, hot, cold, moist and drie; / Hard, soft, rough, smooth, clammy and slippery. / Sweete pleasure, and sharp paine profitable, / That makes us wounded seeke for remedy...” (4.16). This recalls the Stoic theory of the hegemonikon, which offered a full articulation of the Aristotelian common sense as the soul’s central principle of sensation and cognition. “Aristotle’s central principle of sensation [the common sense] became fused with the Stoic idea of the hegemonikon.... [T]he comparison of the hegemonikon to the sun reinforces another materialist metaphor, the often repeated comparison attributed to Democritus of the soul to a spider” (Summers 92). See Voelke on the latter: “Selon Chrysippe, l’hegemonikon siege dans le coeur comme une araignee au centre de sa toile}
Aristotelian common sense appears as one of the main characters in this academic, scholastic version of the *psychomachia*. However, the figure Communis Sensus plays the role not only of a psychological organ or faculty of perception, but a social/rhetorical and even *aesthetic* principle of judgment. He reinforces traditional beliefs and conventional, proverbial wisdom. Just as Phantastes, for instance, embodies not only the imaginative faculty of the mind but also the wild, lawless, “fantastic” social behavior, demeanor, and appearance of the fop or dandy—dressing in all colors and fashions, entering with a “phantastical hat with a plume of fethers of severall colours... sundry coloured Ribands” (2.2), etc.—so Communis Sensus embodies not only sensory organization but also the judicious perspective of traditional wisdom, conventional understanding, and the tactfulness of social and rhetorical order and moderation.96

Structurally, Communis Sensus mediates between the various “special” senses, but he does this not just in the traditional terms of Aristotelian psychology. The central dramatic conflict over which he presides, mediates, and judges, after all, is not simply psychological but social and rhetorical: a matter of conventions regarding rank and status with respect to linguistic behavior and rhetorical eloquence. Lingua wants to be promoted et ‘tient’ l’origine des souffles aboutissant aux organes sensoriels” (42). For another Stoic analogy to Lingua’s model of the psyche, see Voelke: “Pour les stoïciens l’âme est une réalité matérielle, un ‘corps,’ comprenant huit ‘parties’: une partie maîtresse ou hégémonikon, localisée le plus souvent dans le coeur et jouant le rôle principe directeur, et sept parties subordonnées ayant leurs organes respectifs (les cinq sens, la voix, la partie génératrice)” (20). Lingua is the equivalent of “la voix.” “According to this version, there are seven parts of the soul, the five senses plus a seminal principle (in the testicles) and voice (in the tongue)” (Summers 92).

96 The social-rhetorical authority of common sense as a judicious moderator is suggested in the following: “All the senses fell out about a Crowne..., but Viceregent Common sense hearing of it tooke upon him, to umpire the contention...” (3.1).
to the rank of the other designated “special” senses, to upset the conventional
categorization of the mental faculties and organs. And we know along with the original
audience, of course, that she will fail, that Communis Sensus will turn down her petition.
But what are the grounds of our certainty? How and why do we know this? Not because
of the internal logic of Aristotelian psychology, but because of the authority of social-
rhetorical common sense. The number and identity of the senses is something that
“everyone knows”; as Deleuze would say, the belief that there are only five senses is
doxa (“common opinion”), and the notion that there are, or should be, six of them instead
is a paradox. Lingua is asked, “what Sense hast thou to be a Sense?” (1.1). Her
position, her “political platform,” does not present an internal, logical contradiction; as a
statement it is paradoxical not because it denies the same thing that it asserts (“x and not
x”), but rather because it denies what social-rhetorical convention asserts—it claims that
traditional belief is mistaken and proverbial wisdom is wrong. The “Linguistic”
proposition that there are six senses is an example of rhetorical uncommon sense because
it is a paradox, and an example of social uncommon sense because it contradicts
culturally received opinion.

97 “Rhetorical plainness is the orthodoxy of received wisdom and ordinary modes of
speech. It is what everyone knows” (Graham 18).

98 A paradox is a statement “contrary to received opinion,” according to the Merriam
Webster Dictionary, and “opposed to common sense.” Deleuze’s explication of
“paradox” is wonderfully fitting for the plot of Lingua: “There are several kinds of
paradox, all of which are opposed to the complementary forms of orthodoxy—namely,
good sense and common sense…. [P]aradox breaks up the common exercise of the
faculties and places each before its own limit…. [P]aradox communicates to the broken
faculties that relation which is far from good sense” (227). Lingua herself seems to be
exactly what Deleuze would call a “para-sense.”
The comedic conclusion of the play finds mental order restored, the faculties at peace and functioning in their proper places, and Communis Sensus pronouncing final judgment on Lingua to punish her transgressive overreaching. And here we find that the judicious realm of Common Sense extends beyond psychological good sense and proverbial common sense to gesture toward the “good taste” of aesthetic decorum. The sentence that Communis Sensus delivers from his bench puts language (lingua) under the guard of tastefulness (gustus): “Therefore Lingua graunting you your life, I commit you to close prison, in Gustus his house, and charge you Gustus, to keepe her under the custody of two strong doors…” (5.19). This speech offers an allegorical portrayal of how Common Sense tries to confine language into a literal “prison” of decorus good taste. Here, again, we should recall the long tradition of “taste” as a metaphor for aesthetic judgment, and its ultimate emergence as the central term for aesthetic common sense in the philosophies of Hume and Kant.\textsuperscript{99} Thus, Common Sense plays the role of moderator and judge, not just Burton’s “moderator” of the five special senses, but also a normative evaluator of social, linguistic, and artistic practices, like Hume’s “true judge of taste.”

Finally, this play suggests how Elizabethans approached Senecan tragedy satirically, in terms of faculty psychology in general and the common sense in particular. Lingua takes up arms against Communis Sensus, who is allied with popular comedy and

\textsuperscript{99} “Taste may be designated as a sensus communis aestheticus” (\textit{Critique of Judgement} 153). Elsewhere Kant remarks that “the modern languages particularly have chosen to name the aesthetic faculty of judgment with an expression (gustus, sapor) which merely refers to a certain sense-organ (the inside of the mouth), and that the discrimination as well as the choice of palatable things is determined by it” (\textit{Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View} 144).
who engineers a comedic concord of the discordant senses. Thus, Lingua sees herself in a losing battle with Common Sense: fighting for the genre of discord, she tries unsuccessfully to turn the play into a tragedy—a neo-Senecan tragedy—of titanic wills in irreversible conflict. This alignment illuminates the status of Senecan tragedy in the English Renaissance because the Senecan element is presented in the form of the character who is most resolutely opposed to common sense in its psychological, rhetorical, and aesthetic forms. The specifically Senecan parody emerges after the court hearing where Communis Sensus rules against Lingua, who then plunges into a Machiavelian, neo-Senecan fury of vengeful resentment, plotting in a long soliloquy to use infernal magic to strike madness into the other senses, a moment of sublime Senecan evil: “will not Heavens helpe me? / Then shall Hell do it, my enchanting tongue / Can mount the skies, and in a moment fall, / From the Pole Arctick to darke Acheron. / I’ll make them know mine anger is not spent…” (4.8). This proud assertion of persistent rage picks up the Senecan motif that Gordon Braden describes in Renaissance Tragedy and the Senecan Tradition: Anger’s Privilege. It could be a line delivered by Medea. And indeed Lingua calls up a witch to produce the infernal poison: “the olde hag after manie an incircled circumstance, and often naminge of the direfull Hecate, and Demogorgon, gives mee this bottle of wine mingled with such hellish drugges and forcible words, that whosoever drinkes of it shall bee presentlie possest with an inraged and mad kinde of

100 See Lingua’s ironic speech: “Why this is good by common Senses meanes, / Lingua thou hast framed a perfect comedy. / They are all good friends, whom thou mad’st enemies, / And I am half a Sense” (4.8).
anger” (5.1). The last phrase is an explicit, redundantly emphatic circumlocution for Senecan *furor* like that which strikes Hercules.

In fact the highlight of this episode is the madness of Tactus, who performs an outrageous parody of Seneca’s mad hero in *Hercules Furens*. “Sure he doth but trie how to act Hercules” (5.15).\(^{101}\) This parody is tied to its target by direct verbal allusions to Seneca’s tragedy, the most obvious of which is a reference to the title: “They want common Sense amon’st them: there’s such a hurly burly Auditus is starke deafe,…Visus hath drunke himselfe starke blind,…Tactus is raging mad, and cannot bee otherwise perswaded, but hee is *Hercules furens*…” (5.5). Here we find the hurly-burly of Shakespearean tragedy fused with the blind rage of Senecan tragedy.\(^{102}\) As we saw in the last chapter, classical *furor* was defined as a “blindness of the mind”; here the parody of this Senecan formula for tragedy appears not only as a *caecitas mentis* (“stark blind”) but as an explicit breakdown of the *sensus communis* (“they want common sense”). As Somnus says, “Here’s such a stirre I never knewe the Senses in such disorder” (5.13).

Even as the plot of Lingua eventually revolves into comedy, the Senecan catastrophe is

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\(^{101}\) Tactus “thinks himself Hercules”; he refers to “the great and puissant Club,” and asks, “Did not these feete and hands oretake and slay, / The ninble Stagge, and fierce impetuous bull?!”

\(^{102}\) Tactus also alludes to Seneca’s *Hercules Oetaeus*: “Thankes Deianeira for thy kind remembrance, / Tis a faire shirt Ile weare it for thy sake”; “My braines enflamed, my temples ake extremely, oh, oh, / Oh what a wild-fire creepes amongst my bowells: / Aetna’s within my breast, my marrowe fries, / And runnes about my bones, oh my sides...” (5.15). Compare Hercules’ death in Seneca from the poisoned shirt supplied by Deianira: “my liver burns, its gall dried up, and the smouldering heat has driven off all my blood. The fiendish thing first consumed my skin, and from there made its way into my body; the plague wasted my flanks, this evil ate my limbs and drank the marrow; it resides in my hollow bones...” (*Hercules Oetaeus* 1224-1227).
averted by literally reversing the plot of *Hercules Furens*. In Seneca’s play, the blindly raging Hercules bashes his family members to death and then falls into the stupor of sleep. In *Lingua* this order of events is inverted, and sleep (Somnus) intercedes to prevent the killing, as indicated in the stage directions: “Appetitus heaveth up his club to braine Crapula, but Somnus in the meantime, catcheth him behind and binds him” (5.16).103 Nevertheless, the words of Lingua as she comes out of her sleep are reminiscent of the corresponding passage when Hercules awakes in Seneca’s play: “Heigh ho, out alas, aye mee, where am I? how came I here? Where am I?” (5.19); “Quis hic locus, quae regio, quae mundi plaga? / ubi sum?” (*Hercules Furens* 1138-1139).

Regardless of the precise intertextual dynamics of this parody of Hercules, the mock-Senecan element in *Lingua* clearly presents the title character as a neo-Senecan villain, and also clearly presents her in violent opposition to several forms of common sense. Lingua takes the side of uncommon sense: the disorder of the senses and discord of the mental faculties, the contradiction of proverbial wisdom, the opposition to social convention and violation of aesthetic taste. Thus *Lingua* reflects how Elizabethans saw the conflicts and catastrophes of Senecan tragedy as an opposition to, disorder in, and breakdown of the *sensus communis*.

103 The praise of Somnus is probably another parody of *Hercules Furens*: “Soft sonne of night, right heyre to Quietnesse, / Labours repose, lifes best restorative” sounds like a translation of “you, o Sleep, subduer of troubles, rest for the spirit, sweeter part of human life” (*HF* 1066-1068, *tuque, o domitor Somne malorum, / requies animi, / pars humanae melior vitae*).
The *Apocolocyntosis*: Neo-Senecan Satire

The neo-Senecan parody of *Hercules Furens* in *Lingua* is a good Renaissance example of something that John Fitch identifies in Seneca’s own satirical work, the *Apocolocyntosis*: “a burlesque portrait of Hercules appropriate to satire” (43). Indeed, Renaissance neo-Senecan satire appears not only in parodies of Seneca’s tragedy and philosophy, but also in imitations of his own satire on Claudius. If we follow some of the paths taken by the *Apocolocyntosis* in its literary afterlife we will find that its satirical style, whose generic distance from tragedy is maintained in Seneca’s classical corpus, intersects with tragedy in the mixed drama of the English Renaissance.104

Of course, the main satiric target of the *Apocolocyntosis* is not the mythical hero Hercules but the historical emperor Claudius: the title means “gourdification” or “pumpkinnification,” and mocks the recently-dead emperor’s deification. There is pretty good evidence that a renewed interest in Seneca’s *ad hominem* attack on Claudius led to the sixteenth-century revival of Menippean satire. Erasmus observes that “Seneca was... of a very pleasant wit; this is clear from that amusing book which he wrote against Claudius Caesar, and which has recently come to light in Germany” (Phillips 213). Erasmus’ own *Julius Exclusus* (1513-14, published 1517) may have been inspired by

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104 “Why—to come to the essential question—can Seneca give so unfavorable a portrait of Hercules in [*Hercules Furens*], while in prose he usually refers to him with admiration? Part of the answer must lie in the independence of literary genres in antiquity. As a Stoic philosopher Seneca inclines toward the orthodox, favorable view of Hercules; as a tragedian he has license to explore the tragic aspects of his heroism. The importance of generic considerations is borne out by *Apocol.* (5-7, 9), which contains a burlesque portrait of Hercules appropriate to satire, but quite out of keeping with that of the *philosophica*” (Fitch 1987, 43).
Seneca’s. And the preface of his much more famous satire, The Praise of Folly, also invokes the Apocolocyntosis as a precedent: “Will the people who are offended by the frivolity of the argument and the absurdity of the jokes kindly reflect that I’m not setting the style here? The same thing has been done before, again and again, by famous authors of the past.... Seneca ridiculed Claudius (Seneca Claudii luserit) in his pumpkinnification...” (Adams 4). If the Senecan heritage of Erasmian satire is announced by such allusions, subsequent Menippean satires proceed by direct imitation. As De Smet observes, “the interest in the Apocoloquyntosis receives a new and long-lasting impetus, with the next great Seneca scholar, Justius Lipsius” (quoted in Martin, Satyré Menippée, introduction, lxxxi). Lipsius’ 1581 Somnium, the first piece to be explicitly labeled as a “Menippean” satire, is an obvious imitation of Seneca—“It begins in the very beat and measure of the Apocolocyntosis” (Ball 80)—and was followed in 1612 by another imitation (or second-order imitation of Lipsius’ imitation) by Cunaeus, Sardi Venales. Somnium was repeatedly printed alongside Sardi Venales, and also, in 1617, published with both Erasmus’ Praise of Folly and Seneca’s Apocolocyntosis (Ball 82, Matheeuseen

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105 See Colish. In Julius Exclusus, Erasmus appeals to common sense: “But common sense is outraged if we must... speak well of one about whom we think ill” (Adams 154).

106 “I have been able to find no generic use of the term ‘Menippean satire’ prior to 1581, the date of publication of Lipsius’ Somnium, whose title in fuller form reads Lipsi Satyra Menippea. Somnium. Lusus in nostril aevi criticos. Lipsius’ heavenly tribunal is modeled directly on Seneca’s Apocolocyntosis” (Relihan 228). “Lipsius’ Somnium means the reintroduction, the Neo-Latin revival, of the classical Latin Menippean Satire as we know it from the one and only specimen to survive more or less intact, Seneca’s Apocolocyntosis” (Heesakers 500-509). “Cominig to the time of the Renaissance, we find two confessed attempts at a revival of the Menippean satire. They are Justi Lipsi Satyra Menippea, Somnium…, and Petri Cunaei Sardi Venales, Satyra Menippea…. [B]oth of them begin in obvious imitation of Seneca’s Ludus, practically their only Latin model, in fact” (Ball 79).
19). The Senecan genealogy of these Menippean satires is evidenced not only by the
genetic identity that these collections assert as a principle of selection, but also by the
verbal echoes that testify to such identity. Thus Lipsius’ *Somniium* begins, “Quid…
actum… sit, volo memoriae prodere” (I want to put on record what took place), which is
nearly a verbatim reproduction of the opening words of the *Apocolocyntosis*: “Quid
actum sit…, volo memoriae tradere” (I want to commit to record what took place).

Besides this claim to simply record “what happened,” another significant echo
concerns the self-fashioning of both narrators, which appears in claims to the effect that
each will do “whatever he wants,” regardless of audience expectations. He will speak or
not speak to suit his own whim, according to his private humor and not the taste of
readers. This attitude is perhaps best characterized as a kind of scorn in which the
narrator holds the audience. The word *frustra*—“in vain”—conveys the sense that the
audience can try to influence the satirist but that such attempts are bound to have no
effect. Thus *Somniium*’s first paragraph declares, “Frustra me respicis cum sublato
digito…. Dicam quae vidi, quae audivi…. Quis vetat?” (Matheuseen 34) (In vain you
glare at me with your finger raised…. I’ll say what I saw, what I heard…. Who can forbid
me?). Such a willful declaration of linguistic freedom is an interesting variation on the
 correspoinding passage in Seneca, where the narrator asserts the same freedom of speech,
but from both angles: “si quis quaesiverit unde sciam…si noluerò, non respondebo. quis
coacturus est? ego scio me liberum factum…. si libuerit respondere, dicam quod mihi in
buccam venerit” (Ball 115) (If someone asks me how I know these things…if I don’t
want to, I won’t answer. Who can compel me? I know I’ve been made a free man.... If it pleases me to answer, I’ll say whatever comes into my mouth).

This Menippean style is not confined to continental Latin imitations of Seneca such as those by Lipsius and Cunaeus, but also makes its way to England. For instance, John Donne’s 1611 prose theological satire, *Conclave Ignati or Ignatius his Conclave*, follows the same pattern. Healy observes that in the original Latin *Conclave Ignati* Donne uses Lipsian style and that his opening paragraph is modeled on that of *Somnium*:

“The careful but angular rhythms of this passage recall the opening of Lipsius’ own *Satyra Menippaeae*” (xvi). One such textual echo appears in the opening words of Donne’s piece: “Autorem quaeris? Frustra”; “Doest thou seeke after the Author? It is in vaine” (Healy 2-3). The imperious scoff—“Frustra”—establishes the same initial authorial tone of scorn for the audience that we saw in the opening lines of *Somnium*: “Frustra me respicis...” (You glare at me in vain...). In both the word “frustra” manifests the contempt with which the satirist dismisses the attempts of interlocutors to exercise control or influence over him. This willful assertion of linguistic autonomy also recalls Seneca: if Donne’s “Frustra” echoes *Somnium*, his “quaeris” echoes the *Apocolocyntosis*, where Seneca uses the same verb in dismissing the inquiries of the audience (*si quis quaesiverit unde sciam*...). Even if not an actual allusion to Seneca on Donne’s part, the

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107 Korkowski argues convincingly that Donne’s piece belongs to the Menippean genre, along with the *Apocolocyntosis*, *Somnium*, and the anonymous 1594 French *Satyré Menippée*, published in 1595 in English translation as *A Satyre Menippized*. 
The Renaissance influence of Seneca’s *Apocolocyntosis* is not limited to obscure Continental scholastic and controversialist pieces such as Donne’s *Ignatius*, but also extends into the mainstream of English literature. The most monumental Menippean satire or “anatomy” (Frye 311) of the English Renaissance, Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*, begins with the same gesture, acknowledging the query (Donne’s *quaeris*) of the reader about the identity of the author (Donne’s *autorem*). Democritus Junior says, “Gentle Reader, I presume thou wilt be very inquisitive to know what antic or personate actor this is, that so insolently intrudes upon this common theatre to the world’s view, arrogating another man’s name; whence he is, why he does it, and what he hath to say” (1.15). These words probably do not recall Donne’s work in particular; nevertheless they...

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108See Healy: “Like Donne’s work, the *Satyre Menippée* was born out of a precise controversy.... Like *Ignatius His Conclave*, the *Satyre Menippée* begins with a complicated ritual disclaimer which describes how the anonymous report of the sessions arrived, via Italy, at the printer’s” (158). In the latter, this “ritual disclaimer” is developed in “Discourse de l’Imprimeur”: “Messieurs, le proffit que j’ai fait à l’impression, et au debit de ce discours, m’a rendu plus desireux de scavoir qui en estoit l’autheur” (Martin 157); “My masters and good friends, the profit that I have made by the imprinting of this treatie, and that which I owe to this discourse, have made mee very desirous to knowe who was the author hereof” (*SM* 197). The anonymity of the author-figure in the Senecan tradition of Menippean satire is here maintained with absurd and detailed coyness. “Je vous diray, dit-il, son nom, et vous enseignera son logis, à la charge de ne les reveler à personne: Car il est home qui n’ayme pas ester tant visité…. Son nom est le Seigneur Agnoste...” (158); “I will sayd he, tell you his name, and will also shewe you his lodging, upon condition, that you will not disclose it to any man, for he is a person that doth not love to be so much visited…. His name is the Lord Agnosse...” (198-199). The English edition’s marginal gloss says “That is, Vnknowne” (199).
certainly reproduce the conventional opening gambit of this strand of satire. The second sentence makes the Menippean influence unmistakable: “Although, as he said, *Primum si noluero, non respondebo, quis coacturus est?* I am a free man born, and may choose whether I will tell; who can compel me?” This exuberant expression of the willfully scornful free speech of Menippean satire offers the first taste of Latin in Burton’s feast of classical quotations. Seneca, of course, is the anonymous “he” who says “primum si noluero”—these words are from the opening of the *Apocolocyntosis*, as Burton himself notes: “Seneca, in ludo in mortem Claudii Caesaris” (1.441). He is quoting the same passage that Erasmus, in the *Adagia*, mines as his *locus classicus* for the proverbial *locus communis* that kings and fools are “born,” not made (‘AUT FATUUM AUT REGEM NASCI OPORTERE’). Discussing “that amusing book” (the *Apocolocyntosis*), Erasmus observes that Seneca “mentions an adage, *One Must be born a king or a fool*. It is best to give his very words: ‘As for me,’ he says, ‘I know I have gained my freedom from the fact that the end has come for that man who proved the truth of the proverb, *One must be born a king or a fool*’” (Phillips 213). Erasmus explicates

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109 Burton certainly knew of Donne’s *Ignatius*, for he refers to “Ignatius’ parlour” (2.42), and supplies the citation in his own note, “Conclave Ignatii” (2.270).

110 As Gass observes, “the honor of the first quote in Burton’s address to the reader goes to Seneca” (Burton viii).

111 Erasmus continues, “If...a popular saying is never meaningless, perhaps it would not be beside the point to inquire what can have given rise to this proverb, uniting as it does two such dissimilar things—a king and a fool—with the obvious intention of drawing a parallel between them.... [F]amous kings of old time were for the most part well endowed with stark stupidity” (Phillips 214). He says “everything is permitted to fools, because of the weakness of their minds. And everything in the way of praise is awarded to kings, because of their power” (224).
this proverb as a pill encapsulating the whole bundle of ironic relations obtaining
between the figures of the king and fool, to which he entirely devotes himself in the
_**Praise of Folly.**_ Although Burton does not quote Seneca’s _proverbium_ at the beginning of
“Democritus to the Reader,” later he observes that “princes and great men” are often
mentally disturbed, and “are void of reason too oft” (1.109-110). For the latter idea,
Burton’s note cites “Vetus proverbium, aut regem aut fatuum nasci oportere” (1.462); he
is probably thinking both of Erasmus’ _Adagia_ and Seneca’s _Apocolocyntosis_ as sources
of this “old proverb.”

Burton’s _Anatomy_, however, is not the only major work of the English
Renaissance to draw on this proverbial commonplace. In fact, the _vetus proverbium_ about
kings and fools leads us out of the mainstream current of Menippean satire and carries us
straight to the heart of a work that exemplifies the satirical inflection of English tragedy.
In Shakespeare’s _King Lear_, the King asks, “Dost thou call me fool?” and the Fool
replies, “All thy other titles thou hast given away; that thou wast born with” (_History_
4.143-145). The proverbial allusion is significant because it suggests how this play
combines the classical genres (tragedy and satire) that are kept separate in Seneca’s work.
Indeed, it is the abandonment in the Renaissance of what Fitch calls “the independence of
literary genres in antiquity” (1987, 43) and the rise of _interdependent_, “mixed” genres
that paves the way for a work like _King Lear_, in which the elevated mode of tragedy and
the low mode of satire become intertwined in the form of satirical tragedy. If we
recognize two “independent” generic strands in the career of Seneca—on one hand the
_Tenne Tragedies_ (pub. 1581), which embodied classical tragedy for Elizabethan writers,
and on the other hand the *Apocolocyntosis*, the *ludus* which modeled for humanists like Erasmus and Burton the “ludicrous” style of ancient Menippean satire—we see that both Senecan strands find their way into *King Lear*. The tragic strand can be seen in the broad outlines of the plot, which is based, like the neo-Senecan *Gorboduc* before it, on the division of a kingdom among royal siblings and the all-consuming tragic rivalry that results, the classical archetype of which is Seneca’s *Thyestes*. The influence of *Thyestes* is evident not only in the deep form of the play’s dramatic “structure,” but also in the surface form of its linguistic “texture.” For instance, Lear’s bombastic ranting—“I will do such things, / What they are, yet I know not”—appears to derive from the “nescio quid” in *Thyestes*, where Atreus senses a similarly huge yet vague form of revenge coalescing in his mind: “My spirit swells with something great, larger than usual, beyond normal human limits.... What it is, I know not” (267-269, *Nescioquid animus maius et solito amplius / supraque fines moris humani tumet / ... haud quid sit scio*). Where *King Lear* follows Senecan tragedy here, it follows in the footsteps of Senecan satire elsewhere, especially the stichomythic banter between Lear and the Fool. Shakespeare draws on the ironic king-fool pairing celebrated by Erasmus and traceable back to the opening lines of Seneca’s *Apocolocyntosis*, where Claudius was “the one who

112 On this distinction, see Douglas Bruster (in Cohen 37).

113 As Braden says, “Lear virtually quotes Atreus” (216). Compare also Atreus’ threat (*Thyestes* 185-189) and Gloucester’s (*History of King Lear* 6.57-63): “non siluae tegant / hostem nec altis montium structae iugis / arces; reliictis bellicum totus canat / populus Mycenis, quisquis inuisum caput / tegit ac tuetur, clade funesta occidat”; “Not in this land shall he remain uncaught, / And found, dispatch. The noble Duke my master / My worthy arch and patron, comes tonight. / By his authority I will proclaim it / That he which finds him shall deserve our thanks, / Bringing the murderous caitiff to the stake; / He that conceals him, death.”
made the proverb true, that one must be born a king or a fool” (*ille, qui verum proverbium fecerat, aut regem aut fatuum nasci oportere*) (Ball 115). Just as Lear seems to speak an English adaptation of Seneca’s tragic *nescioquid*, so his Fool gives new voice to Seneca’s satiric proverbium.114 As I have already suggested, this is most clearly expressed in the confrontational scene where Lear, the “born” king, having given away his kingdom to his children, is told by his jester that he has become a “born” fool. (“Dost thou call me fool?” “All thy other titles thou hast given away; that thou wast born with.”) Lear alternates between the birth status of king (*aut regem*) and the birth status of fool (*aut fatuum*). Besides foreshadowing Lear’s tragic speech about being born onto a “great stage of fools,” this line echoes the proverb from Seneca’s satire, where it is explicitly categorized as such (*verum proverbium*).

Obscurity: Rhetorical Uncommon Sense in Satire

The Fool’s proverbial language reflects not only the influx of satire in *King Lear* but also a more general alliance between common sense and satire, which often affirms rhetorical common sense through proverbial language.115 Neo-classical literary theory

114 Eden notes that Seneca’s proverb is “a Latin counterpart or derivation of the Greek proverb...‘for a fool and a king the law is unwritten’, and one must be born one or the other to behave arbitrarily with impunity. Claudius was a born fool in the opinion of many, including his mother.... The joke, that he fulfilled both of the conditions of which one alone would have been sufficient..., does not need to be made explicit” (64). Obviously, the same applies to Lear.

115 In *Lingua*, Communis Sensus prefers a smooth “middle” style to Lingua’s rhetorical extremes: “Lingua go on but in a more formall manner..., an ingenious Oration must neyther swell above the Bankes with insolent words, nor crepe too shallow in the ford,
prescribed a vulgar, proverbial, low style of speech for satire and comedy that contrasted with the noble, dignified, high style of epic and tragedy. Scaliger comments on the “Verba vulgaria aut sordida” in Roman satire (149), and Ball observes, “One of the characteristic features of the Menippean satire was the familiar use of popular proverbs” (67). Hence the common sayings strewn through Apocolocyntosis—one of which, as we just saw, lands on the dexterous tongue of the Fool. More generally, a key rhetorical strategy of the Fool’s satirical criticism is to use vulgar, “common” language, and his songs and speeches are full of proverbial language. (For instance, his advice-speech to “lend less than thou owest,” etc., is, like Polonius’ lecture “neither a borrower nor lender be” from Hamlet, essentially an epigrammatic catalogue of proverbs espousing conventional wisdom.) Like much satirical discourse, then, the Fool’s speech promotes the rhetorical common sense of proverbial, “plain” language.

The rhetorical alliance between satire and common sense is not so simple, however; satirists often reject the transparently “plain” style of proverbial speech in the

116 Another example from the Apocolocyntosis is “gallum in suo sterquilino plurimum posse” (7.3), “the cock can be master on his own dunghill.” This proverb made it into English, including twice in Heywood’s proverb collections: “But he was at home there, he might speak his will: / Every cock is proud on his own dunghill” (31), and “Of the Proud Cock” (from Epigrams Upon Proverbs): “Every cock is proud on his own dunghill: / The hen is proud enough there, mark who will” (217). It is also appears in the Defence of Poesie, when Sidney refers to how “Alexander and Darius... strave who should be cock of this world’s dunghill” (97).

117 Graham remarks on “the Fool’s fondness for the popular poetic forms of the native plain style—proverbs, riddles, satire...” (213).
same breath as they use it. Thus there exists a tension between what Cicero called “the language of everyday life ...approved by common sense (communis sensus)” (*De Oratore* 1.3.12) and the opaque “obscurity” that is associated with satire in the Renaissance and that is seen, for instance, in the Fool’s use of riddling speech.\(^{118}\) Rather than a consistently straightforward espousal of rhetorical common sense, the Fool’s speech is an epigrammatic mixture of proverbial transparency and riddling obscurity.\(^{119}\) Of course, it is no surprise that Lear’s Fool is not simply identified with common sense—after all, as William Empson observes, a “fool” is defined as a person “lacking ‘common sense’” (111). Thus the Fool’s riddles manifest a rhetorical uncommon sense counterbalancing the proverbs that manifest rhetorical common sense. Indeed, the proverbial idea about “fool” and “king” being born titles, which clearly draws on the Senecan-Erasmian commonplace that “kings and fools are born, not made,” is itself set up with an epigrammatic riddle: “The sweet and bitter fool / Will presently appear; / The one in motley here, / The other found out there” (*History* 4.139-142).

This exchange displays a more general irony in the Elizabethan conception of satire. That is, just as we see in Lear’s Fool the impulse towards “common” rhetorical sense (proverbial language) mixed with the impulse toward “uncommon” rhetorical sense (riddling language), so in satire in general the usage of common, everyday language bears

\(^{118}\) Campbell says that the Fool uses “apparent nonsense” as a “cover from which to shoot at his victims arrows that are barbed with common sense” (105-106).

\(^{119}\) We might compare Heywood’s mixing of proverbs and epigrams, which perform a similar riddling with rhetorical common sense: “Some words show one sense, another to disclose; / Some words, themselves sundry senses signify; / Some words, somewhat from common sense, I dispose / To seem one sense in text, another in glose” (107).
a strange kinship with the employment of idiosyncratic, opaque language. The result is something of a paradox: “The belief that low style was appropriate for satire acquired a rather curious corollary. The Elizabethans believed that a genuine satire was obscure” (Kernan 60). Elizabethan satirists had to wrestle with this paradox. Thus Joseph Hall, who infamously proclaimed himself the first English satirist, acknowledges in the Prologue to Book 3 of *Virgidemiarum* his imperfect observation of the generic prescription of obscurity: “Some say my Satyres over-loosely flow, / Nor hide their gall inough from open show: / Not ridle-like obscuring their intent: / But pack-staffe plaine vtttring what thing they ment: / Contrarie to the Roman ancients, / Whose wordes were short, & darkesome was their sence” (33). Here Hall registers his awareness of the tension between two values in rhetorical style and linguistic “sense”: common sense (“plaine vtttring”) and uncommon sense (“obscuring...intent”). As with Lear’s Fool, these two contraries are associated, respectively, with proverbial language (“pack-staffe plain,” which “still survives in the form ‘plain as a pikestaff’” [Davenport 1949, 183]) and riddling language (“ridle-like”). Hall thus contrasts two contrary ideals of satirical language, creating a paradoxical quandary out of which he can only partially squirm; he resists the aim of obscurity by offering a half-hearted apology that asserts the corrective value of his satire through the rhetorical common sense of plain-speaking: “but let me be plaine, with hope of profit, rather than purposely obscure onely for a bare names sake” (99).

120 This neoclassical debate about satire’s obscurity was based especially on Persius, who, according to Scaliger, did not want his readers to understand what they were reading (323, *intelligi noluit quae legerentur*). “Principio id est edicendum, ne quod fecit Persius, abstrusam ostentes eruditionem” (Scaliger 149).
In his first satirical collection, *Certaine Satyres*, John Marston addresses the same issue and, while trying to distinguish himself from Hall, nevertheless takes the same stance as his rival satirist. Marston says that he will “leaue the white roabe, and the biting rimes / Vnto our moderne Satyres sharpest lines; / Whose hungry fangs snarle at some secrete sinne. / And in such pitchy clouds enwrapped beene / His Sphinxian riddles, that Old Oedipus / Would be amaz’d... / That such Cymerian darknes should inuolue / A quaint conceit, that he could not resolue‖ (72). Davenport agrees with Grosart, who identifies Hall as the target being attacked when Marston criticizes the obscurity of “biting rimes” (the second half of Hall’s book was entitled “biting satires”) (1961, 229). In Marston’s wild imagination, he even identifies himself with Oedipus, and the blinded tragic hero becomes a figure for his own experience in reading the obscure style of Hall’s satire. “O darknes palpable! Egipts black night! / My wit is stricken blind, hath lost his sight. / My shins are broke, with groping for some sence / To know to what his words haue reference‖ (72). Ironically, although Marston is presumably contrasting himself with Hall, he is actually making the same point, and making it in terms of the same loaded words: he sets his plain-dealing rhetorical common sense against the obscure “sence” of riddles—“these darke Enigmaes, and strange riddling sence” (73). Of course, given his own famous verbal obscurity, Marston’s exasperated dismay here sounds rather less than convincing.¹²¹

¹²¹ Graham discusses the complex tradition of anger and “plainspeaking” very insightfully: “What appears plain from one perspective will seem opaque from all others.... A fundamental ambiguity resides in its plainness” (126).
Harshness and Bitterness: Aesthetic Uncommon Sense in Satire

In the last section I took the Fool’s quipping about fools and kings to illustrate the tension between proverbial and riddling language in satire, a tension that can be defined as an opposition between common and uncommon rhetorical sense and that can be observed in the debates regarding linguistic “obscurity” among Elizabethan satirists. In this section I take the same *Lear* passage as my jumping-off point for a discussion of common and uncommon *aesthetic* sense in satire. In particular, the line about “the sweet and bitter fool” expresses an opposition between pleasing and unpleasing flavors, an opposition in “taste”: the term which, as we recall, Kant identifies with “aesthetic common sense.” Just as the Fool’s mixing of proverb and riddle reflects satire’s negotiation of common and uncommon sense in the realm of rhetoric, so his mixing of sweet and bitter reflects a negotiation of common and uncommon sense in the realm of aesthetics. Where the former tension appears in Renaissance debates over “obscurity,” the latter appears in debates over “harshness” and “bitterness”; taken together these terms name the distinguishing forms of uncommon sense in Elizabethan satire.

As Stanley Cavell has pointed out, the riddling speech of the Fool is not only frustratingly obscure to Lear but positively *harsh*, aiming to inflict pain through words. “Part of the exquisite pain of this Fool’s comedy is that in riddling Lear with the truth of his condition he increases the very cause of that condition” (59). Lear expresses his tortured frustration at such cat-and-mouse verbal abuse most directly by employing a gustatory metaphor in which, unlike the Fool’s riddling language about “the sweet and bitter fool,” he wastes no words on ambiguity. “A bitter fool!” he declares. This
apostrophe reveals a rich set of metaphorical meanings for the term. Obviously, Lear
calls the Fool “bitter” because the latter’s satirical criticism is presented in as distasteful
and painful a manner as possible. It is abusive language. However, it is also important to
recognize that this metaphorical notion of bitterness implies a specifically aesthetic sense.
Distinctions between sweet and bitter, after all, are distinctions in “taste”—they are
concerned with self-conscious judgments about the affective quality of sensations
involved in the process of perceiving something, which Kant calls “reflective” as
opposed to “determinant” judgments (CJ 18). And this aesthetic tasting has to do, first
and foremost, with pleasure and its opposite: sweet and bitter words, like sweet and bitter
fools, are so named because some please and some displease.¹²² (They name the quality
of sensation involved in the perception of the literary object, which produces these kinds
of experience for the audience or reader.)

This flavor metaphor can be extended beyond the dramatic world of King Lear to
the literary theory of Renaissance Europe, which used the terms “sweet” and “bitter” to
classify poetry according to its aesthetic effect on readers. As Rosalie Colie has shown,

¹²² “Taste, in the proper sense of the word, is…the property of an organ (the tongue, the
palate, and the gullet)…. According to its use it is to be understood either as a
differentiating taste alone or, at the same time, as a pleasant taste (for example, whether
something is sweet or bitter, or whether what is tasted [sweet or bitter] is pleasant).
Distinguishing taste can provide universal agreement as to how certain things are to be
labeled, but pleasant taste can never yield a universally valid judgment: namely, that
something (for example, something bitter) which is pleasant to me will also be pleasant to
everybody…. The word taste, is, however, also used for a sensory faculty of judgment,
which is not merely to choose for myself, according to my own sense perception, but also
according to a certain rule believed to be valid for everybody…. One may therefore
explain taste as follows: ‘Taste is the faculty of aesthetic judgment which makes
universally valid discriminations’” (Kant, APPV 142-143).
this culinary or “gustatory” principle of generic definition was most obvious in the opposition between sonnet and epigram and in the division of the epigram into multiple subcategories (86-87). Thus, while sonnets and some epigrams were sweet (“honeyed,” “sugared,” etc.), other epigrams were sharp, sour, or bitter (“salted,” “galled,” etc.). More specifically, the different species of epigram were identified with various substances according to the quality of aesthetic sensation associated with them: sweet epigrams were mel (“honey”), sharp epigrams were sal (“salt”), bitter epigrams were fel (“gall”). On the spectrum of flavors that represent aesthetic feeling, then, these three terms are spread out between absolute pleasure and displeasure: the pointed sharpness of poetic salt stands somewhere between the voluptuous sweetness of poetic honey and the biting bitterness of poetic gall. Thus Julius Scaliger’s Poetics describes a sweet “honey” (mel) style in Catullus and contrasts it with the more “bitter” (acria) style of Martial, whose poems are classified into four categories, apparently in order of decreasing repulsiveness: “filth” (foeditas), “gall” (fel), “vinegar” (acetum), and “salt” (sal). Critics such as Scaliger did not simply impose these culinary terms on classical literature; the same terminology can

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123 “Generally speaking, mel and sal, or mel and fel, were the common categories under which the sweet and the sharp epigrams were discussed; Catullus and Martial were the classical examples most commonly cited for these two half-related, half-opposed types” (Colie 87).

124 See Thomas Bastard on the distinction between bitterness (fel) and sharpness (sal): “I have taught Epigrams to speak chastlie of their olde libertie, not onlie forbidden them to be personal, but turned all their bitterness rather into sharpness” (cited in Colie 87).

125 “In hoc genere..., mel statuimus. Alia contra..., acria, qualia Martialis. horum Ideae quatuor. Una, in qua foeditas est. .... Una in qua fel. amarulenta species haec.... Una in qua est acetum. mordax genus hoc carpit sine maledictis.... una in qua est sal ex iis captatur risus sine vlla vituperatione, atque haud multa mordacitate” (Scaliger 171).
be found in Martial’s own poems. In one epigram, for instance, Martial satirizes the works of another poet, which are written “without a grain of salt in them, not a drop of bitter gall” (*nulla salis nec amari fellis in illis*). Martial points out that “there is no relish even in food deprived of vinegar’s bite” (*nec cibus ipse iuvat morsu fraudatus aceti*), and concludes: “Give honey apples (*melimela*)… to baby (*infanti*): my taste is for the Chian, that knows how to sting” (7.25).

Martial’s gustatory ideal—of a pleasant sharpness or “bite” amongst the farrago of flavors to be enjoyed in poetry—is echoed by the Renaissance epigrammatists who follow in his footsteps.126 In the “Epistle to All” that John Harington offers before his collection of epigrams, he advises readers to “taste but few at once, feede not too fickle, / So shall you finde some coole, some warme, some biting, / Some sweet in taste, some sharpe, all so delighting, / As may your inward taste, and fancie tickle” (1618, n.p.). Here Harington describes the aesthetic effect of reading his epigrams as “tickling” two of the inner senses in Aristotelian psychology: the imagination (“fancie”) and the common sense (“inward taste”).127 In this notion of an “inward taste” by which poetry pleases the

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127 Readers will recall that the grounds for reading “inward taste” as a synonym for “the common sense” were established in my first chapter. There I observed the terminology provided by George Chapman in his 1595 poem *Ovid’s Banquet of Sense*, Stanza 88 of which has the phrase “that inward taste of mine / Which makes all sence,,” for which Chapman gives the following marginal definition: “He intends the common sence which is *centrum sensibus et speciebus*, & calcs it last because it dooth, *sapere in effectione sensuum*” (Chapman 75).
mind’s palate, then, we can see a proto-Kantian formulation of the sensus communis aestheticus or “reflecting taste” (gustus reflectens), the principle of judgment in aesthetic pleasure.\footnote{Cf. Kant: “There is also a pleasant taste whose rule must be established a priori, because it indicates with necessity, hence it is valid for everybody, how the idea of an object is to be judged in relation to the feeling of pleasure or displeasure…. One could classify this taste as a rationalizing taste in distinction to the empirical as the sensuous taste, (the former being the gustus reflectens, the other the gustus reflexus) (APPV 142).} Harington also gives one of the clearest formulations to the opposition of the sweet-flavored sonnet and sharp-flavored epigram, in his “Comparison of the Sonnet, and the Epigram”:

Once, by mishap, two Poets fell a-squaring,  
The Sonnet, and our Epigram comparing;  
And Faustus, hauing long demurd vpon it,  
Yet, at the last, gaue sentence for the Sonnet.  
Now, for such censure, this his chiefe defence is,  
Their sugred taste best likes his likresse senses.  
Well, though I grant Sugar may please the taste,  
Yet let my verse haue salt to make it last. (1.37)

Other epigrammatists present the ideal literary-culinary flavor as a mixture of the sweet and bitter substances. Thomas Bastard says that “salt with sugar, honnie mixt with gall, / Must needes be praisde, must needes be likt of al,” and Francis Thynne describes a pleasing balance in such mixture: “So addinge hard to softe, and bitter to the sweete, / compounds a meane between them both, for Judgment allwaies meet” (cited in Peter 297).

The gustatory metaphor, however, applies to literary genres well beyond the bounds of sonnet and epigram. For instance, in Lingua we find tragedy contrasted with (and defined against) comedy in terms of taste, the former as bitterness and the latter as sweetness: “For this that rears him selfe i

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the first, proud in the midst: / Stately in all, and bitter death at end. / That in the pumpe
[i.e., comedy] doth frowne at first acquaintance: / Troble the midst, but in the end
concludes, / Cloasing up all with a sweete catastrophe. / This grave and sad disdaine with
brinish teares, / That light and quick with wrinckled laughter painted…” (4.3). Likewise,
Lingua conflates her own production of linguistic pleasure more generally with the
capacity of sweet-flavored substances (“sugared”), mixed with salt-flavored (“savory”),
to please the sense of taste: “Delightfull speeches, sweet perswasions / I have this long
time usd to get my right, / My right that is to make the Senses sixe; / And have both name
and power with the rest. / Oft have I seasoned savorie periods, / With sugred words, to
delude Gustus taste…” (1.1). Such rhetorical appeals to sweet linguistic pleasure are
linked with the honey metaphor intrinsic to the term for auditory pleasure in music—
“melody”—which conflates the sense of taste with the sense of sound, and which in the
Renaissance often appears as the adjective “mellifluous.” Thus in Lingua Auditus
exclaims, “O sweete, admirable, Swanlike heavenly, hearke, O most mellifluous straine,
O what a pleasant cloase was there.... O hony sweete” (3.ultima). Likewise in Twelfth
Night, Feste sings the song about “sweet and twenty,” and Sir Andrew declares: “A
mellifluous voice.... Very sweet” (2.3.50-54). The term is not limited to music but applied
to poetry in general. Francis Meres says that “the sweete wittie soule of Ouid liues in
mellifluous and hony-tongued Shakespeare, witness his Venus and Adonis, his Lucrece,
his sugred Sonnets among his priuate friends, &c.” (2:317). This mellifluous metaphor
goes back at least to Lucretius’ De Rerum Natura. A passage from Book 1 includes
several keywords such as “obscurity,” “sweetness,” and “bitterness,” which become
definitive terms for Elizabethan satire. Lucretius wants to make his subject appealing even though he knows “how full it is of obscurity” (*quam sint obscura*), so he is shedding on dark material (*obscura de re*) the bright beams of my song…..

My art is not without a purpose. Physicians, when they wish to treat children with a nasty dose of wormwood, first smear the rim of the cup with the sweet yellow fluid of honey (*mellis dulci flavoque liquore*). The children…are lured by the sweetness at their lips into swallowing the bitter (*amarum*) draught …. In the same way our doctrine often seems unpalatable to those who have not handled it, and the masses often shrink from it. That is why I have tried to administer my philosophy to you in the dulcet strains of poesy, to touch it with the sweet honey (*dulci… melle*) of the Muses. (1.922-947, Latham 32-33)

In his *Defense*, Sidney employs the same conceit: he says that the poet “beginneth not with obscure definitions, …but he cometh to you with words set in delightful proportion…. even as the child is often brought to take most wholesome things by hiding them in such other as have a pleasant taste” (95).129 And in *Pierce Penniless*, Nashe makes a similar (although convoluted) argument in his praise of the theater: “In plays all cozenages, all cunning drifts overgilded with outward holiness, …all the cankerworms that breed on the rust of peace, are most lively anatomized. …. What should I say more? They are sour pills of reprehension wrapped up in sweet words” (Nashe 65).

By observing through this gustatory analogy how satire is positioned on the spectrum of literary flavors, we can see that it invokes uncommon aesthetic sense. In gustatory terms, unsurprisingly, the genre of satire is not identified with honey as in Lucretius, Catullus, and the amorous traditon of sonnets and love-poetry more generally. Rather satire is identified with salt, vinegar, and gall. For instance, Horace says that

129 Cf. Meres: “Poetrie dooth most delight which is mixt with Philosophie” (Smith 2:309).
Lucilius, the earlier Roman satirist, “rubbed the city down with much salt” (1.10.3-4, sale multo / urbem defricuit). Likewise, the neo-Senecan tradition of Menippean satire that I discussed above is “salty,” linked with sal rather than fel. In his Praise of Folly Erasmus says that he offers readers a “delectable” (delectari), quasi-culinary literary mixture of “jests seasoned with a touch of learning and a dash of wit” (Adams 3) (Miller 67, iocis... nec indoctis... nec usquequaque insulsis). The phrase translated here as “seasoned with wit”—“nec insulsis”—literally means “not lacking salt.” This witty sharpness—the pleasant, gentle bite of sal—also appears as a defining quality in the salacious Satyré Menippée (A Satyre Menippized) with its “salt and biting words” (SM 204). Indeed, the latter characterizes its Menippean style exactly as did Erasmus, featuring jests that are salty: “al ful of salted iestings, & poudred merie conceits of good words, to make men to laugh” (203); “toutes pleines de brocards sales, et de gausseries saulpoudrees de bons mots pour rire” (Martin 161). As the association of the sal flavor with amusing wit suggests, this “salty” strain in Menippean satire is allied with the gentler comedic mode of satire embodied by Horace, who aimed to “tell the truth laughing” (1.1.24, ridentem dicere verum). However there is another strain of satire traceable back to classical Rome, identified with Juvenal’s “biting” as opposed to Horace’s “laughing” mode, which savors more of gall than salt. Where Horace laughs and Persius mocks, Juvenal attacks

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130 See editor’s note: “Pour ‗brocards sales,‘ lire salés plutot que sales” (Martin 444).

131 Horace renders a version of the Lucretian metaphor in Satire 1, sweetening unpleasant truths with pleasant jokes, “as teachers sometimes give cookies to children to coax them into learning their ABC” (25-26, ut pueris olim dant crustula blandi / doctores, elementa velint ut discere prima).
with burning, open rage and “goes for the jugular” (Scaliger 149, *Iuuenalis ardet, instat aperte, iugulat. Persius insultat. Horatius irridet*). Scaliger calls the satires of Juvenal not only better (*meliores*) than those of Horace but “more bitter” (*acriores*). Where the jesting wit of Menippean satire in Erasmus aims for the *sal* sharpness near the center of the palate’s range, the biting tradition of Juvenalian satire gravitates farther from the sweet end of the spectrum of flavors, towards the extreme bitterness of *fel* (and even the absolute distaste of *foeditas*).

The Elizabethan satirists “take over Juvenal’s bitter manner with evident relish” (Peter 113). As Hall says, they do not “hide their gall” (33). “Gall is medicinal,” Colie points out, “providing a purge; in that metaphor, ‘gall’ was one quality of satiric writing, with which epigrams often overlapped” (87). A version of this metaphor appears in Sidney’s gustatory language where, in contrast to the honeyed images of sugar-coated medicine (95), “sweet poesy” (108), and the “sweet violence” (98) of tragedy, he offers a purgative image of ancient invective poetry in “the bitter but wholesome Iambic... which rubs the galled mind” (97). “Whose gall is’t that would not overflow?” asks Guilpin (84), and Marston shouts, “O what dry braine melts not sharp mustard rime / To purge the snottery of our slimie time?” (108). This purging metaphor implies pain rather than pleasure, as Gustus from *Lingua* testifies: “Many a grievous paine have I sustain’d, / By

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132 “eius versus longe meliores quam Horatiani: sententiae acriores: phrasis apertior” (Scaliger 323).

133 Cf. Erasmus: “Neque enim ad Iuvenalis exemplum, occultam illam scelerum sentinam usquam movimus, et ridenda magis, quam foeda recensere studimus” (Miller 68-69).
bitter pills, and sowe purgations…” (4.5). More prevalent and more significant than the specifically medical metaphor of gall as a purge, however, is the more general notion of satire as a genre that is composed of gall as its essential substance, simply because “bitterness” is its essential quality. In this version of the metaphor, satire “proceeds” from *fel* simply because the latter is its material and perhaps even efficient cause; Harington says: “Lynus, who to me beares hate exceeding, / I heare against me is ev’n now a breeding, / A bitter Satyr all of Gall proceeding” (1.14).

Both the medicinal and the gustatory metaphor for satiric gall appear in Guilpin’s collection of satire, *Skiatheleia*, which develops the culinary analogies with gusto. Far from the sweetness of *mel* and even the sharpness of *sal*, Guilpin’s satire tends towards the extreme of absolute bitterness, to the *fel* (“Whose gall is’t that would not overflow?”) that is defined by its proximity to the end of the aesthetic spectrum opposite to pleasure. He ridicules genres that are tender and “sweet” and the “comicall” Muse, which entertains “with many a salt La volto iest” (60). The sole exceptions to this general censure of poetry are the two “bitter” genres: epigram and satire. “The Satyre only and Epigramatist, / (Concisde Epigrame, and sharpe Satyrist) / Keep diet from this surfet of excesse, / Tempring themselves from such licenciousness. / The bitter censures of their Critticke spleenes, / Are antidotes…” (61). In this arrangement, the genres of epigram and satire are similar in kind in that they both offer the averse-flavored aesthetics of displeasure, instead of the agreeable-flavored aesthetics of pleasure; they only differ in

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134 Lingua is accused of spewing “bitter” satire like that associated with Old Comedy and the iambic: “she railes on men in Authority depraving their Honours, with bitter lests and tauntes... she’s a Backbyter setting strife betwixt Bosome friends” (3.5).
degree, the epigram more moderate and the satire more extreme. While Guilpin goes on to distinguish them by developing the culinary metaphor (“diet”), he also connects aesthetic sense to rhetorical sense through the notion of proverbial plain-speaking: “An Epigram / Is... / A plaine-dealing lad, that is not afraid / To speake the truth, but calls a iade, a iade. / And Mounsieur Guulard was not much too blame, / When he for meat mistook an Epigrame, / For though it be no cates, sharp sauce it is, / To lickerous vanitie, youth’s sweet amissee. / But oh the Satyre hath a nobler vaine, / He’s the Strappado, rack, and some such paine...” (61). As with the Fool’s mixture of proverbial maxims and biting criticism, in this passage the plain-speaking rhetorical common sense of epigrams is set beside the bitter aesthetic uncommon sense of satire. Here the two genres are connected by kind as sharp and bitter, in opposition to the sweetness (“sweet amissee”) of sensual pleasure, and are separated by degree, magnitude, and intensity: the satire is harsher, fiercer, more punishing—in a word, more unpleasant. Furthermore, the shift from the gustatory to the penal metaphor—from the “bitter sauce” of the epigram to the “Strappado” and “rack” of the satire—isolates the essentially aesthetic continuity of this conception of literary forms. Bitter foods and instruments of torture, after all, have in common nothing except their capacity to excite to varying degrees the feeling of displeasure, aversion, “some such paine.” We are back to the painful torment of sadistic verbal abuse such as Cavell sees in Lear.
Thus bitterness was a constitutive feature of Elizabethan satire and closely connected with the quality of roughness or “harshness.” In Puttenham’s definition, the satirist was a “kind of Poet, who intended to taxe the common abuses and vice of the people in rough and bitter speeches, and their inuectiues were called Satyres, and them selues Satyrques: such were Lucilius, Juuenall, and Persius…” (Smith 2:27). According to another typical Elizabethan definition: “Satyra est carmen acerbum, instrumentum mordax”; “A Satyre, is a tarte and carpyng kynd of verse...” (cited in Peter 301). The term acerbum, rendered as “tart” in the English version, means acidic, sharp, and bitter, like gall. This “acerbity” stands alongside the “obscurity” and “harshness” of Elizabethan neoclassical satire—“To sum up the influence exerted by particular Romans on the satirirsts of the English Renaissance one could say, roughly, that they took over Persius’ obscurity, Juvenal’s acerbity, and from Martial... a fondness for salacity and double entendre” (Peter 117)—and it aims at an aesthetic experience contrary to pleasure; it wants to be disturbing, “distasteful,” downright painful. Both ancient and Renaissance poets exhibit a tendency to be aesthetically reflexive, to present explicit meta-poetic statements that self-consciously reflect on the aesthetic experience they offer readers—on the bitter flavor of this distasteful genre. While Juvenal is probably the main classical model for this authorial stance, another important influence is Martial. In one epigram, for instance, Martial describes the effect his poem has on a reader: “ecce rubet quidam, pallet, stupet, oscitat, odit. / hoc volo: nunc nobis carmina nostra placent” (Look, 93).

135 Where Harington says his “sharp” style will tickle the “inward taste,” Guilpin says, “May my harsh stile (the Muses I beseech) / Be but as arse-smart to his tickled breech” (93).
somebody turns red, turns pale, is dazed, yawns, is disgusted. This I want. Now my poems please me) (6.60). This is an extreme statement: his poems “please” (placent) him precisely when the reader “hates” (odit) them! Given how the genres of epigram and satire overlapped in Elizabethan poetry, the perverse, quasi-sadistic attitude on display in this poem becomes an important precedent for Renaissance satirists. Hall alludes to this epigram repeatedly in his satires: “ecce rubet…pallet” appears as “Now red, now pale” (87); more profoundly, Hall declares, “Go to then ye my sacred Semones, / And please me more, the more ye do displease” (51), which seems to translate Martial’s “nunc nobis carmina nostra placent” (see Davenport 1949, 197 and 251).

Regarding Hall’s “please me more the more ye do displease,” Peter observes: “The precise ‘source’ is immaterial: all that matters is that ‘Satyre’ is learning new habits, and learning them of Rome” (140). In my view, the significance of Hall’s declaration lies in its perversely asymmetrical formula—displeasure in the reader produces pleasure in the satirist—that contradicts the Kantian aesthetic pleasure in the beautiful, which is governed by “taste” and conditioned through the sensus communis aestheticus. If the pleasure in unanimously agreeing with others’ pleasure in a given representation affirms Kantian common sense (which “concerns the consensus of different judging Subjects” and “demand[s] universal assent” [Kant CJ 85]), this pleasure in the representation that provokes others’ displeasure can be called “uncommon sense.” This bitter aesthetic consists not in consensual identification through common feeling—the “faculty of estimating what makes our feeling in a given representation universally communicable” (CJ 153)—but rather in the conscious disjunction of sensibility, the assumption that one’s
feeling does not participate with but contradicts that of another: the satirist’s pleasure in
the poem (“please me more”) is based not on the assumption that others will agree and
coincide in this feeling, but rather precisely on the assumption that their aesthetic
experience will be antithetical (“the more ye do displease”).

Marston invites a similar aesthetic reading, one that sees behind his satires the
irrational impulse to take pleasure in the presentation of a work that will be an object of
displeasure, indeed outright pain, to others. He says: “Let others sing as their good
Genius moues, / Of deep desines, or else of clipping loves. / Faire fall them all, that with
wits industry, / Doe cloath good subjectes in true poesie. / But as for me, my vexed
thoughtfull soule, / Takes pleasure, in displeasing sharp controule” (102). Like Guilpin,
here Marston obviously invokes the contrast between amorous poetry and satirical
poetry. But even more striking is the emphatic antithesis of aesthetic pleasure in the experience
postulated for readers, whom the satirist “takes pleasure in displeasing.” Marston asserts
this perverse, aesthetically sadistic principle insistently, almost as a point of honor: “If
thys displease the world’s wrong-judging sight, / It glads my soule.... / ...But if that this
doe please, / Hence, hence, Satyrick Muse” (92). Here is the ugly twin of the consensual,
vicarious pleasure in beauty postulated by Kant’s sensus communis aestheticus. The
person making a judgment “this is beautiful” in Kantian aesthetics is by definition taking
pleasure in perceiving that others should feel the same pleasure. A satirist like Marston,
however, takes pleasure in perceiving not only that others won’t share his pleasure, but
that others will feel displeasure. “Vexe all the world, so that thy selfe be pleased” (139).
Uncommon Sense in Marston’s *Scourge*

Most of this chapter has discussed satire in terms of the last two forms of common sense: rhetorical and aesthetic. However, there are also hints of psychological uncommon sense. As with Senecan tragedy, although to a much lesser degree, Elizabethan satire involves the representation of disordered and, if not deranged, at least discontented mental states. The most obvious example is the pathology that gives Burton the subject and title for his Menippean satire: melancholy. The association of melancholy with satire is not limited to this one example, but appears elsewhere in key moments of English satire (see Biester 67-93). For instance, Donne’s first satire—“Away thou fond motley humorist”—sets the stage with a conventional portrait of what will become Burton’s own signature affliction, scholar’s melancholy. Like Democritus Junior, Donne retreats disillusioned from the mad stage of the world to the universe of his own library. Likewise, Marston’s *Scourge* depicts the satirist’s inspiration as melancholy, and does so with bitter passion rather than Donne’s urbane wit.

Indeed, in Book 3 of the *Scourge of Villanie* (*SV* VIII-XI) we find perhaps the most intense expression of uncommon sense in any of the Elizabethan verse satirists. “Here’s a Toy to Mock an Ape Indeed” (*SV* IX) defines and embodies Marston’s satirical style. The title sets the tone, defining the satirist’s relationship with his audience-enemies as an aesthetic antagonism: the poem is an aesthetic object (“Here’s a Toy”) by which the satirist will annoy those he scorns (“to Mock an Ape”). The opening lines, “Grim-fac’d *Reprooфе* sparkle with threatning eye / Bend thy sower browes in my tart poesie” (158) invoke a punishing genius to animate Marston’s satire, which is characterized by an
unpleasant, painful literary flavor ("tart," elsewhere "bitter"), the aesthetic bitterness that, as we have seen, is opposed to the honeyed "sweetness" associated with aesthetic common sense in the "dulce et utile" Horatian tradition. Marston places himself in antagonistic opposition to the widely-pleasing, widely-praised style of poetry that appeals to mass consumer taste; he associates the "Ape" in the title not only with an unworthy poet who is praised but also the incompetent critic who praises him and the brainless audience that laps it all up—they drink the Cool Aid like stupid primates: "O ideot times, / When gaudy Monkeyes mowe ore sprightly rimes! / O world of fooles, when all mens iudgement's set / And rests vpon a mumping Marmuset!" (158). Here is an angry "critique of aesthetic judgment" that sneers with indignation at the consensus of public taste about poetry.

As Marston develops his attack on the critic-ape ("Iudiciall Jack"), the language plunges with characteristic extremity into foeditas, the "filth" that Scaliger declared out-of-bounds for the decent poet. Marston describes apish criticism as "reeching steams / Of dungie slime," and compares the ape-scholar—who "With muck-pit esculine filth bescumbers" the poetry he criticizes—to the dog that "perfumes the roome, / With his tailes filth" (159). Although Marston fashions himself the defender of poets who are unjustly criticized (and thus "bescumbered") with the negative commentary of scholar-apes, here he seems to be more angry about the skewed positive judgment that apish critics make of bad poems. Such unworthy aesthetic objects garner a consensus of praise not through "iudiciall scholarship" but through "seruile imitatorship," on account of which pieces of "shit" are "flattered / With seeming worth." Here Marston plays the part
of an angry naysaying audience member, trying to shout down the *plaudites* of the majority with a sneering hiss: “o what a tricksie learned straine / Is this applauded, sencles, modern *vain!” (159). In these lines Marston opposes himself to the applauded “senseless” style or tendency (“vein”) of contemporary poetry. He also offers his own quasi-scholarly gloss, a satirical critical apparatus that clarifies the features of this “modern” style to which he objects so forcefully. The asterisk in “sencles, modern *vain” points readers to a Latin marginal annotation: “*non laedere, sed ludere, non lanea, sed linea, non ictus, sed nictus potius*”; i.e., “not hurting, but playing; not woolen, but linen; not a blow, but rather a wink.” In this series of oppositions we can locate the aesthetic features of “modern” poetry against which Marston contrasts the features of his own preferred style.

Thus, to the playfully gentle comedic style of Horatian satire Marston opposes a biting Juvenalian style that does not “play” (*ludere*) but hurts or “injures” (*laedere*): it cuts and causes damage. The same is true of “non ictus, sed nictus,” which contrasts the violent “blow” or beating which really hurts—like the axe’s ictus that decapitates Agamemnon in Seneca’s play (line 46)—with the playful charm of winking. These connotations also sharpen the contrast between the middle pair of terms, “*non lanea, sed linea*” (not woolen but linen). Davenport says, “I suspect there is some point about ‘lanea, linea’ that escapes me” (350). I think this “point” lies in the aesthetic associations of the harsh style proper to Elizabethan satire, which often takes the tactile metaphor of roughness (i.e. Puttenham’s “rough and bitter speeches”), a metaphor that is here exemplified in the contrast between two fabrics: Marston mocks the “modern vein” of
poetry for being “not woolen” (possessing the roughness proper to satire) “but rather linen” (a pleasing lyrical smoothness). In contrast to such smoothness, Marston is playing “a rough-tongu’d Satyres part” (158).

The next poem, “Satyra Nova” (SV X), also exhibits uncommon sense. This “new” satire is an angry and depressed counter-volley against Marston’s chief poetic enemy—the latest installment of Marston’s rivalry with Joseph Hall. In it Marston vents his spleen against “that stinking Scavenger” who “from his dunghill... bedaubed on / The latter page of Old Pigmalion” (164). The “stinking Scavenger” is clearly revealed as Hall (the author of Virgidemiarum) when Marston illustrates how this scavenger has crapped all over his good name. In a manner similar to Thomas Nashes’ satirical citations and refutations of Harvey’s polemical “open letters” attacking him in Nashe’s counter-volley, Strange News, Marston interrupts his own poem after 46 lines to introduce and reproduce the “Epigram which the Author Virgidemiarum, caused to bee pasted to the latter page of euery Pigmalion that came to the stacioners of Cambridge” (164). Marston offers an ironically meta-sarcastic marginal annotation on Hall’s epigram (“*Mark the witty allusion to my name”) and then resumes his own satiric voice, declaring that “Opinion,” in the form of gullible readers, “perfumes his dung” by praising Hall’s verse. Here Marston displays the negative creativity central to the newly antagonistic genius of Elizabethan print culture (see Lander). In the slanderous epigram proudly noted and transcribed by Marston’s own hand, complete with mock learned marginal annotations on the “allusion to my name,” we see the Hall-marks of a truly engrossed and engrossing intertextual writer. Marston revels in a new mode of literary existence that is
freewheeling and messy yet focused, laser-like, on the virtual bodies of a world made up of texts.

Alongside this meta-literary quality, the poem also exhibits the features that I have called psychological, rhetorical, and aesthetic uncommon sense. First, it takes its inspiration from the condition or influence of melancholy; Marston begins by invoking this melancholic discontent as the condition from which his poetry arises, the very ground in which it grows: “From out the sadnes of my discontent, / Hating my wonted iocund merriment, / (only to give dull Time a swifter wing) / Thus scorning scorne of Ideot fooles, I sing‖ (163). Thus the poem originates in an unhappy consciousness that creates satire in order to literally “pass the time” and distract itself from the self-conscious melancholy that tends—like an unfortunate form of Kant’s gustus reflectens or aesthetic common sense—to reflect on itself and thus multiply itself in the mirroring capacity of the higher mental sensations. This “depressed” poem is representative of the melancholy discontent that figures as the animating genius of Marston’s whole satiric project. (Thus, the “Proemium” to the first book of the Scourge invokes melancholy as the Muse proper to the entire collection: “Thou nursing Mother of faire wisedoms lore, / Ingenuous Melancholy, I implore / Thy graue assistance, take they gloomie seate, / Inthrone thee in my blood” [102].) Here melancholy is not just an emotional imbalance but a mental derangement; it is a form of madness. Marston asks his friend Everard (or Edward) Guilpin whether he isn’t crazy: “pre-thee Ned, I pre-thee gentle lad, / Is not he frantique, foolish, bedlam mad, / That wastes his spright, that melts his very braine / In deep designes, in wits darke gloomie straine?” (163). This “Bedlam” is a form of
psychological uncommon sense, as in Shakespeare’s Mad Tom o’ Bedlam. The self-portrait of melancholy genius as the patron power of Marston’s satire also involves an opposition to social convention, to the consensus of public common sense: “Is not he frantique, foolish, bedlam mad, / ...that melts his very braine... / ... / That scourgeth great slaues with a dreadsse fist, / Playing the rough part of a Satyrist, / To be pervers’d by all the dung-scum rable / Of thin-braind Ideots, dull, vn-capable?” (163). Here the satirist’s sad, furious resentment is expressed as an alienation from the vulgus, from the communal conventional consensus of the general populace, the base chunk of society, who are targeted in Marston’s touchy rant (his rhetorical pose of aristocratic scorn) as “the dung-scum rable” who are too dense to comprehend or appreciate him according to his true poetic value (“vn-conceiued rime”). Thus the personal, individual, essentially psychic tenor of uncommon sense in melancholy is reflected in the interpersonal, collective, essentially social form in which it manifests itself, abusing and contradicting the judgment of the crowd, the wisdom of the many.

There is also an aesthetic dimension to this melancholy stance, implicit in the way that the poet contradicts the consensus of public taste (which he disparages as mere “Opinion”). Where Hume and Kant treat such consensus as an ideal embodiment of the intangible authority of aesthetic taste, a gauge of artistic worth that transcends idiosyncrasies and personal preferences, Marston here treats it as quite the opposite—a negative or inverse indicator of poetic merit. “Opinion” is what “perfumes his dung [i.e., Hall’s verse]”; it is “Iugling Opinion,” an “inchaunting witch” (165). Thus, while the consensus of public taste is justified and defended by Kant’s theory of aesthetic common
sense, Marston’s defense of his own “unvalued,” under-appreciated poetry is advanced in opposition to such consensus (and hence as a form of aesthetic uncommon sense). In the midst of the intemperate ranting and raving of his melancholic poetical furor, Marston declares: “But I forget mee I, / I am seduced with this poesie: / And madder than a Bedlam spend sweet time / In bitter numbers, in this idle rime, / Out on this humour” (165). Here Marston recalls the earlier lines about “Bedlam madness” and suggests a continuity of the psychological, rhetorical, and aesthetic spheres in the interlocking forms of uncommon sense. The psychological uncommon sense of mental derangement (“madder than a Bedlam”) is here linked to the aesthetic uncommon sense of Elizabethan satire (“bitter numbers’”). Indeed we have come full circle: the image of “Opinion, thou inchaunting witch” is mirrored now in the vision of “poesie” by which Marston is “seduced”: “Inchantment, Ned, hath ravished my sense / In a Poetick vaine circumference” (166). Thus in the “Bedlam” craze of the poet’s melancholy we return to Marston’s original posture of uncommon sense, enriched and complicated by the intersection of psychological derangement, social alienation, and aesthetic solipsism.

The Aesthetic End(s) of Satire

In trying to excavate the notion of aesthetic uncommon sense in Elizabethan satire I have stated the formula as boldly as possible: it takes pleasure in provoking pain; it produces pleasure because it produces displeasure. Of course such an extreme aesthetic credo, however forcefully expressed on occasion, is not maintained in rigorous coherence or consistency. In practice, satire’s willful provocation of displeasure is counterbalanced
by a studied eagerness to please. Thus, just as there appears a tension between common
and uncommon rhetorical sense in the ambiguous status of “obscurity” in satire, so in the
ambiguous status of “harshness” there exists an analogous tension between common and
uncommon aesthetic sense, a tension which in broad terms takes the form of pleasure and
displeasure as competing aesthetic goals.

We can see one muddled negotiation of these contradictory aims in Hall’s “Post-
script to the Reader,” where he begins: “It is not for every one to relish a true and natural
Satyre, being of it self besides the native and in-bred bitterness and tartnes of particulers,
both hard of conceipt, and harsh of stile, and therefore cannot but be vnpleasing both to
the vnskilfull, and ouer musicall eare, the one being affected with only a shallow and
easie matter, the other with a smooth and currant disposition” (97). The parallel clauses
of Hall’s prose here reflect the double bind in which he is trapped: either the satiric poet
will disappoint his audience by speaking a language over the cruder heads, or else he will
disappoint by speaking a language jarring to the finer sensibilities. Thus because it is
“hard of conceipt” and “harsh of stile,” satire frustrates readers’ appetite for rhetorical
common sense (“shallow and easie”) and aesthetic common sense (“smooth and
currant”). The result is a sense of futility on Hall’s part, a paradoxical Catch-22: “What a
monster must he be that would please all?” (97). In consequence of this awareness, he
foresees that he will be “set vpon the racke of many merciless and peremptorie censures”
(97). This formulation, ironically, inverts the positions of satirist and reader, rendering
them mirrors of one another: just as the satirist aims to inflict the pain of linguistic abuse
on readers in the form of whipping, scourging, and torture—Guilpin’s “Strappado, rack,
and some such paine‖—so likewise will readers abuse the satirist, hurling and binding him to the same metaphorical machines of torture: Hall’s “rack of… merciless…
censures.” The satirist and reader reflect each other in mutual postures of sadistic abuse.

Picking up this worrying over satire’s prescriptive “obscurity” and “harshness,” Marston also seems initially to distance himself from these two qualities. His preface to *The Scourge of Villainie*, “To those that seeme iudicial perusers,” begins: “Know that I hate to affect too much obscurity, & harshnes, because they profit no sence” (100). Here we can read “profit” as referring not only to the successful circulation of meaning (rhetorical common sense), but also the successful production of pleasure (aesthetic common sense), i.e. “pleasure and profit.” Clearly the dominant meaning is that the convention of “obscurity” in satire prevents its linguistic “sense” from being commonly available (just as, presumably, the convention of “harshness” gets in the way of a reader’s aesthetic pleasure). Like Hall, Marston tries to align himself with “common” rhetorical sense, on the side of proverbial plain-speaking: “I will not delude your sight with mists; yet I dare defend my plainnes gainst the veriuyce face, of the crabbed’st satirist that euer stuttered” (101). Despite such protestations and declarations, however, Marston cannot be taken at his word. He has a half-hearted inability to stand by his self-exemption from the realm of “harshness and obscurity,” an exemption contradicted not only by the experience of most readers who plunge into the choppy, storm-tossed linguistic waters of his verse, but also by his own admission elsewhere.  

136 On one hand, Marston makes

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136 Marston’s diction was considered intolerable by Ben Jonson, and some modern readers find it literally “unspeakable” (see Rasmussen 89-112).
sardonic comments about readers with such rigid generic expectations that they only accept poems to be “satires” if they are “palpable dark, and so rough writ, that the hearing of them read, would set a mans teeth on edge.” On the other hand, he no sooner says so than he admits that it was precisely for such readers’ “vnseasoned pallate” that he “wrote the first Satyre in some places too obscure, in all places misliking me” (100). Here Marston construes style in aesthetic terms using the venerable gustatory metaphor of taste (“vnseasoned pallate”), and renders one of his characteristic outbursts of aesthetic self-denigration, expressing distaste for his own work.\(^{137}\) And yet we have already seen how, contrary to the dominant aesthetic tradition of “sweet” poetry from Lucretius to Sidney, Marston repeatedly affirms such displeasure as his true aesthetic aim: he wants his satire to be ugly, unpleasant, and painful. (Like the tragic crime in Seneca, satirical invective in Marston is conceived and created—“invented”—to be an object of profound aversion and displeasure). This goes some way toward explaining his constant shifting between asserting and denying the aesthetic value of his verse, which cannot be rationally defended in the conventional terms of beauty or aesthetic common sense. Where Kant’s aesthetic pleasure is premised on consensual unanimity, Marston’s is premised on a singular antagonism: “Vexe all the world, so that thy selfe be pleased” (139). He expresses pleasure in perceiving that the work he produced is provoking displeasure in the public who apprehends it.

Regardless of the contradictions in his various metapoetic statements, it is clear that Marston is consistently concerned with aesthetic judgment and aesthetic experience.

\(^{137}\) The “taste” metaphor lurks in *Poetaster*, which also stages the “purge” metaphor in portraying Marston as a writer with indigestion, who literally vomits his lines.
He constantly comments on the artistic value of his satires, pointing out their distinctive style and lecturing the audience about how to evaluate them. He both presents himself (the satirist) as an aesthetic subject, and his creation (the poetry) as an aesthetic object. Following Marston’s own lead, I think there is good reason for defining Elizabethan satire in largely aesthetic terms: not so much through the objects represented, nor even the intentions of the satirist, but through the affect associated with it, through the distinctive experience it aims to produce in readers. There is a longstanding body of critical writing suggesting that the more traditional terms of generic definition such as form, structure, and plot are largely frustrating dead-ends on the path towards defining satire. In fact genre theorists tend, despite themselves, to come to the conclusion that satire does not have a definable plot, no Aristotelian “action” or structuralist mythos. For instance, in Northrop Frye’s fourfold scheme of mythoi or generic plot-forms, satire is by far the one that fits the least naturally and gives him the most trouble: he offers two labels—“satire and irony”—rather than the usual one, and seems reluctant to identify an actual plot with this mythos, only suggesting that it parodies romance, and deferring any substantial treatment of the “typical form” of irony/satire.138

138 “As in this mythos we have the difficulty of two words to contend with, it may be simplest, if the reader is now accustomed to our sequence of six phases, to start with them..., instead of abstracting a typical form and discussing it first” (225). On satire and irony, see also Pavlovskis-Petit: “If we approach the distinction between satire and irony historically, we learn that the word ‘satire’ (satura) is Latin..., while the concept of irony (eironeia) originates in ancient Greece. Indeed, effective satire has something Roman about it: the powerful, bold attack, the abundance of crudeness, the strong disapproval and rejection of anything that falls outside norms delineated by what is established as common sense” (Quintero 512).
In *The Cankered Muse*, Kernan runs into similar difficulty in identifying the plot of satire. He discusses the genre as a literary fiction using three terms that overlap with Kenneth Burke’s “dramatism”: scene, hero, and plot (*scene, agent,* and *act* in Burke’s terminology). However, Kernan is only able to flesh out the first two (the scene and the hero or “satirist”), and cannot give any significant content to the plot, which, he admits, is not really present in satire: “the most striking quality of satire is the absence of plot” (30). In the terms of Burke’s dramatism, then, he defines satire through the “scene” and “agent,” but not the “act” itself: thus, ironically, Kernan himself falls subject to his own earlier criticisms of “historical” and “biographical” approaches to satire, which he had faulted for focusing too exclusively on, respectively, the social context (“scene”) and the author (“satirist”) (4-6). This slippage in critical analyses of narrative structure or “plot” in satire stems, I would argue, from the fact that satire like Marston’s is more concerned with *how* people feel than with *what* they do, with the aesthetic experience of x or y than x or y in itself. Marston represents perceptions more centrally than actions or “what happens”—attitude and tone rather than things themselves (in Kantian terminology, things as phenomena rather than as noumena).

There are some useful precedents in prior criticism for this aesthetically-oriented conception of satire. Robert Elliott, for instance, argues that satire emerges as a specifically literary form in ancient Rome and Renaissance England only when writers “transform satire from magic into art” by representing invective language intrinsically, for its own sake, rather than instrumentally for some utilitarian end. In this view, satire becomes literary precisely insofar as it is divorced from the “practical” consequences of
its performance: “satire as an art cannot develop so long as belief in its magical efficacy retains its hold over men’s minds” (98). In literary satire, then, imprecation can be seen as a hypothetical rather than a practical speech act: like the aesthetic object in Kant, the subjects, propositions, and objects of satire are hypothetically considered, apart from any interest in their actual existence. Here, in an ironically pragmatic way, the political and legal issue of libel prompts the theoretical defenders of satire to adopt this proto-Kantian “disinterested” point of view. That is, it provides some insulation against readers who interpret the poems as depicting real persons, or as making slanderous statements about current affairs, if satires are defined as aesthetic representations whose proper contemplation involves no interest in their possible reference to objects of real-life practical, ethical, or social concern. For this reason satirical writing is repeatedly defended by its practitioners as an abstract, anonymous, or hypothetical form of representation—that is, as essentially fictional. Indeed, Marston goes beyond the conventional mouthings of political expedience and champions this point of view with passionate insistence. “For tell me Crittick, is not Fiction / The soule of Poesies inuention? / Is’t not the forme? the spirit? and the essence? / The life? and the essentiaall difference?” (83). As Patrick Buckridge observes, “Much more radically..., Marston not only attacks wrong readings, but defends the act of fictitious creation itself” (Wharton 64).

Like the “art pour l’art” of the modern aesthetic movement, then, Elizabethan satire can abandon external teleology and turn into its own end. It takes on the defining feature of aesthetic representation, becoming, as Kant would say, “purposiveness without
a purpose.” We can see this transformation illustrated dramatically in Campbell’s contrast of the satirical Fool in *King Lear* with Thersites from *Troilus and Cressida*. Campbell sees the former as a “wise fool” similar to the Folly of Erasmus: a figure whose satirical language is tactical and relative to practical goals, rather than an absolute or inherently self-justified activity like art *per se*. That is, the Fool’s bantering foolishness is not the promotion of pure nonsense as an end in itself, but an instrumental means to some greater wisdom—he wields “apparent nonsense” but shoots “arrows that are barbed with common sense” (105-106). Against the strategic criticism of such “licenced fools,” Campbell contrasts the radical cynicism of Thersites, who “differs from these conventional figures in making opprobrious speech *an end in itself*” (106, my emphasis). Besides helpfully situating Renaissance satire in its ambivalent relationship with “common sense,” Campbell here implies one of the qualities that make satire such as Marston’s particularly amenable to Kantian analysis: the verbal abuse is not practical or instrumental but simply an end in itself.

For Kant, of course, the value of beauty lies in the way that it pleases aesthetic taste disinterestedly and necessarily *via* aesthetic common sense. But satire (despite titles such as “A Pleasant Satire”) is a genre that most clearly contradicts the pleasure of objects “tasteful” to aesthetic sensibility, even as it also most explicitly justifies itself for its own sake, “disinterestedly.” This helps account for the troubled self-justification, self-condemnation, and self-evaluation of Elizabethan satire such as Marston’s: the verbal abuse must be justified for its own sake or not at all, like Kant’s beauty, yet its emphatic ugliness deliberately produces a displeasure contrary to the subjectively universal
pleasure that Kant’s beautiful object inspires. Thus this sort of satire cannot assert its value practically, or morally, or even aesthetically—except through an aesthetic displeasure that violates (like Senecan tragedy) the notion of artistic delight. Such an aesthetic, Kantian interpretation of satire helps explain the value of satire’s negativity without simply explaining it away—that is, without sublimating (and thus discounting) it through moralistic interpretations. Instead of relating Elizabethan satire to the moral aim of affecting the reader’s behavior we can relate it to the aesthetic aim of affecting the reader’s feeling—and not the quasi-ethical nature of the reader’s moral feelings in general, but rather the feeling that is attached to a literary representation and that is provoked precisely by the act of reading it.

To explain the harsh “abusive” style of Elizabethan satire through an aesthetic rather than ethical or “practical” motive, we must of course contradict all the passages where satirists say that they are only distressing the wicked by whipping vice, and leaving the good uninjured. But the rise of aesthetic theory allows precisely for this distinction from ethics, and thus for possible alternatives to the moralistic didacticism that champions only the positive values lumped together in the good, true and beautiful. Meres says, “As Rubarbe and sugarcandie are pleasant & profitable: so in poetry ther is

139 See *Hamlet*, “‘Tis a knavish piece of work; but what o’ that? Your majesty, and we that have free souls, it touches us not. Let the galled jade wince, our withers are unwrung” (3.2.229-231), and the *Satyré Menippée*:160-161: “Wherefore it is not without cause, that they have intitled this little discourse, by the name *Satyre*, though that it be written in prose, being yet notwithstanding stuffed and stored with gallant Ironies, prickting notwithstanding and biting the very bottome of the consciences of them, that feele themselves wipped therewithall, concerning whom it speaketh nothing but trueth: but on the other side, making those to burst with laughter, that haue innocent hearts” (*A Satyre Menippized* 203).
sweetnes and goodness” (Smith 2:310). But this *dulce et utile* conception of literary value is not helpful for cases like Marston, whose satire contains very little goodness or sweetness, but rather only heaps of useless scorn. It is a pure indulgence in scorn for its own sake—a representation of, and an invitation to, the pathos of absolute contempt, a luxurious excess of irrational resentment, of piled-up layers of scorn: “Thus scorning scorne of Ideot fooles, I sing” (163). Clearly, a big part of what’s going on in Elizabethan satire has to do with forms of negation: with violent contention, rivalry, and mutual antagonism. Part of the aesthetic value of such aggression lies in its productive inspiration; just as the competition of the Dionysian festivals spurred the ancient tragedians in Greece, so the violent antagonism between satirists seems to have inspired, in cases like Nashe vs. Harvey and Marston vs. Hall, a bitter poetic value that is essentially negative.

The Elizabethans did invoke notions of how such relations of negativity might have value, particularly in social and spiritual contexts; as Nashe says in *Pierce Penniless*: “The only enemy to sloth is contention and emulation, as to propose one man to myself that is the only mirror of our age and strive to outgo him in virtue” (63-64).

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140 Peter, for instance, argues that the real impulse behind Marston’s satire was, whether consciously or not, ultimately not virtuous but a hypocritical species of sadistic or masochistic pathology: “Throughout the whole book he is quite absurdly on the defensive… never ceasing to rail against frailties that seem to have been as prominent in himself as they can have been anywhere…. As we close *The Scourge of Villainie* it is difficult to resist the conclusion that we have been witnessing an utterly insincere and possibly pathological performance” (176).

141 We see powerful examples of such attack-literature in Nashe’s *Strange News* and Marston’s *Scourge*—examples, I would suggest, in which the satirist takes the aesthetic stance of uncommon sense against the polemical adversary (Harvey, Hall).
However, the *aesthetic* value of such negativity is more evident in the Elizabethan practice of literature than their theory of it.\textsuperscript{142} The conventional Renaissance theories of “poesy” largely gloss over the amoral aesthetic value of uncommon sense in satire. Instead of the positive value of goodness or the positive pleasure of beauty, satire should be defended—like the Senecan tragic masterpiece—in terms of the “negative” pleasure of the Kantian sublime, which is based in “a feeling of displeasure at an object” (108).\textsuperscript{143} This “sublime” aesthetic conception of displeasure is a more fruitful way to interpret the predominance of bitter contempt, pain, and violence in the language of Elizabethan satire than the ethical motive pled most often by the satirists themselves, who justify the ubiquitous presence of violent images in their work as a cultural form of corporal punishment, pressed in the service of moral correction. The “scourging” metaphor in Marston, for instance, or in the burst of “whipping” pamphlets, can be understood as an aesthetically sadistic literary practice aiming to produce, like Kant’s sublime, a paradoxically pleasurable form of displeasure.

According to Puttenham, there was an ancient geneology of “reprehensiue” literature through which “the common abuses of mans life was reprehended,” and satire

\textsuperscript{142} Cf. Meres: “As that ship is endaungered where all leane to one side, but is in safetie one leaning one way and another another way: so the dissensions of Poets among themselves doth make them that they lesse infect their readers. And for this purpose our Satyrists Hall, the Author of *Pigmalions Image* and *Certaine Satyres*, …and such others are very profitable. As a Bee doth gather the iuice of honie from flowres, whereas others are onely delighted with the colour and smel, so a Philosopher findeth that among Poets which is profitable for good life, when as others are tickled only with pleasure” (Smith 2:312).

\textsuperscript{143} Kant says that “delight in the sublime... is only *negative* (whereas that in the beautiful is *positive*)” (*CJ* 120).
was the “first and most bitter inujective” (Smith 2:31-32). Likewise in his *Defence of Poetry* Thomas Lodge describes the “Satyers” as “monsters...such as with pleasure reprehended abuse” (Smith 1:80). The constant tension between “bitterness” and “pleasure” in such formulations of satire bears an intriguing resemblance to the paradoxical aesthetic experience that Kant locates in the sublime, which involves both a first-order feeling of displeasure and a second-order feeling of pleasure: “The feeling of the sublime is, therefore, at once a feeling of displeasure..., and a simultaneously awakened pleasure” (106). This aesthetic displeasure that is *on account of that very fact pleasurable* offers a striking analogy to the sado-masochistic production of pleasure through displeasure in work like Marston’s, which I have called aesthetic uncommon sense (“my vexed thoughtfull soule, / Takes pleasure, in displeasing sharp controule...”). This interpretation reveals an essential similarity between the violent displeasure in the aesthetic representations of satiric invective and the sadistic violence in the “aesethetic ideas” behind Seneca’s tragic crimes. Thus, by making Elizabethan satire legible in the same terms as Senecan tragedy, this chapter has paved the way for the next, which will examine the fusion of these two traditions in Marston’s dramatic career.
CHAPTER FOUR
MARSTON’S PHANTASTICKE DRAMA

John Marston combines neo-Senecan tragedy with Elizabethan satire more clearly than any of his contemporaries: he out-Seneca’s Seneca in the bloody masque of Antonio’s Revenge and puts the satirist onstage as the title figure of The Malcontent. And unlike Ben Jonson, for instance, who wrote “comical satyre” (Every Man Out) and neo-Senecan tragedy (Catiline) but kept the two genres separate, Marston indulges his taste for both simultaneously: Antonio from Antonio’s Revenge is a satirical fool as well as a Senecan revenger, and Malevole from The Malcontent is an avenging duke as well as a satirist. Thus Marston plows up the fertile ground where satire and tragedy overlap, and helps sow the seeds of a neo-Senecan “tragical satire” that will bear fruit in Shakespeare’s Troilus and Cressida and Timon of Athens. Most importantly, Marston represents this area of overlap as a realm of uncommon sense, which he calls “phanstasy.”

Senecan Sense in Antonio’s Revenge

Marston conducts an early experiment mixing Senecan tragedy and Elizabethan satire in Antonio’s Revenge. The neo-Senecan influence shows itself particularly in Marston’s systematic parallels, both verbal and structural, with Thystes. “Of all the Elizabethan dramatists,” Cunliffe wrote, Marston “owed the most to Seneca, and was the
readiest to acknowledge his indebtedness” (98). Piero is an obvious example, a tyrant figure cut from a Senecan cloth and spruced up with Senecan quotations.\footnote{“Au moment où Marston écrit ses deux premières tragédies, il est sous l’influence directe de Sénèque: les emprunts qu’il fait au tragique latin sont si nombreux qu’on ne saurait les juger accidentels” (Axelrad 91).} Like most Elizabethan stage tyrants, he is associated with passionate, angry bombast and the “autarkic” selfhood that Gordon Braden has shown to be one of the defining hallmarks of the Senecan tradition in Renaissance tragedy. This aspect appears in the very first speech, where Piero sets the lurid Senecan scene—“howling dogs, nightcrows, and screeching owls”—and then boasts of his unparalleled achievements in Senecan villainy, his nefas or outrageous crime: “Lord, in two hours what a topless mount / Of unpeer’d mischief have these hands cast up! / I can scarce coop triumphing vengeance up / From bursting forth in braggart passion” (1.1.9-12). Piero’s language marks him as a neo-Senecan overreacher in the competitive art of bloody revenge, a “mythical monster” who goes beyond all others.\footnote{“Piero sounds as though he has done a comparative analysis of Senecan atrocities (English and Latin) and has made it a matter of pride to have attained ‘topless villainy’ against such precedents” (Altman 294).} He has the quasi-aesthetic ambition of an artist who crafts his criminal masterpiece in order to be admired, valued—and applauded: “I am great in blood, / Unequal’d in revenge. You horrid scouts / That sentinel swart night, give loud applause / From your large palms” (1.1.17-20).

In addition to such ranting of proud, angry privilege, Piero’s language displays another Senecan quality: that of paradox, the contradiction of logic and of common opinion that I have called rhetorical uncommon sense. This also appears in the opening
tyrant-advisor scene, where Piero plots his next move with his “accomplice,” Strotzo. There is an undercurrent of humor here in the way that Piero keeps demanding and then stifling his accomplice’s verbal report, showing his powerlessness over his own power, his inability to master his own tongue’s relentless impulse to overmaster others. Strotzo enters and tries to unload the prepared speech he is carrying: “My lord, ‘tis firmly said that—” (1.1.13), but immediately is interrupted by the uninterruptible onward flow of Piero’s thoughts and words: “Andrugio sleeps…” etc. This keeps happening: Strotzo’s first ten speeches are all a single line or less, serving merely as momentary punctuations in the extended flowing periods of verse piled up by Piero. The failed opening phrases of Strotzo’s report, half-bitten off, are cut short by the tyrant’s voice: “Duke, ‘tis reported….” Strotzo’s frustration leads to the further humor of his apparent despair at ever getting to deliver the oft-demanded information, as he settles into the monotonous role of supplying one-word answers to Piero’s self-serving rhetorical questions: Piero’s “Could I avoid…?” “Did’st thou ever see…?” “Have I not crushed them…?” “Is’t not rare?” only receive, and only allow for, Strotzo’s monosyllabic responses: “No,” “No,” “Yes,” “Yes.” He is literally playing the part of a “yes man.” (“No! Yes!” says Piero, “Nothing but no and yes, dull lump?” [1.1.83-85].)

In the dramatic irony of this lopsided dialogue the play’s first verbal paradox gains its resonance. In the midst of his boasts, Piero prompts Strotzo to speak and then interrupts to criticize his speaking ability: “Unseasoned sycophant, / Piero Sforza is no numbed lord, / Senseless of all true touch; stroke not the head / Of infant speech till it be fully born” (1.1.30-40). This passage is an example of Marston’s obscure language, his
rhetorical uncommon sense. In this case the obscurity lies not in the meaning of individual words (which, of course, Marston was also infamous for: “glibbery,” “organon,” “defunct,” etc.) but in the syntactic meaning of the larger units of expression that we—and likely also Marston’s first audience—don’t have a familiar purchase on.

When Piero says that he is “no numbed lord, senseless of all true touch,” he is setting the terms for a metaphor in which physical sensitivity (the capacity to “sense” things) stands for rhetorical, linguistic sensitivity (the capacity to appreciate well-wrought language).

“True touch” depends on this sense metaphor and also particularizes it by identifying rhetorical sensitivity with one of the special senses (“touch”). This leads to the verbal paradox: “stroke not the head / Of infant speech till it be fully born.”

Clearly, Piero’s metaphor has gotten mixed. The comparison of rhetorical insensitivity to numbness, and of linguistic sensitivity to a fine sense of feeling, now shifts to a biological metaphor, in which the process of conceiving, forming, and “delivering” a speech is represented in terms of pregnancy: as conceiving, forming, and delivering a child. At the same time, strangely, the “touch” of the initial metaphor is reproduced (pregnant word!) in the image of stroking the head of an unborn baby. This image is perverse in two ways. First, the physical perversity of the tasteless scene conjured, which imagines Strotzo as an incompetent midwife who abandons her duties halfway through the birthing process to pet the bald wet head of the baby partially protruding from the mother’s body.\(^{146}\) Second, the logical perversity of the phrase “infant

\(^{146}\) As Marston says in SV VIII, some images are better left unstated: “so beastly tis I may not vtter it” (154).
speech.” Given the abundant awareness of the semantic possibilities of Latinate diction on display throughout his work—“fulgor” in this same scene, “maculate” in his satires, “sanguinolent” in The Insatiate Countess—Marston surely knows that it is contradictory to represent speech as “infant.” The latter comes from the Latin “infans,” literally “non-speaking”; an infant is a baby who has not yet acquired the power of speech. Thus “infant speech” is a metaphor in which the tenor (speech) is figured by a vehicle (infant) whose very definition is the negation of tenor. It is a verbal contradiction.

While some might call the rhetorical uncommon sense of Piero’s language here simply “Marstonian,” his paradoxical rhetoric later in the play is explicitly Senecan. One example is the first scene of act 2, another dialogue modeled on Seneca’s tyrant-advisor debates. Piero’s interlocutor is not the Machiavelian Strotzo but the Stoic Pandulpho, who declares his inability to play the part of the flattering, two-faced, double-tongued sycophant: “My lord, the clapper of my mouth’s not glibb’d / With court oil; ’twill not strike on both sides yet” (2.1.113-114). Piero replies with a paraphrase from Senecan tragedy: “‘Tis just that subjects act commands of kings,” to which Pandulpho responds with his own commonsense maxim: “Command then just and honorable things” (2.1.115-116). This opens a stichomythic debate in which the advisor and tyrant trade,

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147 See T. S. Eliot’s “Song for Simeon”: “Let the Infant, the still unspeaking and unspoken Word…” (The Complete Poems and Plays 70).

148 This is a paradox emphasized in the Antonio plays: the theme of language expressing the failure of linguistic expression, of words that stick in a speaker’s throat and won’t come out. See Loewenstein, “Marston’s Gorge” (Rasmussen 89-112).

149 Cf. Thyestes 213, “Rex velit honesta.”
respectively, the wise maxims of proverbial common sense and the perverse maxims of paradoxical uncommon sense—which are freely translated from the corresponding scene in the second act of *Thyestes*. Here Marston literally plagiarizes Seneca: for instance, Piero’s paradoxical claim, “True praise the brow of common men doth ring, / False only girts the temple of a king” (2.1.129-130), simply restates Atreus’ maxim, “Laus uera et humili saepe contingit uiro, / non nisi potenti falsa” (211-212). \[150\]

However, even as Marston develops this portrait of neo-Senecan tyranny he can’t help coloring it with a few strokes from Elizabethan satire. We can see this in his use of the gustatory language by which the literary genres were classified in the Renaissance (with, for instance, love sonnets defined as sweet and verse satires defined as bitter). \[151\] Piero has no use for bitter satire; he wants pleasant flattery. In terms of the gustatory range of literature, then, he craves the sweet style of *mel* rather that the bitter style of *fel*. \[152\] He illustrates this by yelling at Strotzo, “Canst thou not honey me with fluent speech / And even adore my topless villainy?” (1.1.84-85). If Piero here makes it clear that he wants to enjoy the pleasant sweetness of flattering speech, he later makes it clear

\[150\] The highest praise for Piero, as for Atreus, is not true praise (*laus vera*) but false praise (*laus falsa*). In the paradoxical logic of the Senecan tyrant, it is precisely the falseness of false praise that he believes in: he only credits it insofar as he knows it is false (false praise is coerced, and this coercion is a testament to his power).

\[151\] Piero hints at this in the first scene when he criticizes Strotzo as an “unseasoned sycophant” (1.1.37). This implies that Strotzo has none of the mental “sharpness” or *sal* that was identified with witty literature such as epigrams, Horatian satire, and *The Praise of Folly*, which is “seasoned with a dash of wit” (*nec insulsis*).

\[152\] The name of Marston’s heroine, Mellida, is “intended to suggest ‘honey’ or ‘sweet’, from the Latin *mel*, perhaps by association with the form *mellitus*-a, used by Plautus and others, to mean ‘honey sweet’ or ‘darling’” (Gair 58). Marston may allude to this derivation when Mellida dies, and Maria exclaims, “Alas, sweet maid!” (4.1.284).
that he doesn’t like the saltiness, tartness, or bitterness of critical speech—he doesn’t like
the sal, acetum, or fel range of literary flavors that are dominant in Elizabethan satire
such as Marston’s “sower” tone, “tart poesie,” and “bitter numbers.” In the terms later
made famous by King Lear, Piero has a decided preference for the “sweet fool” over the
satirical “bitter fool”:

O, your unsalted fresh fool is your only man;
These vinegar tart spirits are too piercing,
Too searching in the unglued points of shaken wits.
Find they a chink, they’ll wriggle in and in,
And eat like salt sea in his siddow ribs
Till they have opened all his rotten parts
Unto the vaunting surge of base contempt,
And sunk the tossed galleas in depth
Of whirlpool scorn. (4.1.114-122)

This passage develops the same disorderly yet exhilarating contortion in its extended
mixed metaphor that we saw in Piero’s speech on “true touch” stroking the head of
“infant speech.” He combines the gustatory metaphor of literary flavors with the
maritime metaphor of the polis as a “ship of state.” (The quality of saltiness serves as the
middle term linking the two metaphors: it joins the biting “salty” flavor of the satirical
fool with the “salty” corrosive water of the rough ocean.) In preferring the “unsalted fresh
fool” to the “vinegar tart spirits,” Piero condemns the literary flavors that Scaliger
classified as sal and acetum, and although he doesn’t mention the two opposite extremes,
mel and fel, we have already seen Piero’s taste for mel; he wants to be “honeyed with
fluent speech.” Thus we can infer that he likes mel most of all and fel least of all.

Ironically, Piero’s speech here describes Antonio, who in the disguise of a
harmless, uncomprehending fool spends his time going “puff, puff” and blowing bubbles.
Piero likes him because Antonio betrays no whiff of salty, briny, sour, or bitter qualities: he is a “freshwater” fool. But of course Antonio is only putting on a sweet face in order to catch Piero unawares. This fact emerges later, when Antonio is about to enact the bloody Senecan catastrophe under cover of a courtly masked performance. Settled down to enjoy the evening’s entertainment, Piero again expresses his preference for *mel*, for sweets: “Bring hither suckets, candied delicates. / We’ll taste some sweetmeats, gallants, ere we sleep” (5.3.50-51). Here “sweet” is meant literally, but Antonio translates it into the figurate terms of the gustatory metaphor in his ironic aside: “We’ll cook your sweetmeats, gallants, with tart sour sauce” (5.3.52). This reintroduces the unpleasant flavors associated with satire and the satirical fool: his preference for “tart sour sauce” reveals Antonio to be precisely one of the “vinegar tart spirits” that Piero dislikes.

Antonio’s “tart sour sauce” echoes the description of bitter poetry that we observed in the satire of Marston’s friend Guilpin: “he for meat mistook an Epigram, / For though it be no cates, sharp sauce it is, / To lickerous vanity, youth’s sweet amisse. / But oh the Satyre hath a nobler vaine, / He’s the strappado, rack, and some such pain...” (61). Indeed, Marston’s revengers make the same transition in their bitter language of vengeance that Marston’s satirical comrade makes in turning from the epigram as a “sharp sauce” to satire as a painful “strappado” and “rack.” After Antonio declares that he will cook Piero’s sweetmeats in a “tart sour sauce,” the ghost of Andrugio (Antonio’s father) observes, “Here will I sit, spectator of revenge, / And glad my ghost in anguish of my foe” (5.3.53-54). This line introduces a meta-dramatic element of aesthetic satisfaction: the ghost will enjoy watching the show as a “spectator.” It is a perversive,
sadistic pleasure like the aesthetic uncommon sense of Elizabethan satire: it will take pleasure in the production of displeasure in others. But the torture that is only figurative in Guilpin’s “strappado” and “rack” or Marston’s Scourge is rendered literal in the process of violent abuse that envelops Piero: “Murder and torture” (5.3.63). It is the literal violence of Senecan tragedy, a monstrous crime that aims to outdo all precedents in its gory attention to detail: the avengers “bind” Piero and tear out his tongue, and then Antonio, reinforcing the play’s pervasive parallels with Thyestes, serves Piero the limbs of his slaughtered son in a dish as the culminating main course in this banquet of Senecan revenge warmed over: “Fall to, good duke. O these are worthless cates. / You have no stomach to them. Look here, look here: / Here lies a dish to feast thy father’s gorge” (5.3.77-79). At this point, Antonio manifests his revenge as a literal embodiment of the bitter food of satire; he reveals himself to be not an “unsalted” fool but a truly bitter one. He also reveals himself as an Elizabethan descendent of the Senecan avenger, a mythical “monster” equal to Atreus. In this respect he has displaced Piero, taking over the Atreus-role that the latter was rehearsing. Antonio has quite literally turned the tables on his enemy, rendering Piero a Thyestes-figure who is served the flesh of his own son.

Thus Antonio figures as a crucial early example of the fusion of Elizabethan satire and Senecan tragedy in Marston’s drama, a figure of the wish-fulfillment of both traditions. On one hand, Antonio achieves the purging of a corrupt society, the aim of the bitter Elizabethan satirist: he is “another Hercules... / In ridding huge pollution from our state” (5.3.129-130). On the other hand, in Act 5 he also achieves his final baptism as the

\[^{153}\] He will “take pleasure in displeasing sharp control.”
Senecan hero-villain that has been in gestation for much of the play and is now “fully born.” We see its moment of conception in the third act when the ghost of his father appears, instructing Antonio to revenge him. The ghost says,

rousing up thy blood,  
Invent some stratagem of vengeance  
Which, but to think on, may like lightning glide  
With horror through thy breast. Remember this:  
Scelera non ulcisceris, nisi vincis. (3.1.47-51)

The ghost’s last line is a direct quotation from Atreus in *Thyestes*, a perverse Senecan maxim that Marston’s Hamlet-figure must “remember” for the rest of the play. The ghost’s paradoxical proposition—“You don’t avenge crimes if you don’t outdo them” (or more freely, “You can only pay back crimes by going bankrupt”)—is a specimen of the rhetorical uncommon sense of Senecan tragedy. By adopting it as his personal motto, Antonio professes a concept of revenge whose paradoxical formulation contradicts conventional wisdom.

The first fruit of Antonio’s perverse neo-Senecan vocation is the murder of Piero’s little boy, Julio. Antonio reiterates the *Thyestes* parallel when he finds himself alone with the helpless, innocent victim, and again quotes Atreus: “I do adore thy justice:  
venit in nostras manus / Tandem vindicta, venit et tota quidem” (3.1.151-152)  
[Vengeance has finally come within my grasp, and come all in one piece]. Antonio has now fully assumed the voice and role of Atreus. Not only is the Thyestean murder neo-

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*154 Antonio must take the Senecan maxim to heart, inscribe it permanently in the tables of his memory. Indeed he memorizes whole passages from Seneca’s play; a few moments later, he quotes 8 lines more from *Thyestes*, and concludes with an addition by which he reiterates the earlier ulcisceris: “Ulciscar” (3.1.73) [I will avenge].*
Senecan as signaled by the Atreus quotation, but it is a perverse inversion or mirror-image of the Roman *sensus communis*. In his prose, Seneca defines “common sense” as a convenient sense of fitness or decorum, a propriety in which time, place, and persons are in accordance.\(^{155}\) Finding himself alone with the vulnerable son of his enemy—observing the perfect time, the perfect place, the perfect person for his revenge—Antonio articulates a tragic perversion of that formula:

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\begin{align*}
\text{I will laugh and dimple my thin cheek} \\
\text{With cap’ring joy; chuck, my heart doth leap} \\
\text{To grasp thy bosom. Time, place, and blood,} \\
\text{How fit you close together!} \quad (3.1.155)
\end{align*}
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In such moments, Antonio combines the rhetorical uncommon sense of Senecan tragedy with the aesthetic uncommon sense of Elizabethan satire.\(^{156}\) But the fusion remains very crude in this play.

As we will see, however, Marston unites Elizabethan satire and Senecan tragedy by means of a more sophisticated representation of uncommon sense when he writes *The Malcontent*. In order to give an account of this uncommon sense, I will first address Marston’s use of two terms: “sense” and “phantasy.” By tracing the development of these

\(^{155}\) “Let there be... common sense; one should observe time, place, persons” (*De Beneficiis* 1.12.3: *Sit... sensus communis; tempus, locum observet, personas*). Cf. *Twelfth Night*, “Is there no respect of place, persons, nor time in you?” (2.3.86), and *Othello*, “The time, the place, the torture, O, enforce it!” (5.2.379).

\(^{156}\) Antonio proclaims the same perverse pride in his crime that we see in the megalomania of Seneca’s hero-villains, a monstrous, pathological form of the sublime: “O, my soul’s enthron’d / In the triumphant chariot of revenge. / Methinks I am all air and feel no weight / Of human dirt clog. This is Julio’s blood; / Rich music, father!” (3.2.80-84). Where Piero was before the “peerless” neo-Senecan villain, Antonio is now competing for the same title: “be peerless in revenge” (3.2.91).
two keywords in Marston’s satires, we can see how he creates a poetics of “phantasticknesse” that serves in *The Malcontent* to unite the raging satirist and the Senecan madman.

A Strange Consensus: “Sense” in Marston’s Satires

To appreciate how Marston’s work celebrates uncommon sense we must first consider the ways in which he uses the term “sense” itself. For Marston, *sense* functions as a complex word that can signify various physical, mental, and rhetorical processes.\(^{157}\) Sometimes Marston uses “sense” as a physiological term, referring to the biology of appetite as opposed to intellect. This is perhaps clearest in the couplet that ends “A Cynicke Satyre” in the *Scourge of Villainie* (*SV VII*): “Beasts *sence*, plants *growth*, like being as a stone, / But out alas, our *Cognisance* is gone” (146). Here, Marston invokes the hierarchical, concentric neo-Aristotelian classification of souls (or formal organization of living things), according to the level of animate function proper to each class. In addition to the mere *being* that a “stone” possesses, “plants” possess the vegetative function (*growth*) of the nutritive soul, “beasts” possess the appetitive function (*sence*) of the sensitive soul, and human beings possess (or at least should possess) the intellectual function (*cognisance*) of the rational soul.\(^{158}\)

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\(^{157}\) Empson says that “the word is regularly used in contexts where it could be replaced by ‘judgement’” and that “in modern English we have accepted this shift of meaning very completely for the grammatical form *sense* used alone; we take it only to mean ‘good judgement’, except so far as we insert a secondary idea, that this is arrived at through the senses” (257). But in Marston’s language this “shift” is still in process.

\(^{158}\) See Davenport’s commentary (338).
Elsewhere, however, “sense” refers not to appetitive functions but to intellectual powers of judgment. In “Reactio,” presented as a counter-attack against Hall’s attack on poetry, Marston defends the value of older verse from the criticism of the “academic” critic and his “modern” rules of decorum:

it greeueth me  
An Academick should so senceles be.  
Fond Censurer! why should those mirrors seeme  
So vile to thee? which better judgement deeme  
Exquisite then, and in our polish’d times  
May run for sencefull tollerable lines. (83)

Here, the term “sense” is being used in at least two ways. In “senseless,” the term refers to the rational, intellectual capacity for making sound judgments: the “senseless” academic lacks what the “better judgments” possess (presumably good sense or common sense). In “senseful,” however, it refers to the coherence of linguistic meaning: unlike the obscure poem whose reader must “grope for sense,” the older poetry in question (presumably the Mirror for Magistrates) contains “sencefull tollerable lines” because they will “make sense” to a competent reader. Thus, Marston sometimes uses “sense” to name something whose ontological status is not physical or mental but rhetorical. For instance, when he describes himself reading Hall’s “modern satyre,” Marston says that he

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159 See Kant: “The fact that the word ‘sense’ … is used so often as a synonym for ‘thought’ should indicate that it is of a higher level than that of thinking. Consequently, we have expressions which say that something contains a rich or profound sense…, and sound human understanding is also called common sense, and is placed on the highest level, although this expression really denotes only the lowest level of the cognitive faculty” (APPV 58).

160 See Empson: “the main meanings of the word already existed in Latin, and were therefore well known before the Restoration. The use of sensus for ‘good judgement’ is classical; that for ‘meaning’ comes in Augustan poets but not in prose till later” (263).
is “groping for some sence / To know to what his words haue reference” (72). Here, Marston uses “sense” and “reference” in the same way that analytic philosophers do in talking about the meaning and referentiality of language.

These ambiguities in “sense” underlie some paradoxes in Marston’s language that seem on the surface to be simply contradictory. For instance, playing the part of the skeptical cynic Marston satirizes the “senselesse, sensuall Epicure” (141). These two adjectives affirm and deny the same quality of the same subject: the Epicure is characterized both by the absence of sense (“senseless”) and by the presence of sense (“sensuall”). Thus, the Epicure has no “sense” in the form of intellectual comprehension because his existence is wholly wrapped up in “sense” in the form of physiological apprehension: “He’s nought but clothes, & senting sweete perfume. / His very soule... / Is not so big as an Atomus: / Nay, he is sprightlesse, sence or soule hath none...” (141). Of course, the claim that the Epicure has no “sense or soul” at all is an exaggeration; the point is that he neglects the “intellectual” sense proper to his rational soul while indulging in the “sensual” sense of his animal soul. Thus the Epicure stands as one instance of the type that is the main object of Marston’s satirical critique: the condition where the “lustre wherewith natures Nature decked / Our intellectual part, that glosse is soyled / With... / ... muddy durt of sensualitie” (140).

This theme is continued in “Inamorato Curio” (SV VIII), which focuses on one figure of such beastly sensuality: the aspiring playboy or lovesick paramour (he is called

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161 The idea is repeated later in this poem: “He hath no soule, the which the Stagerite / Term’d rationall, for beastly appetite, / Base dunghill thoughts, and sensuall action / Hath made him loose that faire creation” (142). Marston here explicitly refers to the “rational soul” in Aristotle’s 3-leveled model (nutritive, sensitive, rational).
“womans slaue‖) who wastes his time—and ultimately his “spright” (spirit)—in the pursuit of romantic pleasure. This satire develops the complex meanings of “sense” in fascinating ways through the paradoxical opposition of “sense” and “sensuality.” As the poem unfolds, the social landscape of the first half gives way to the psychological landscape of the second half: the impulse to make a mental “diagnosis” takes over. The raving “madness” of the lover is situated in what first seems a rather crude body/soul dichotomy, but then morphs into a more complicated sensual-intellectual opposition, where the decisive contrast is not so much between the soul and something else (“spirit” vs. “matter”), but between different aspects of the soul (the “intellectual” capacities of the rational soul vs. the “sensual” capacities of the sensitive or appetite soul): “O franticke fond pathetique passion! / Ist possible such sensuall action / Should clip the wings of contemplation?” (153). Eventually, Marston turns from describing the symptoms of this pathology to describing its cause: “But now I see, and can right plainly show / From whence such abiect thoughts & actions grow” (156). His diagnosis spills over the rest of the poem and is well worth quoting at length. It is probably the fullest expression Marston gives to the psychological model that underlies most of the moralizing commentary in his satire, and indeed much of his drama as well: this “essential plot” is the skeleton inside all of the fleshed-out portraits of degradation, vice, and folly that make up the textual scenery of the Scourge. It suggests why “sense” plays such an ambiguous yet important role in Marston’s work:

Our aduerse body, beeing earthly, cold,
Heauie, dull, mortall, would not long infold
A stranger inmate, that was backwards still
To all his dungie, brutish, sensuall will:
Now here-vpon our Intellectuall,
Compact of fire all celestiall,
Invisible, immortall, and diuine,
Grew straight to scorne his Land-lordes muddy slime.
And therefore now is closely slunke away
...leauing the sensuall
Base hangers on, lusking at home in slime....
Now doth the body ledde with sencelesse will,
(The which in reasons absence ruleth still)
Raue, talke idle, as’t were some deitie
Adoring female painted puppetry
Playing at put-pin, doting on some glasse
(Which breath’d but on his falsed glosse doth passe)
Toying with babies, and with fond pastime
Some childrens sport, deflowring of chast time,
Imploying all his wits in vaine expence,
Abusing all his organons of sence. (156-157)

The first obvious feature of this passage is the binary opposition between the body and
the soul and their attendant contrasting qualities (the former “earthly, cold, heavy, dull,
 mortal”; the latter “of fire all celestial, invisible, immortal, and divine”). This static set of
oppositions is conventional, but when it is set in motion by the plot of Marston’s
archetypal myth, it becomes more subtle, complex and fascinating—and more
paradoxical. Thus, the story goes: in the beginning the human being was a compound of
two contrary things, the body and the soul, which because of their contrary natures
separated like oil and water. The intellectual soul “scorns” the brutish body, which is then
left to wallow in filth while the “Intellectuall” stands aloof, and the result of this
psychological divorce is the self-divided, sub-human being targeted in Marston’s satire:
“the body led with senseless will.” This phrase suggests, however, that we cannot read
Marston’s myth as a simple antagonism between the body and soul, because the end
result is still a body led by a will. But it is a will that lacks “sense.” Thus we should read
Marston’s poetry not in terms of a proto-Cartesian radical dualism, but in terms of the neo-Aristotelian model popular with Renaissance authors. In this model psychic conflict is not so much between the body qua body and soul qua soul, but rather between the “animal” concerns of the sensitive soul and the “intellectual” concerns of the rational soul. And the term “sense” is a locus for this conflict because Marston uses it to signify both of the opposing sides: “sense” refers both to the passionate impulses of the sensitive soul and the intellectual powers of the rational soul.\(^{162}\)

This tension between the sensual and intellectual connotations of “sense” makes room for an aesthetic resonance in the term. We can see this artistic connotation emerging in Marston’s very first published work, the erotic neoclassical Ovidian poem *Pigmalian*, which tells the story of the sculptor who fashions a beautiful stone woman, falls in love with this image, and then successfully prays to Venus to give the statue life. In this work, “sense” stands not only for a negative form of sensual self-deception, but a positive form of artistic fiction, of aesthetic fantasy and *play*. In stanza 17 Pygmalion fondles the statue, imagining her a real woman: “His eyes, her eyes, kindly encountered, / His breast, her breast, oft ioyned close Vnto, / His armes embracements oft she suffered, / Hands, armes, eyes, tongue, lips, and all parts did woe [woo].” But immediately he realizes that these impressions are mistaken, as described in stanza 18: “he saw poore

\(^{162}\) This is reinforced in Satire 5 from *Certaine Satyres*: “Promethius, who celestall fyer / Did steale from heauen, therewith to inspire / Our earthly bodies with a sence-full mind” (87). This “celestial fire” is synonymous with the “sacred *Synderesis*,” the “divine spark” that Marston invokes in *SV* VIII as “our Intellectual, / Compact of fire all celestiall” (156). Where the presence of the Promethean “celestial fyer” in the former inspired human “bodies with a sence-full mind” (87), the absence of the “fire all celestiall” in the latter results in “the body ledde with senceles will” (157).
soule he was deceaued, / (Yet scarce he could beleue his sence had failed)” (56). Here “sense” represents the sensory perceptions that have led him astray, the powers of the sensitive soul that have overcome the judgment of his rational soul. Pygmalion’s behavior foreshadows that of the “senseless will” divorced from reason in the satires. Pygmalion is adoring a carved female sculpture, like the sensualist who is “Adoring female painted puppetry.” Pygmalion is, like the sensualist, “Abusing all his organons of sence” (157).

The self-abuse or self-deception in Pygmalion’s fantasizing, however, is not contained within the fictional character but implicates the author himself: on some level it is a self-portrait of Marston, the fantasizing poet. In *Pigmalion* the hero’s sensual daydreaming is fairly obviously identified with Marston’s own creative activity (the statue is the object of Pygmalion’s deluded sensory representations, which the sculptor brings into being, just as the poem is the object of Marston’s deluded sensory representations, which the poet brings into being). Thus, when Pygmalion makes his invocation to Venus in stanza 22, its efficacy is prepared by a magical trance in which the artist deliberately deranges or distracts his sensory faculties: “On his knees he all his senses charms” (57). In his later satire, Marston uses the same image to describe how he himself deranges his senses and charms his own faculties of perception: “Inchauntment... hath rauished my sense / In a poetic vaine circumference” (166). Marston’s parallel with Pygmalion is deep: not only is the poet engaged in a self-derangement analogous to the sculptor’s disorder of his senses, but in both cases this enchantment is represented as a response to being infatuated with the object of one’s own artistic representation, with the
“substance” of the aesthetic form itself. “I am seduced with this poesie” (165). This ironic identification highlights Marston’s complicity with the playful self-delusion of “sense” that he criticizes in his satires. For instance, the phrase “Abusing all his organons of sense” is an infamous example of Marston’s tendency to indulge in ludicrously inventive language, the “obscurity” or rhetorical uncommon sense distinctive of Elizabethan satire. Thus, the line enacts the very mental “toying” at the level of literary style that the passage criticizes at the level of social behavior: it employs “wit” in vain expense as a sort of poetic form of conspicuous consumption; it is an “abuse” of linguistic sense.163

*Phantasia Complexa: Marston’s Poetics of Phantasy*

While the sensualist is “Playing at put-pin, doting on some glasse,” “Toying with babies” in “fond pastime” and “children’s sport” (156-157), the satirist is also daydreaming, producing poetry that is the “toy of an empty braine, / Some scurrill iests, light gew-gawes, fruitlesse, vaine” (163). Likewise, where the sensualist is “deflowring of chast time, / Imploying all his wits in vaine expence,” the satirist says, “I (poore soule) abuse chast virgin Time, / Deflowring her with vnconceiued rime” (163). In both cases the playful, fantastic misuse of one’s time is portrayed as a rape or seduction, in which the sensualist and the satirist expend time and energy in a degrading manner, as if each

163 For this reason it is ridiculed by Jonson in *Poetaster*, where the verse of Crispinus (Marston) is read aloud by Tucca: “No; teach thy incubus to poetize; / And throw abroad thy spurious snotteries, / Upon that puffed-up lump of barmy froth… / Or clumsy chilblained judgment; that, with oath, / Magnificates his merit; and bespawls / The conscious time, with humorous foam, and brawls, / As if his organons of sense would crack / The sinews of my patience” (2:211-212). This parody illuminates Marston’s style, sharpened and magnified (even as it is distorted) by the lens of an egomanical Elizabethan Cyclopean monocle: the prescriptive perspective of Jonson.
minute spent mooning over a beautiful woman or polishing a new poem were the
equivalent of a minute spent in shameless sexual conquest, taking a virgin (by force?) for
no other reason than to see if one can. Thus the sensualist’s social pathology is reflected
in the satirist’s mental pathology, his psychological uncommon sense.

However, the image of the sensualist as a voraciously devouring, deflowering
rapist or raptor is inverted by the image of the poet himself as seduced or raped, stolen
away and ravished by a specifically aesthetic rapture (also from the Latin rapio). And the
key term for this sensual-intellectual rapture—this enthusiasm in which Marston finds
himself “getting carried away” by aesthetic uncommon sense—is phantasy. Marston
associates inspiration with the phantasy as an irrational, yet sublime faculty of the soul. In
“Inamorato Curio,” for instance, Marston says, “Me thinkes the spirits Pegase Fantasie /
Should hoise the soule from such base slauery” (156). These lines point to the mobile
status of “phantasy” in Marston’s work as a complex word that can move, like “sense,” to
either side of the hierarchical dividing line between the “base” functions of the sensitive
soul and the “sublime” functions of the intellectual soul.164 Furthermore, the image of the

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164 Davenport suggests that Marston is borrowing, as he often does, from Comes’
Mythologia (346-347). Comes describes Pegasus as lofty and high-seeking, as “sublime”
(500, Pegasus nunc sublimis, nunc depressus per aera volans, in coelum denique rediit in
Iouis praesepe). Indeed, this “sublime” quality is emphasized in the Mythologia passage
that Davenport cites: “In his astrology, Lucian interprets [Pegasus] to be the soul of
Bellerophon, raised to the speculation of sublime things, that is credited as a winged
horse and thus passed down in the fables” (500, Lucianus in astrologia sensit animum
Bellerophontis ad sublimium rerum speculationem elatum equum fuisset creditum alatum,
atque ita rem fabulis inuolutam.) A 1627 French translation of Comes has: “Lucian en
son Astrologie estime que Bellerophon ayant le courage attentif à de grandes & hautes
enterprises, eut la reputation d’estre monté sur vn cheual aislé, & que de là veint la Fable”
(979) [Lucian in his Astrology judges that Bellerophon, having a spirit keen on great and
phantasy as Pegasus embodies a concept at the heart of Marston’s aesthetic uncommon sense: a “phantasticknesse” that is simultaneously sublime and irrational. It symbolizes Marston’s own practice of poetry as an irrational activity, sublime through its opposition to reason. His is a poetics of inspired “enthusiasm,” a furor poeticus. This can be seen in Marston’s contribution to the Love’s Martyr collection, where he invokes phantasy in an explicitly literary context:

Now yeeld your aides, you spirites that infuse
A sacred rapture, light my weaker eie:
Raise my inuention on swift Phantasie,
That…
My Muse may mount with an vncommon wing. (177)

On one hand, this passage implicitly recalls the figure of Pegasus: the phantasy that is “swift” and that enables Marston to “mount with an uncommon wing” recalls the swift winged horse, the “spirits Pegase” which is, in the French translation of Comes, “monté sur vn cheual aisle.” On the other hand, where the image of phantasy was in the Pegasus passage only an indirect portrait of the artist, it is now a self-conscious reflection of the poet summoning a literary sublimity (“my inuention,” “My Muse”).

The broader Renaissance understanding behind this association of the sublime image of Pegasus with the “sacred rapture” of the poet is sketched out by Marston’s lofty enterprises, had the reputation of being mounted on a winged horse, and that the fable comes from that].

165 For an interesting parallel, see chapter 15 of Longinus’ On the Sublime, on the imagination or “Images.” Longinus says that “as a result of enthusiasm and emotion, you think you are gazing at what you are describing” (87); he mentions Cassandra as an example of enthusiasm, and sees in Phaethon a reflection of the poet’s Pegasus-like soul: “the soul of the writer steps up into the chariot with the boy and, sharing the danger with him, wings his way with the horses” (90).
occasional ally, Ben Jonson. In his *Discoveries* Jonson discusses “naturall wit” (*ingenium*) and cites Seneca’s notion of a literary “rapture” (“Seneca saith... *insani*... *jucundum esse*; by which hee understands, the *Poetical Rapture*”). Discussing this rapture as a mental disturbance (again citing Seneca, “*mota mens*”), Jonson portrays it—like the “swift Phantasie” in Marston’s “sacred rapture”—as a sublime Pegasus that carries away the poetic psyche: it “riseth higher, as by a divine Instinct” and “it gets a loft, and flies away with his Ryder.” Jonson concludes, “This the *Poets* understood by their *Helicon, Pegasus, or Parnassus*” (637). This account of the “poetical rapture” is a more idealized version of the irrational frenzy that Jonson (along with others) elsewhere calls *furor poeticus* and associates with Marston’s raging style of satirical invective.\(^{166}\)  

The tradition of literary inspiration as a rapture or *furor poeticus* underlies Marston’s identification of aesthetic phantasy with a sublimely deranged imagination, with the uncommon sense of enthusiasm.\(^{167}\) Alessandro Schiesaro points out that the “connection

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\(^{166}\) In *Every Man Out* the satirical Asper—a Marstonian figure described as “a madman”—delivers a lengthy satirical rant, and then Cordatus—the “author’s friend” who is associated with psychological common sense in his role as “a moderator”—responds, “Why this is right *furor poeticus*!” (Wilkes 1:284, 289). The anonymous Elizabethan play, *The Return from Parnassus* (cf. Jonson’s “*Pegasus, or Parnassus*”) also contains a parody of the young Marston as “Furor Poeticus.” This character gives several speeches that mock the bombastic and arrogant language of Marston’s satire: “By that celestial fire within my brain, / That gives a living genius to my lines, / However my dulled intellectual /Capers less nimbly than it did afore; / Yet will I play a hunts-up to my muse, / And make her mount from out her sluggish nest, / As high as is the highest sphere in heaven” (170-171); “You grandsire Phoebus... / Inspire me straight with some rare delicacies, / Or I’ll dismount thee from thy radiant coach, / And make thee poor Cutchy here on earth” (171). As we will see, this parody of Marston’s poetic inspiration as an invocation of Phoebus is right on target.

\(^{167}\) See Kant: “If a person habitually fails (by daydreaming) to compare his imagination with the laws of experience, he is a visionary.... If he does so because of emotional
between poetry and furor (in the sense of enthousiasmos or ‘divine madness’) dates back to Democritus and Plato‖ (Braund and Gill 98). Likewise James Biester quotes a 1599 English text describing “a kinde of divine ravishment, commonly called Enthousiasma” (77). In the subsection of the Anatomy of Melancholy on “Dotage, Madness, Frenzy,” Burton writes: “Of this fury there be divers kinds: ecstasy..., in which the Indian priests deliver their oracles.... The other species of this fury are enthusiasms, revelations, and visions..., sibylline prophets, and poetical furies” (1:140-141). These enthusiasms—prophetic visions or literary raptures—are typically associated with the imagination or “fantasy.” Thus, Burton includes literary production in his discussion of the imagination: “In poets and painters imagination forcibly works, as appears by their several fictions, antics, images” (1:159). For many readers this last sentence will call to mind Theseus’ description of poetic inspiration in the irrational imagination:

Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
More than cool reason ever comprehends.
The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
Are of imagination all compact. (5.1.4-8)

Burton’s claim that in poets “imagination forcibly works” resonates with Shakespeare’s description of “strong imagination,” the “fine frenzy” by which poets are possessed in the excitement, he is an enthusiast. Unexpected fits of the stricken person are called attacks of fancy (raptus).... Insanity accompanied by emotional excitement is called madness. It is often present from the beginning, but it may also spring up unexpectedly like poetic inspiration (furor poeticus), and in such cases it may border on genius” (APPV 97-98).

168 In his essay “On the Shortness of Life,” Seneca himself refers to poetarum furor, “the madness of poets” (Basore 2:340).

169 Biester quotes a 1607 text describing “the enthusiasticall breath of poetry, the foyson of our phantasies” (78).
process of inspiration. As the tradition of poetic derangement makes clear, it is precisely
the fact that the imagination is not coterminous with, and hence not subjected to, reason
per se that establishes its unique value—in a “seething brain” the imagination can
“apprehend more than cool reason ever comprehends.”

In the same spirit, Marston offers his own celebration of the imagination in What
You Will, in an encomium on “Phantasticknesse.” In this passage phantasy takes on the
sacred, lofty status that is usually reserved for the divine spark of reason: phantasy usurps
the latter’s rightful place of predominance in the hierarchical model of the soul.170

Phantasticknesse,
That which the naturall Sophysters tearme
Phantasia incomplexa, is a function
Even of the bright immortal part of man.
It is the common passe, the sacred dore,
Unto the prive chamber of the soule:
That bar’d: nought passeth past the baser Court
Of outward sence: by it th’ inamorate
Most lively thinkes he sees the absent beauties
Of his lov’d mistres.
By it we shape a new creation,
Of things as yet unborne, by it wee feede
Our ravenous memory, our intention feast:
Slid he thats not Phantasticall’s a beast. (2:250)

Marston’s account of the phantasia incomplexa is in many ways parallel to Shakespeare’s
account of “strong imagination,” but it is much more obscure and convoluted. Its
language of phantasticknesse is muddled by seeming paradox. First, the passage
emphasizes the uncertain status of the phantasy in its ambiguous location somewhere
between the senses and the intellect. Phantasy belongs neither to the “base” court of

170 Geckle points out that “the fantasy was considered to be a faculty of the sensible
soul and hence inferior to reason or understanding, a faculty of the rational soul” (99).
external sense nor to the “privy” chamber of the soul; it is rather “the common pass, the sacred dore.” But the simple equation between these phrases implied by their parallel syntax is contradicted by their opposed meanings: rather than synonyms, “common” and “sacred” are antonyms. Second, Marston’s description of the phantasy as a “common pass” through which the impressions of “outward” sense are transferred to the psyche’s inner “chamber” makes it sounds like another faculty: the common sense. “In Marston’s model, … the ‘common sense’ and fantasy are identical” (Bednarz 173). Thus the passage renders the two faculties indistinguishable, collapsing both in one complicatedly “uncomplex” (incomplexa) term. This realignment of phantasy with common sense is a paradoxical move insofar as it contradicts the common opinion that these two “inner senses” are distinct and that their adjectival qualities are in fact contrary (i.e., the “fantastic” is the opposite of the commonsensical). Finally, this praise of the phantasia incomplexa clashes with a speech from the play’s Induction, which asserts that “Musike and Poetry were first approv’d / By common scence” (2:232). If the latter passage

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171 One of Marston’s colleagues at the Inns of Court, John Davies, treats the imagination and common sense as synonymous in Nosce Teipsum—“The Imagination or common sense” (40)—while also implying that the imagination and fantasy are different.

172 Paradoxically, Marston introduces the term as if established by scholastic precedent, but as Caputi observes, “phantasia incomplexa” does not appear in earlier writers: “Quadratus’ term… seems to be Marston’s own coinage. Although dozens of distinctions were made with reference to the phantasia…, none of the authorities on the subject mentions the phantasia incomplexa” (169-170, note). The term yokes the Greek word for “imagination” and a Latin word for non-complex or “simple.” Thus it is an example of the rhetorical uncommon sense or innovative “obscure” language associated with Elizabethan satire in general and Marston in particular.

173 See Phantastes and Communis Sensus in Lingua, for instance.
suggests that the authority of artistic representation originates in the consensus of a neo-Roman *sensus communis*, the speech on “phantasticknesse” suggests that all art is grounded in the extravagance of an eccentric *phantasia*.\(^\text{174}\)

Such contradictions, however, are not proof that Marston doesn’t “stand behind” what the *phantasia incomplexa* passage says. In fact, its paradoxical treatment of phantasy reflects the “systematic” inconsistencies in Marston’s language of sense, which is repeatedly tugged between the realm of intellectual sublimity and the realm of base sensuality; its praise of phantasy as an agent of elevation matches the earlier representations of phantasy as the “spirit’s Pegasus” and as the “sacred rapture” of inspiration. Therefore the ironic undercutting in this hyperbolic praise of the *phantasia incomplexa* is at least counterbalanced (and perhaps outright outweighed) by the fact that it is seconded by what Marston says about the phantasy elsewhere and, more importantly, what Marston actually *does* in much of his work—which strains, with well-documented stumbles and awkward missteps, to embody the ideal of “phantasticknesse” that is here articulated.\(^\text{175}\) For Marston, the quality of phantasy offers a powerful alternative literary ideal to the more orthodox poetics of common sense (the “common scence” by which “*Musike and Poetry* were first approv’d”). And it is in the literary phantasy of *The Malcontent* that Marston most fully realizes this ideal of uncommon sense. With the figure of Malevole, he creates a form of deranged phantasy unique both in its intensity

\(^{174}\) Steggle observes that “Quadratus starts off with a definition of ‘fantastical’ in terms of contemporary fads and fashions, and modulates from that into a celebration of the fantasy as a part of the organic soul” (2000, 50).

\(^{175}\) See Marston’s self-description as a “seriously fantastical” writer in the preface to *Antonio and Mellida*. 
and in its generic sophistication: in the *dementia* of his enthused imagination, Malevole fuses the *furor poeticus* of Elizabethan satire with the *furor* of Senecan tragedy.

*Phantasia Vesana: Cassandra’s Sublime Dementia*

Where *Antonio’s Revenge* incorporates numerous general features of Senecan tragedy, Marston’s representation of phantasy in *The Malcontent* reproduces one in particular: the visionary *furor* of the deranged prophet Cassandra. To make this case I will reexamine the Senecan allusions in Marston’s preface to *The Malcontent* and situate these allusions in relation to Seneca’s portrayal of Cassandra. Then I will offer a Senecan reading of Malevole himself.

The play is more profoundly Senecan than scholars have acknowledged.\(^{176}\) George Geckle, for instance, overstates things when he says that “Marston’s editors and commentators have identified all of his Senecan allusions” (64). A case in point is the Latin motto appended to Marston’s preface (“To the Reader”). The A quarto has the epigraph “*Me mea sequentur fata,*” which editors have labeled an unknown allusion; however, the line is a verbatim quotation from Seneca: in line 994 of *Troades*, Hecuba says to Ulysses, “*me mea sequentur fata.*” Recognizing this allusion helps us not only interpret but actually *read* Marston’s motto. It suggests that Hunter’s gloss—“Let my

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\(^{176}\) Axelrad says that Senecan elements “deviennent moins fréquents à mesure que Marston approche de la maturité. Mais il semble qu’il n’arriva jamais à se libérer complètement de l’attrait qu’exerçait sur lui l’auteur du *Thyeste*” (96). But he also declares that “Cette influence, dans l’ensemble, ne fut pas heureuse. Dans les meilleures de ses pièces, elle est négligeable ou inexistante” (97). And *The Malcontent* is included among the latter: “*le Malcontent* est l’une des meilleures pièces de Marston” (79).
destiny pursue me”—is a mistranslation, since in its original context Hecuba’s meaning is not “let my fate follow me” but rather “my fate will follow me.”\footnote{That is, “sequentur” is a future indicative verb, not a present subjunctive.} Hecuba says, “Duc, duc, Vlixe, nil moror, dominum sequor; / me mea sequentur fata” (993-994) [Lead on, lead on, Ulysses, I’m not holding up, I am following my master; but my fate will follow me].

This intertext suggests a neo-Senecan meaning in Marston’s notion of “fate” that is connected to the prophetic madness of Cassandra. In Troades, Hecuba’s use of fata is ambiguous, referring both to the individual destinies of the Trojan women and to the collective destinies of Troy and Greece in the aftermath of the war. Thus, Ulysses is Hecuba’s “master” (dominus) because he has won her in the drawing of lots that divides the Trojan captives among the Greeks: she “fell to the Ithacan as his prize” (980, Ithaco obtigisti praeda), which Hecuba blames on a “caster of unjust lots” (981-982, iniquae... / sortitor urnae). The only Trojan woman expected to avoid this “allotted” fate is Cassandra: “Lucky Cassandra, exempted from the lot by madness and by Phoebus!” (965-966, Cassandra felix, quam furor sorti eximit / Phoebusque!). These lines recall the enthusiastic frenzy in which the prophetess is possessed by her inspiring god. Indeed, the words that Fitch translates “by madness and by Phoebus” (furor...Phoebusque) are an example of hendiadys, similar to Virgil’s “we drink from cups and gold” (pateris libamus et auro); just as the latter means “golden cups,” so the former means “Phoeban madness.” However, this “Phoeban madness” does not protect Cassandra from the lot, in which she is taken by Agamemnon himself and thus eventually bears witness to his homecoming.
and murder. Therefore in Seneca’s *Agamemnon*, in a moment of such divine frenzy or “Phoeban madness,” Cassandra declares “fate has arrived” (883, *venere fata*). Recognizing in the image of Agamemnon’s slaughter the turning of Fate against the Greek conquerors, Cassandra notes the fulfillment of the promise made by her mother when Hecuba told Ulysses that “my fate will follow me” (994, *me mea sequentur fata*) and that “it must arrive” (997, *veniant*).

Thus, Marston’s *Troades* epigraph in the first quarto of *The Malcontent* reflects an interest in Seneca’s portrayal of the post-Trojan War myth. It also strengthens the notion that the epigraph which replaces the *Troades* line in the second quarto is also of Senecan origin. Where the A quarto has “*Me mea sequentur fata*,” the B quarto has “*Sine aliqua dementia nullus Phoebus*.“ Bevington glosses this, “Without some madness there is no poetic power,” and observes that the source is “unknown” (551). However some editors suggest that the line may be an echo of Seneca’s *De Tranquilitate Animi* (*On Tranquility of Mind*), where Seneca discusses a proposition attributed to Aristotle, “*Nullum magnum ingenium sine mixtura dementiae fuit*” (Basore 2:289) [There has been no great genius without an element of madness]. The fact that it replaces a line from Seneca’s *Troades* strengthens the case for seeing this “*aliqua dementia*” motto as one of Marston’s many Senecan allusions. Indeed, it refers to a *furor* like that by which Phoebus

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178 G. K. Hunter is an editor who misses this Senecan allusion and is also the author of the strongest argument against Senecan influence on Elizabethan drama. See “Seneca and the Elizabethans: A Case Study in ‘Influence’.” While an important correction to overstatements of Senecan influence, his essay has been well answered by Braden and Miola. (Indeed, his call for critics to see Senecan tragedy as part of a matrix of influences that include other genres and “native” traditions fits my own project.)
inspires Cassandra; it could serve equally well as a motto for the prophetess, for whom it is no less true that “without some dementia, there is no Phoebus” (i.e., inspired rapture). By invoking this dementia Marston points to a Senecan provenance in his notion of aesthetic uncommon sense; he seems to take Seneca’s formulation of the madness (furor Phoebusque) in Cassandra’s deranged imagination and combine it with Seneca’s formulation of the madness (dementia) in the poet’s deranged imagination.

In On Tranquility of Mind, the dementia maxim emerges from a discussion of the benefits of occasional drinking, in the course of which Seneca develops an analogy between the frenzy of inebriation and that of poetic inspiration or enthusiasm. Seneca says that “gloomy sobriety must be banished for a while,” and quotes a “Greek poet” that “it is a pleasure to rave” (insanire iucundum est). He cites Plato that “the sane mind knocks in vain (frustra) at the door of poetry,” and then Aristotle: “nullum magnum ingenium sine mixtura dementiae fuit.” This leads to Seneca’s description of a lofty, uncommon, “sublime” style of literary expression, which is only attainable when the mind is moved or disturbed (mota mens), when it “has scorned the vulgar and the commonplace” (solita contempsit) and “soared aloft.” To “reach any sublime (sublime) and difficult height,” the deranged mind “must forsake the common (solito) track and be

\[179\] Alessandro Schiesaro calls this passage “the locus classicus for the Senecan theory of the enthused poet” (Braund and Gill 99). “Seneca moves from advocating near-drunkenness as relaxation, to accepting the madness of poetic inspiration and frenzy, only to conclude by presenting Aristotle as offering that, in fact, all great intellects are demented” (Motto and Clark 191).

\[180\] While the dementia formula is ostensibly Aristotelian, it is passed down as a Senecan formula: “in the Renaissance the Senecan version is the one we encounter most frequently” (Motto and Clark 192).
driven to frenzy and champ the bit (mordeat frenos) and run away with its rider (rectorem rapiat suum)” (Basore 2:285). As Motto and Clark have shown, this account of literary “dementia” was very influential and was repeated by numerous authors in the Renaissance, including Ben Jonson (the “Poeta elegantissimus gravissimus” and “amicus” to whom Marston dedicates his work on the title-page of The Malcontent). In his Discoveries, Jonson writes:

> the Poet must bee able... to pour out the Treasure of his minde; and as Seneca saith, Aliquando secudum Anacriontem insarire, jucundum esse; by which hee understands, the Poetical Rapture. And according to that of Plato; Frustra Poeticus fores sui compos pulsavit: And of Aristotle; Nullum magnum ingenium sine mixtura dementiae fuit. Nec potest grande aliquid, & supra caeteros loqui, nisi mota mens. Then it riseth higher, as by a divine Instinct, when it comtemnes common, and known conceptions. (637)

Here Jonson not only paraphrases Seneca but copies him verbatim. Even when he is ostensibly citing other classical authors (Plato and Aristotle), Jonson is actually only quoting Seneca’s quotations. The fact that the premier Elizabethan scholar-poet takes Seneca’s text as his locus classicus for the notion of “poetical rapture” strengthens the case that Seneca is also the locus classicus for Marston’s motto of literary dementia.181

This neoclassical concept of dementia appears in various Renaissance discussions of literary inspiration. Sometimes it is identified as “enthusiasm”: “a kinde of divine

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181 See also Summer’s Last Will and Testament, where Nashe offers a slight rewording of Seneca’s maxim: “Give a scholar wine, going to his book, or being about to invent, it sets a new point on his wit, it glazeth it, it scours it, it gives him acumen. Plato saith vinum esse fomitan quendam, et incitabilem ingenii virtutisque. Aristotle saith: Nulla est magna scientia absque mixtura dementiae: ‘There is no excellent knowledge without mixture of madness.’ And what makes a man more mad in the head than wine?” (177). Nashe translates Seneca’s defense of occasional drinking into a reductio ad absurdam of itself. Compare the opening speech of The Malcontent: “Why, how now? are ye mad? or drunk? or both? or what?”
ravishment, commonly called *Enthousiasma*, which stirreth men up to plaie the Philosophers, Poets, and also to prophesie” (Biester 77). There is a notion of aesthetic sublimity implicit in such descriptions of irrational “enthusiasm,” a sublimity that is spelled out later in Kant’s philosophy. “Although ethically condemnable as pathological, ‘aesthetically, enthusiasm is sublime’” (Lyotard 166, citing Kant). Kant characterizes enthusiastic *dementia* as a “blind” form of lawless imagination: “The extremely painful joy that is enthusiasm is an *Affekt*, a strong affection, and as such it is blind and cannot therefore, according to Kant, ‘deserve the approval of reason’... It is even a *dementia*..., where the imagination is ‘without bridle’” (Lyotard 166). The “blindness” in Kant’s account of enthusiasm points to one of the parallels linking the *dementia* of poetic inspiration to the psychological uncommon sense of Seneca’s tragic heroes; the enthusiastic imagination that is “blind” and “without a bridle” mirrors the tragic *furor* that is defined as a “blindness of the mind” (*caecitas mentis*). It is an unbridled *dementia* in which the imagination throws off the reins of common sense.\(^{182}\) Indeed, reading Seneca’s portrayals of madness through Kant helps us define the type of *dementia* that migrates from Senecan tragedy and animates the Malcontent’s deranged phantasy. The noun *dementia* comes from the adjective *demens*, “out of one’s mind,” a term used frequently to describe Seneca’s tragic characters. Phaedra is “demens” (202) because of

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\(^{182}\) Clytemnestra says that she is going “headlong” along her path of crime with the reins thrown off, letting the wild horse run wild (114-115, *da frena et omnem prona nequitiam incita: / per scelera semper sceleribus tum est iter*); she is demonically given over to the sublime unbridled imagination of tragic *furor*. Likewise, Medea says that her “genius has grown through evils” (*crevit ingenium malis*); and this *ingenium* is cognate with her *furor*, her unbridled love-hate for Jason (*imitare amorem*).
her raging love for Hippolytus, and Medea is repeatedly labeled as “demens” in her fury at Jason (174, 930). A character like Medea, however, is also called “vesana” (123, 728), a term which suggests not only insanity but the inspiration of divine frenzy, *vesania*. (The term comes from *vesanus*, “to be frenzied” and the verb *vesanio*, “to rage.”) In his *Anthropology* Kant discusses both terms—*dementia* and *vesania*—which serve as labels for two types of madness in which the imagination defies reason or strays beyond the bounds of common sense.\(^{183}\) Thus, *dementia* is a “disturbance of the mind” in which “because of falsely inventive imagination, self-concocted ideas are treated as if they were perceptions” (112), and *vesania* is “the sickness of a disordered reason” in which one “disregards all the facts of experience” and “fancies that [one] comprehends the incomprehensible” (113).

Kant’s terminology gives us clues for navigating the forms of madness in Seneca’s *Agamemnon*. Towards the end of the play, Clytemestra calls Electra *demens*, “out of your mind” (961, *esse demens te parem nobis putas*). Electra, in her turn, has already applied the label to her brother (915, *quid, anime demens, refugis?*). But it is another character from this play that stands as Seneca’s greatest portrait of inspired madness, of irrational enthusiasm. This character is Cassandra, the archetype of the mad prophet-poet and, I argue, a prototype of Marston’s Malevole. She is characterized as having the form of insanity that Kant defines as being “transported” far away “from the *sensorio communi*” (APPV 113): the condition of *vesania*. Like Tiresias, Cassandra has

\(^{183}\) Kant says, “The only general characteristic of insanity is the loss of a sense for ideas that are common to all (*sensus communis*), and its replacement with a sense for ideas peculiar to ourselves (*sensus privatus*)” (APPV 177).
uncommon insight into the tragic crime that has yet to be revealed to common knowledge, a vision of Agamemnon’s murder at the hands of his wife and her lover. She has this vision after falling into a divine trance in which she is sublimely elevated “above the common” (716, levat in auras altior solito caput), a trance that she identifies as furor (720, me furoris incitam stimulis novi) and attributes to the god by whom she is unwillingly possessed, the same god whom Marston credits as inspiring the divine madness of poetry: “leave me alone, Phoebus!” (722, recede, Phoebe).

Despite these protests Cassandra is dragged into the clutches of Apollo’s influence. She defines herself as vesana when, like Tiresias, she foresees the destruction of the tragic hero in the paradoxically distracted yet focused vision of her deranged imagination: “cui nunc vagor vesana? cui bacchor furens?” (724) [Fitch: “For whom do I drift in frenzy now? For whom do I play the crazed maenad?”]. She resists the recurring state of possession (vesania) because it makes her feel like a “false” prophet: “Troy has already fallen—why am I driven to be a false prophet?” (725, iam Troia cecidit—falsa quid vates agor?). Yet she is carried off in her imaginary mental landscape to someplace far away: “Where am I? (726, Vbi sum?) As in Kant’s vesania, where the soul is transported “from the sensorio communi” to “a faraway place” (APPV 113), Cassandra

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finds herself instantly transplanted back to Troy. In this state literally “outside” common sense, she is elsewhere than where she is, and rather than seeing what is where she is, she sees what is in the faraway “elsewhere” of her mind when she is “out of her mind” (demens). And as in Kant’s dementia, which creates things “as if perceptions” (APPV 112), Cassandra says, “I perceive the groves of Ida” (730, Idea cerno nemora) when she is at Agamemnon’s palace. Her blizzard of visions in this scene—of the ancient past in Troy, of the immediate present inside the palace where murder lies in wait, of the future fate of herself and the Greeks—are apprehensions of a mad imagination. Her furor is a “shaping fantasy” that takes the form of literal visions, of quasi-sensory perceptions: she keeps using verbs for seeing, especially videre. Thus, hers is the paradoxical vision of a furor (caecitas mentis) that sees that it doesn’t see, yet nevertheless sees.\(^{185}\)

There is also an aesthetic emphasis in her visions, insofar as she emphasizes the feelings—of pleasure, pain, disgust—that are attached to the products of her deranged imagination. She says “iuvat videre Tartari saevum canem” (751); it literally “pleases” her to “see” the cruel image of the hellhound. This pleasure is certainly not the universal, shared pleasure of a beautiful representation or image, but rather an idiosyncratic, perverse pleasure in something normally terrifying and disgusting. (To borrow from Kant’s sublime: she takes a paradoxical pleasure in what is displeasurable.) Indeed this suggestion of the “sublime” is literal in Seneca’s text: Cassandra includes in her furious mental kaleidoscope the image of a “sublime” lion (sublimis... leo), a “conqueror of beasts” (victor ferarum) who “lies down” (iacet) having fallen from the cruel bites of the

\(^{185}\) Cf. the visions of Seneca’s Tiresias, and Oedipus who, blinded and having long ago killed his farther, declares “genitorem vides? / ego video” (Phoenissae 43-44).
“audacious lioness” (*audacis leae*) (737-740). The sublime language here may seem incidental, but it is not. Cassandra’s lion-vision is an account of the impending assassination of the “conqueror” Agamemnon by his “audacious” wife, and is reiterated in the very next scene, where Cassandra has another, more deliberate vision, in which her insight into the tragic crime is made clearer.\(^{186}\) Like Tiresias, she brags of the blazing insight in her psychological uncommon sense: “Never has the frenzy of my foreseeing mind showed things so clear to my eyes: I see the scene, I am there and I relish it” (872-873, *Tam clara numquam PROVIDAE MENTIS FUROR / OSTENDIT OCULIS: VIDEO ET INTERSUM ET FRUOR*).

What follows is Cassandra’s vision of Agamemnon’s murder: the tragic *nefas* or catastrophe that is usually recounted by a *nuntio* or witness is here described in the prophetic foresight of a quasi-eyewitness. It expands and “translates” the sublime image of the lion attacked by the lioness: just as the lion is lying low yet still “lies sublime” (738, *sublimis iacet*), so the doomed king is resting on his fatal couch of death—yet he “lies sublime” (879, *sublimis iacet*). This representation of the crime in Cassandra’s deranged imagination is not only a sublime image; it is also vivid: “imago visus dubia non fallit meos: / spectemus!” (874-875) [Fitch: “this is no hazy picture deceiving my sight. Let us watch!”].\(^{187}\) Like Oedipus, whose paradoxically visionary blindness allows

\(^{186}\) Cassandra senses that “something big” (*magna*) is happening, and instead of resisting divine madness as in the earlier scene, she urges it on as “the gift frenzy” (868-869, *anime, consurge et cape / pretium furoris*).

\(^{187}\) In Studley’s translation of *Agamemnon*, “No vision fond fantastical / My senses doth beguile” (Newton 133). Ironically, even though Studley’s Cassandra says that her vision is not “fantastical,” in our context that is exactly what it is.
him to “perceive the night” (*experitur noctem*), Cassandra raises the mental blindness of tragic *furor* to a sublime level of consciousness—she is lucid in the midst of a waking nightmare.

Phantasia Satirica: Malevole’s Senecan Phantasy

Cassandra’s fatalistic immersion in the uncommon sense of prophetic madness—the inspired enthusiasm of her sublime *dementia*—is reproduced in satirical form in *The Malcontent*, whose title character spends all his public time testifying to “dreams, visions, fantasies,” and all his private time wandering down the haunted mental halls of insomnia. Malevole is the figure in which Marston gives free rein to his demented, enthusiastic imagination; like Cassandra, he fills key scenes of the play with his deranged, prophetic, quasi-mythical visions—visions that mix the grand bloodshed proper to tragedy with the base corruption proper to satire. Thus Malevole is a satirical reincarnation of Cassandra, a Cassandra in satirical form who combines the tone of Elizabethan satire and the material of Senecan tragedy in his tragicomic phantasy.

Malevole capitalizes on the ethically safe, insulated status of the imagination—the status of the literally *phantastical*.\(^\text{188}\) He bears witness to the monstrous possibilities of tragic revenge but does not bring them to actuality—in fact he represents them fictionally in order to prevent them actually. Such a reading clarifies how Marston refutes Senecan

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\(^{188}\) This is the same defense, at bottom, as the principle of “fiction” for the abusive satirist: “For tell me *Crittick*, is not *Fiction* / The soule of Poesies invention? / Is’t not the forme? the spirit? and the essence? / The life? and the essentiaall difference?” (83). As in Marston’s defense of “fiction” against the “Critticke” in his satire, Malevole takes refuge in fiction as hypothetical propositions or potential representations.
tragedy in this play even as he fills it with Senecan innuendoes. Through the tragic
phantasia of Phoebus-inspired madness, Cassandra produces in her imagination a sensory
representation or “image” (874, imago) of the tragic crime, and she does so in a manner
profoundly analogous to the author and to the spectator, audience or reader. Her inspired,
enthusiastic, demented imagination becomes a model for the poet and the audience. She
responds to the image as an “aesthetic idea” whose quasi-sensory representations produce
both pleasure (iuvat, fruor) and displeasure (horreo). Seen in this light as a producer of
aesthetic images, Cassandra is analogous to Malevole, who also creates the monstrous
hypothetical representations that are central to the drama as a construct of the
imagination, as fantastic objects.

Indeed, Malevole’s visions are “fantastic” in a double sense: they are both
products of phantasy and portraits of phantasy. Take, for instance, the speech on
aristocratic adultery in which he uses his imagination to paint a mental picture of the lady
seduced at court, a speech that foregrounds “sense” and “phantasy” while recalling the
criticism of sensuality from Marston’s satires. Malevole declares, “I would sooner leave
my lady singled in a bordello than in the Genoa palace,” and then explains why:

    Sin there [at the bordello] appearing in her sluttish shape,
    Would soon grow loathsome, even to blushless sense;
    Surfeit would choke intemperate appetite,
    Make the soul scent the rotten breath of lust.
    When in an Italian lascivious palace, a lady guardianless,
    Left to the push of all allurement,
    The strongest incitements to immodesty—
    To have her bound, incensed with wanton sweets,
    Her veins filled high with heating delicates,
    Soft rest, sweet music, amorous masquerers, lascivious banquets, sin itself
gilt o’er, strong fantasy tricking up strange delights, presenting it dressed
pleasingly to sense, sense leading it unto the soul, confirmed with potent
example, impudent custom, enticed by that great bawd Opportunity; thus being prepared, clap to her easy ear youth in good clothes, well-shaped, rich, fair-spoken, promising-noble, ardent, blood-full, witty, flattering,—Ulysses absent, O Ithaca, can chastest Penelope hold out? (3.2.28-47)

Malevole here uses the language of phantasy to embody concepts, to render abstract entities in sensible form (“Sin there appearing in her sluttish shape”). The representation is given in partly aesthetic terms, as a form either pleasing or displeasing to human sensibility: in the “shape” in which it appears in the bordello of the imagination, Sin is “loathsome, even to blushless sense.” Then the complexity in “sense” is developed in Malevole’s scene of courtly seduction, when he vividly paints the picture in his mind’s eye of the conditions in which the wife is tempted to take a lover: “sin itself gilt o’er, strong fantasy tricking up strange delights, presenting it dressed pleasingly to sense, sense leading it unto the soul....” On one hand, this is a redundant elaboration of the earlier idea of the “shape” in which sin appears to “sense.” On the other hand, it is a contrast: the “sluttish” shape that Sin takes in the bordello scene conjured in Malevole’s imagination is counterbalanced by the more tasteful appearance of Sin that is “gilt” (and guilt?) at court, where the presentation is not “loathsome” to sense but “dressed pleasingly to sense.” In the latter phrase “sense” is the apparatus of sensation, the capacity of sensory faculties taken collectively as the process of physical perception. Thus it is a portrait of “fantasy” in the conventional terms of Renaissance psychology.

189 The original texts have “blushes sense,” which is accepted in Wine’s edition as a plural possessive construction: “even to blushes’ sense” (65). (Wine also accepts the original text in the next line—“surfeit would cloak intemperate appetite”—where other editors change to “choke.”) Hunter changes the noun (blushes) to an adjective (blushless). This is supported by an earlier passage: “It makes man blushless” (2.3.46).
Is “strong fantasy” supposed to refer to a real psychological faculty in this passage? If so, whose phantasy is it? Perhaps it belongs to the courtly wooer seducing the wife: his “strong fantasy” conceives new forms of alluring erotic bait to get the lady to nibble. But perhaps it belongs not to the wooer but to the imaginary wife herself: Malevole may be describing courtly seduction as a sort of fantasizing auto-eroticism on the lady’s part, at once both autonomous and pathetic. The deep psychological truth in such a reading is faithful to the spirit of Marston’s play, in which all of the conniving men and women at court, seducing and seduced, remain desperately self-enclosed, locked within their own egocentric fantasies of power and pleasure. The imaginary wife can only be deceived by the appearance of Sin dressed up in courtly fashion insofar as her own imagination, “tricking up strange delights,” pulls the wool over her own eyes. (The lady at court must ultimately trick herself into turning aristocratic adultery into something superior to turning tricks at the bordello.) Such a reading suggests a paradoxically autonomous yet powerless auto-eroticism in “phantasy” that mirrors, in the little world of (wo)man, the claustrophobic, short-circuited, solipsistic world of egotistical self-deception and illusions of grandeur that is the Genoa court.

In a more basic way, however, the phantasy that animates this scene belongs neither to the wife nor her seducer, but to Malevole himself (who creates this scene and thus reflects the author’s own productive imagination). This “strong phantasy” suggests creativity, productivity, “production value”; it points to Marston’s complex notion of phantasy as an agent in not just the perception but the creation of representations, appearances and images. It embodies the power of stylish custom at court in a way that
suggests the seductive power of mimetic representation: the strangely delightful fashion of Genoese aristocracy presents Sin to the imaginary wife in a pleasing, enticing shape and seduces her judgment, just as the enticing shape of the statue seduces the sculptor’s judgment in *Pigmalion*. Thus, while “strong fantasy” is a term of psychological and social pathology in this passage, it is also invested with Marston’s own understanding of artistic creation.190

The same holds true for another reflexive portrayal of phantasy in the first act, where Malevole conjures up a prophetic vision in which he produces a fictional representation of the imagination producing a fictional representation. In this self-reflecting portrait of “strange imagination,” Malevole imagines another imaginary wife (she stands for Pietro’s wife, Aurelia) who imagines herself committing adultery while in her husband’s arms:

…the thaw of her delight
  Flows from lewd heat of apprehension,
  Only from strange imagination’s rankness
  That forms the adulterer’s presence in her soul,
  And makes her think she clips the foul knave’s loins. (1.3.125-129)

As Hunter says, the specific point here is that “even during intercourse with her husband her involvement comes only from the imagination that it is her lover she is with” (30, note). After presenting this vision of the wife whose imagination is possessed by her illicit lover—which points to Pietro’s wife, seduced by Mendoza (“Mendoza cornutes thee”)—Malevole ratchets up his mental torture of the cuckolded duke: “Nay, think, but

190 The “strong fantasy” here also echoes the “strong imagination” of a Senecan passage from *Antonio’s Revenge*: “swart Piero’s lips reek steam of wine, / Swallows lust-thoughts, devours all pleasing hopes / With strong imagination of—what not? / O, now, *Vindicta!* that’s the word we have” (5.2.52-55).
think what may proceed from this. Adultery is often the mother of incest.” Pietro responds with incredulous curiosity at this paradox—“Incest?”—and Malevole then plunges into a hypothetical proof, another imaginary scenario that illustrates the fantastical proposition: “Yes, incest. Mark: Mendoza of his wife begets perchance a daughter. Mendoza dies. His son [‘i.e. the fruit of his secret adultery’ (Hunter 31)] marries this daughter. Say you? Nay, ‘tis frequent, not only probable but, no question, often acted, whilst ignorance, fearless ignorance, clasps his own seed” (1.3.131-138). At this point, Pietro can only cry “Hideous imagination!” (1.3.139).

The context of Senecan tragedy (and Agamemnon in particular) illuminates the quality in Malevole’s imagination that prompts Pietro to call it “hideous.” Indeed, Seneca offers an extraordinary illustration of the maxim “adultery is the mother of incest” in the familial abominations of the house of Atreus: the tragedy of Thyestes is the consequence of adultery, while the tragedy of Agamemnon is the consequence of incest.191 Atreus kills his brother’s sons and feeds them to Thyestes because Thyestes has seduced his wife. Consequently Thyestes, inspired by Phoebus, commits incest: “Thyestes was directed by Phoebus to lie with his own daughter Pelopia; the child of this incestuous union, Aegisthus, was fated to take revenge on Atreus’ son Agamemnon” (Fitch 2004, 115). For Seneca’s Thyestes, then, committing adultery leads to committing incest (adultery is the mother of incest). The equation is a vicious circle in which the two sexual crimes are linked by the logic of revenge. This Senecan cycle of tragic revenge is precisely what keeps bubbling to the surface in The Malcontent; it is a lurking potential that comes

191 Marston quotes lines from both of these plays in The Malcontent.
dangerously close to tragic actuality but is contained in tragicomic fashion. And in an important sense this potential for Senecan tragedy is averted precisely through the fantastic visions of Malevole, fantasies that are at once a satirical expression of such Senecan perversion and an antidote to it. It is as if Malevole keeps injecting small doses of neo-Senecan material into the play in the form of his perverted fantasies, which serve as vaccinations preventing a full-scale infection.

We can see this more clearly by noting how Marston reproduces some of the key features of Agamemnon in *The Malcontent*. Seneca’s tragedy opens with Thyestes’ ghost (*umbra*), who delivers a bone-chilling speech that makes clear the causal connection between his fate and that of his nephew Agamemnon. The ghost declares, with something like the “braggart passion” of the neo-Senecan monster Piero in the opening scene of *Antonio’s Revenge*, “I Thyestes will outdo everyone with my crimes” (25, *vincam Thyestes sceleribus cunctos meis*). He mentions how he has consumed his own flesh and blood (27, *viscera exedi mea*), but adds that Fate kept something even worse in store for him, commanding him “to seek out the abominable embraces of my daughter” (30, *gnatae nefandos petere concubitus*). This is the incest that produces Aegisthus, the fated assassin of Agamemnon. The ghost then sets the stage for the tragedy to come, describing how “that king of kings, Agamemnon the leader of leaders” (39, *rex ille regum, ductor Agamemnon ducum*) has crossed the seas and is back on home soil, about to be reunited with his wife—who is waiting at the palace with her lover Aegisthus, plotting his death. This leads to a visionary outburst in the climax of the ghost’s speech, prophesying the fated murder that is lurking only hours away, the murder in which Thyestes will take
vicarious revenge on his brother’s family tree when his bastard son/grandson chops off its main branch with an axe: “Now, now the house will swim in waves of blood: I see blades, hatchets, weapons, I see the kingly skull split open by the heavy blow of a double-bladed axe; ...the reason for your birth, Aegisthus, has arrived” (44-49, Iam iam nabit sanguine alterno domus: / enses secures tela, divisum gravi / ictu bipennis regium video caput; / ...causa natalis tui, / Aegisthe, venit).

In this prologue the ghost establishes the role of prophetic visionary that Cassandra will take up for the rest of the play. It is a role marked by the literal language of vision: the ghost says “I see” (46, video) when he predicts the murder, just as Cassandra says “video” (873) in her own subsequent vision of the impending assassination. This language of sense-perception, representing what is not present or not actual, is a mark of the deranged imagination in the sublime state of divinely inspired enthusiasm, or demonically possessed dementia. And it is also the form of psychological uncommon sense exhibited by Malevole, another deranged visionary who lives in a “phantastick” Senecan dream-world of his own discontent imagination. We see this from the moment he enters Marston’s play. Pietro observes, “I hear thou never sleep’st,” and Malevole confirms the fact with manic, insomniacal glee: “O, no, but dream the most fantastical . . . O heaven!” Pietro asks, “Dream! what dreamest?” and Malevole replies in a key passage describing his sleepless daydreaming: “Why, methinks I see that signior pawn his footcloth, that metreza her plate; ... here is a pander jewelled; there is a fellow in shift of satin this day, that could not shift a shirt t’other night. Here a Paris supports that Helen; there’s a Lady Guinevere bears up that Sir Lancelot—dreams, dreams,
visions, fantasies, chimeras, imaginations, tricks, conceits!” (1.3.45-56). This wondrously performative passage puts Malevole’s psychological and social pathology in terms of the visionary language of Senecan phantasy. On one hand, this phantasy is cut from the cloth of Elizabethan satire: it almost paraphrases the compendious catalogue classifying people as species of phantasy from Marston’s “Cynicke Satyre” (SV VII): “These are no men, but Apparitions, / Ignes fatui, Glowormes, Fictions, / Meteors, Ratts of Nilus, Fantasies, / Colosses, Pictures, Shades, Resemblances” (140). But on the other hand it uses literally visionary language akin to Seneca’s tragic phantasy in Agamemnon: just as the ghost and Cassandra say “video,” asserting that they see the events and figures that are not actually present, Malevole says “methinks I see.”

The figures in Malevole’s “dream” are from ancient and medieval legend: Helen cheating with Paris, Guinevere with Lancelot. They are legendary examples of the kind of royal infidelity featured in Seneca’s tragedy, a theme that haunts Malevole’s imagination throughout the play and that shows Marston to be aware of its parallels with Agamemnon. Later Malevole plays further variations on this theme, pointing to mythical precedents to get Pietro to imagine the ubiquity of adultery among royal wives. Malevole says, “Heaven hear my curse: / May thy wife and thee live long together!” and when Pietro responds, “Begone, sirrah!” Malevole breaks into song: “When Arthur first in court began, —Agamemnon—Menelaus—was ever any duke a cornuto?” (2.3.6-10). Here Malevole repeats the prior exempla of unfaithful marriages, except now he points to the cuckolded husbands where before he pointed out the wives and their lovers: instead of Helen with her Paris and Guinevere with her Lancelot, he now mentions Helen’s
husband, Menelaus, and Guinevere’s husband, Arthur. And he includes another example: Agamemnon, the husband of Clytemnestra, cuckolded by Aegisthus. Thus when he asks the rhetorical question “was ever any duke a cornuto?” Malevole recalls the cuckolded ruler in Seneca’s tragedy, “that duke of dukes, Agamemnon” (39, ductor Agamemnon ducum).

Indeed, Agamemnon occupies a significant place in Malevole’s threatening intuitions of the Duke’s fate: “Do not weep, kind cuckold; take comfort man; thy betters have been beccos: Agamemnon, Emperor of all the merry Greeks that tickled all the true Troyans, was a cornuto…” (4.5.54-57). In such speeches Malevole is warning Pietro by envisioning him as a potential Agamemnon, a reincarnation of Seneca’s cuckolded ruler who is unwittingly walking into the trap set for him by his unfaithful wife (Aurelia) and her lover (Mendoza). Thus, where Pietro is envisioned as a type of Agamemnon in Marston’s satirical rewriting of Seneca’s tragedy, Mendoza is cast as the Aegisthus-figure. Malevole himself makes this identification in the first act: when Mendoza enters, Malevole immediately exposes the murderous, plotting, upstart seducer (which Cassandra tries unsuccessfully to do in Seneca’s play): “You are a treacherous villain.” Mendoza attempts to shoo the prophetic satirist away—“Out, you base-born rascal!”—but Malevole stands his ground and refutes him: “We are all the sons of heaven, though a tripe-wife were our mother. Ah, you whoreson, hot-reined he-marmoset! Egistus! didst ever hear of one Egistus?” (1.5.3-8).192 There is an element of implicit meta-dramatic

192 The “natural equality of men” idea here (“we are all sons of heaven”) is identified with Seneca later in the play: “Noble, why not? since the Stoic said, Neminem servum non ex regibus, neminem regem non ex servis esse oriundum” (3.3.60-61).
commentary in this exchange: we can hear in Malevole’s satirical abuse of Mendoza a winking, parallel challenge to the audience regarding their classical reading.\textsuperscript{193}

When Malevole asks Mendoza whether he has ever heard of Aegisthus he is not only mocking Mendoza’s lack of learning but is asking the same question of readers: have we heard of the villain of Seneca’s tragedy, whose incestuous birth has only brought him into the world in order to seduce Clytemnestra and to wield the axe that slaughters Agamemnon? And do we recognize how Marston’s classical allusions situate his characters in relation to Seneca’s? We are supposed to do better than Mendoza, of course, who fails to recognize the allusion and therefore fails to comprehend his own place in the quasi-Senecan tragedy he is trying (and ultimately failing) to create. Mendoza only echoes the name in phonetic stupidity—“Gistus?”—and leaves the identification up to Malevole, who makes it with expansive, vicious, and gleeful contempt: “Ay, Egistus; he was a filthy incontinent fleshmonger, such a one as thou art.” Again Mendoza tries to dismiss the satirist—“Out, grumbling rogue!”—but Malevole presses still further, adding another twist to the Senecan parallels: “Orestes, beware Orestes!” (1.5.9-13). Here again the visionary warning in Malevole’s prophetic frenzy renders him a sort of satirical

\textsuperscript{193} See Axelrad: “il nous paraît intéressant de rappeler une allusion à l’antiquité vue à travers Sénèque, don’t on peut se demander si le grand public était capable de la saisir. Elle se trouve dans le Malcontent: au premier acte, Malevole adresse de rudes reproches à Mendoza qu’il accuse d’amour quasi-incestueux, et il lui jette à la figure des bribes de l’histoire des Atrides; Mendoza ne comprend pas” (98, note).
reincarnation of Cassandra; this dire prediction to “beware Orestes” could have been words spoken by Cassandra herself in the last scene of Seneca’s play.¹⁹⁴

Some readers may wonder whether it is arbitrary to privilege these mythical-literary allusions to Agamemnon over the others that Malevole invokes: King Arthur, Hercules, Menelaus, etc. On one hand, all interpretation involves a strategy of selection and emphasis that can never be wholly innocent or neutral. But on the other hand, Seneca’s Agamemnon is an “intertext” not subjectively imposed but objectively there, presented by Marston as a prompt to readers. Just as Marston stages an interrogation of Mendoza regarding whether he recognizes Malevole’s allusion to the Agamemnon myth (“didst ever hear of one Egistus?”), which implicitly calls on the audience to make the same intertextual application of the ancient story to Marston’s own plot and characters, later in the play Malevole again challenges Mendoza to identify an Agamemnon allusion—not simply a reference to one of Seneca’s characters, but a quotation of Seneca’s text itself. In the last act Mendoza decides to kill Maria and cites an English paraphrase of one of the perverse maxims from Senecan tragedy: “Then she’s but dead; ’tis resolute she dies; / Black deed only through black deed safely flies.” Malevole replies, “Pooh! Per scelera semper sceleribus tutum est iter” (5.4.13-15). This line, meaning “the

¹⁹⁴ The very last line of Seneca’s play is a stichomythic exchange between Clytemnestra and Cassandra: the adulterous husband-killer says, “Die, you madwoman” (Furiosa, morere), and Cassandra replies, “Madness will also come to you” (Veniet et uobis furor). As Fitch points out, Cassandra is predicting the madness of Agamemnon’s avenging son: she is saying, “vengeance will come upon both of you (vobis plural) at Orestes’ hands” (213, note). Egistus! Beware Orestes!
safe path for crimes is always through more crimes” and supplied by Malevole as the Latin original of Mendoza’s English knockoff, is line 115 of *Agamemnon*.  

In response to Malevole’s huffy citation of the Senecan original of Mendoza’s Machiavelian maxim, Mendoza exclaims, “What! Art a scholar?” (5.4.16). The implicit answer is yes: Marston represents in Malevole a satirical figure who is also scholarly, well-versed, like Antonio, in Senecan tragedy. And it is no coincidence that he picks this Senecan line to quote here, since in *Agamemnon* the line is Clytemnestra’s justification for the necessity of killing her husband; the “crimes” to which it refers are adultery and murder. (She is saying that the only “safe path” down which her “crime” of adultery with Aegisthus can proceed is through the further “crime” of murdering Agamemnon with her lover’s help.) As before with Malevole’s probing into Mendoza’s familiarity with his literary ancestor Aegisthus, then, Marston here prompts the audience to process a strategic, almost systematic use of Senecan tragedy. Recognizing the Senecan intertext highlights the parallels between Marston’s plot and Seneca’s and reinforces the intertextual identifications that Malevole makes earlier: Mendoza corresponds to Aegisthus; Pietro corresponds to Agamemnon; Aurelia corresponds to Clytemnestra. But to whom does Malevole himself correspond?  

On one hand, Malevole is alien to the heritage of Seneca’s tragedy: he is a contemptuous railer, a satirical figure who has migrated from Marston’s *Scourge* to abuse these neo-Senecan characters. On the other hand, however, he recreates a powerful voice

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195 This is “the most quoted of all Senecan tags” (Hunter 142). It is used by Kyd in *The Spanish Tragedy* and adapted by Shakespeare in *Macbeth* (Miola 93).
that reverberates in the world of *Agamemnon:* he articulates the otherworldly language of prophetic vision identified with the ghost of Thyestes and the mad seer, Cassandra. In Pietro’s initial description, for instance, Malevole calls to mind the uprooted ghost from Seneca’s prologue:

> This Malevole is one of the most prodigious affections that ever conversed with nature, a man, or rather a monster, more discontented that Lucifer when he was thrust out of the presence; his appetite is unsatiable as the grave, as far from any content as from heaven. His highest delight is to procure others vexation.... (1.2.17-22)

Here Malevole has the air of an Elizabethan satirist: he exhibits the aesthetic uncommon sense of satirical bitterness, taking pleasure in the displeasure that he produces in others (“His highest delight is to procure others vexation”). But he also has the air of Seneca’s ghost: he appears as a transgressive, otherworldly figure trespassing among the living from some horrid underworld. He possesses the status that Florence Dupont argues is essential to Seneca’s tragic characters, being not really human but an abomination: not a “man” but “rather a monster.” Thyestes’ ghost in *Agamemnon* is such a monster, at home neither in the world of mankind nor in the realm of the gods: “I, Thyestes, flee the beings of the underworld and I chase away the beings of the upper world” (*fugio Thyestes inferos, superos fugo*). Seneca’s ghost is “thrust out from the profound pit of Tartarus” (*profundo Tartari emissus specu*). Malevole is likewise a cosmic vagabond, reminiscent of a yawning “grave” and of Lucifer when he was “thrust out” of God’s presence. Furthermore, Malevole is unnatural, alienated, at odds with nature: “one of the most prodigious affections that ever conversed with nature.” In Marston’s Latinate phrasing we hear a hint of the Senecan formula for the tragic perversity of his monsters: “versa natura
est retro.” Nature is converted or inverted by Seneca’s tragic prodigies, turned aside or upside down as with Thyestes: “Nature has been turned backwards: I have mixed up parent with grandparent, ... husband with father, grandchildren with children—and day with night” (34-36, versa natura est retro: / avo parentem, ... patri virum, / gnatis nepotes miscui—noci diem).

While the first perverse “mixing” of natural categories here is Thyestes’ incest with his daughter (rendering him both “parent” and “grandparent” to Aegisthus), the final perverse confusion—the mixing of day with night—refers to the banquet served by Atreus in Thyestes, when the sun fled from the sky in cosmic shame as Thyestes ate his children. This solar confusion has a powerful resonance with Malevole, who is also conspicuous for mixing up daytime and nighttime: in his very first appearance, Malevole is asked by Pietro about his strange nocturnal habits, “How dost spend the night? I hear thou never sleep’st” (1.3.45-46), and Malevole replies, “O, no, but dream the most fantastical....” This introduces the theme of insomnia, a condition that seems to be not merely part of Malevole’s role-playing but a genuine affliction; later it is described with deep pathos in one of his most powerful monologues:

I cannot sleep; my eyes’ ill-neighboring lids
Will hold no fellowship. O thou pale sober night,
Thou that in sluggish fumes all sense dost steep,
Thou that gives all the world full leave to play…
The stooping scythe-man, that doth barb the field,
Thou makest wink sure. In night all creatures sleep;
Only the malcontent, that ’gainst his fate
Repines and quarrels—alas, he’s goodman tell-clock! (3.2.1-12)

This insomnia is an unnatural state of sensory perception in which “sense” remains unsteeped in the tranquilizing “sluggish fumes” of sleep. It is a pathology, a form of
psychological uncommon sense. Malevole’s insomnia reflects an unhappy, isolated consciousness, the painful downside to the manic, ever-alert yet demented phantasy of his otherwise racing, active mind. The two conditions of mania and depression alternate, like day and night; they are two sides of the same coin. Malevole does not exhibit the normal pattern that alternates between rational sensory perception in daytime hours and anesthesia or harmless dreaming in nighttime hours. Instead he is awake all night and dreams all day: his demented phantasy creates prophetic and symbolic visions in a continuous walking daydream. And in this respect Malevole is a satirical counterpart to Seneca’s Cassandra: they both exhibit the dementia or vesania of a deranged imagination possessed by a “sacred rapture.” Malevole is another dramatic manifestation of Phoeban madness, of the sublime frenzy that Seneca identifies with the dementia of literary enthusiasm in On Tranquility of Mind and with the furor of prophetic inspiration in Agamemnon. Like Seneca’s demented poet and enraptured prophetess, Malevole is constantly getting “carried away” by his spirit’s Pegasus. Thus Malevole is a refracted image of Marston himself, engrossed in the aesthetic uncommon sense of his simultaneous literary enthusiasms for Senecan tragedy and Elizabethan satire. Wild horses couldn’t drag him away.

Finally Containing Himself

Since Cassandra is a prophetess in a tragedy, of course, the prophetic visions she produces actually come to pass, whereas in Marston’s tragicomedy the hypothetical representations of catastrophe remain only potential, never actualized. Thus Malevole is a
satirical prophet who is able to avert the tragedy by making himself heard—precisely unlike Cassandra, the prophetess doomed to be considered “vain” or “false.” Through this tragicomic twist, Marston indulges in the aesthetic bitterness of satirical abuse and the monstrous, “hideous,” catastrophic image of Senecan revenge tragedy; but unlike the real (“private,” “particular”) satirical injury in the Scourge and the “real” tragic violence in the conclusion of Antonio’s Revenge, he renders them merely fictional, merely forms of “phantasy.” Where Antonio was the ultimate wish-fulfillment of both the Senecan revenger and the violent “purging” satirist, Malevole performs both these roles through phantasy, existing on an imaginary level that is hypothetical rather than actual.

In this way, The Malcontent ultimately makes concessions to common sense, saying in effect: this phantasy is not real, let’s come back to our senses. Marston asserts common sense in his Prologue by refuting the “private sense” of readers who see his play as injuring real people through “particular” references and possessing the “bitterness” of truly displeasing ad hominem satire: “To wrest each hurtless thought to private sense / Is the foul use of ill-bred Impudence” (1-2). The Induction likewise denies the accusation that Marston has written a “bitter play.”¹⁹⁶ In Kant’s terms, he is asserting the claims of the sensus communis over those of the sensus privatus. What happened to Marston’s satirical heyday, when he was eager to declare Joseph Hall a “stinking scavenger” in print through the bitterly “private” sense of his verse satire?¹⁹⁷ The most obvious explanation

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¹⁹⁶ “Do you hear, sir, this play is a bitter play? –Why, sir, ‘tis neither satire nor moral…” (Induction, lines 51-52).

¹⁹⁷ Axelrad describes “son style accoutumé où fleurit l’insult; telle la description de Hall, ‘that stinking scavenger’, écrivant ‘from his dunghill’” (263-264).
is generic: Marston is committed to writing a comical (or tragicomic) play; thus, he must avoid Senecan bloodshed in its plot and also neutralize the satirical bitterness in its tone, both of which aims are somewhat arbitrarily and perfunctorily achieved through the disguise-plot, which renders the apparent death of Pietro and the apparent bitterness of Malevole both hollow, void, unreal: “fictional.” But I think it is an open question: Marston ultimately leaves it up to readers to decide whether or not Malevole’s neo-Senecan phantasy is fully neutralized by Altofronto’s serene “good sense.”

And Marston ultimately leaves it up to Shakespeare to assert the aesthetic uncommon sense of satire onstage in all its absolute, unmitigated bitterness. Where in the final analysis Marston’s Malcontent is what Campbell calls a “comicall satyre,” Shakespeare’s Troilus and Cressida and Timon of Athens are “tragical” satires that allow for, or perhaps demand, a more intense and unmitigated representation of uncommon sense. In The Malcontent such uncommon sense is contained, counterbalanced, or neutralized by Marston’s irresistible fantasy of finally achieving common sense through a festive union among the characters and between himself and his satisfied audience.198

Thus there is a perennial tension in Marston’s work that makes it wonderfully powerful but also inevitably contradictory, at odds with itself. This deep ambivalence can be expressed in a formula of chiastic opposition: on one side, the uncommon sense of perpetual phantasy; on the other side, a recurring fantasy of common sense.

198 Bednarz argues that Marston chooses an irrational form of festive comedy in his plays where Jonson represents a rational form of corrective judgment.
CHAPTER FIVE
UNCOMMON SENSE IN SHAKESPEARE’S TRAGICAL SATIRES

It is true that Marston almost always spoils the effect by overstraining, but the effects he is aiming at, Shakespeare was inspired to aim at and hit. (Davenport 27)

_Troilus and Cressida_ and _Timon of Athens_ illustrate Shakespeare’s simultaneous engagement with satire and tragedy, and also the explanatory value of the term “uncommon sense.” Unlike his other satirical plays—_Hamlet, As You Like It, King Lear_—these two cannot be explained as comedies or tragedies that merely “incorporate” elements of satire. They do not fit in the conventional groupings of the Shakespeare canon (the Folio’s Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies). They are also confusingly or indeterminately labeled (_Troilus and Cressida_ has too many labels attached to it—comedy, history, tragedy, etc.—while _Timon of Athens_ has no generic labels). They

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199 _Troilus and Cressida_ “has been called a history (Q), a comedy (Q), a tragedy (F), a comical satire (Campbell), a tragical satire (Muir), a problem comedy (W. W. Lawrence), a problem play (Tillyard), and a ‘hybrid and hundred-faced and hydra-headed prodigy’ (Swinburne)” (Muir 1982, 37). _Timon of Athens_, on the other hand, “is simply _Timon of Athens_. This at first appears to be of little help, since it says nothing specific about genre. Nevertheless, the absence of the generic designation may still provide a clue, since all the other tragedies are specifically named as such; hence _Timon_, like the play it replaced, _Troilus and Cressida_, stands out as anomalous. It looks as if the compilers of F might themselves have been uncertain about what to call _Timon_; it fits into the ‘Tragedies’ section, though not too comfortably” (Dawson and Minton 28).
were moved around and swapped with each other to fill holes in the First Folio.\(^{200}\) Thus, these two plays invite a rethinking of Shakespearean genre and demand a generic term with more explanatory value than the \textit{ad hoc} label “problem play.” To address such a challenge, I will develop two main claims in this chapter. First, \textit{Troilus and Cressida} and \textit{Timon of Athens} should be seen as “tragical satires” in which Shakespeare negotiates the same two traditions (Senecan tragedy and Elizabethan satire) with which Marston was wrestling. Second, their artistic coherence consists in the way that they unite the forms of uncommon sense proper to both of those traditions.

Shakespeare’s Senecan Troy

\textit{Campbell was so intent on seeing Shakespeare as a passive assimilator ..., that he never suspects that he might have had ideas about satire in his own right. (Bednarz 262)}

In addressing the largely unexplored question of the relation of Senecan tragedy to \textit{Troilus and Cressida}, I will argue that \textit{Troades} is the main Senecan intertext. \textit{Troades} was one of the most influential classical plays for the Elizabethans: the first of Seneca’s tragedies translated into English (Miola 18), and simultaneously expanded by Heywood’s additions to the ghost of Achilles. As scholars of Shakespeare’s classicism have demonstrated, Seneca’s representation of the “Trojan women” made a lasting impression on him in the period prior to writing \textit{Troilus}. “Whether Shakespeare knew \textit{Troades} directly or indirectly, it became an important influence on him in the 1590s” (Miola 18-200)

\(^{200}\) “\textit{Timon} occupies a place between \textit{Romeo and Juliet} and \textit{Julius Caesar} that was originally intended for \textit{Troilus and Cressida}.... When \textit{Troilus} was pulled, the editors needed something to fill the gap, and \textit{Timon} was somehow found and pressed into service” (Dawson and Minton 11).
19. It seems to have inspired parts of *Titus Andronicus* and *Richard III*. There are also traces of *Troades* in the play that is perhaps the closest to *Troilus and Cressida* in chronology and sensibility: *Hamlet*. One symptom of this influence is the portrait of Pyrrhus, the wavering, yet bloodthirsty son of a war hero: “Virgil’s depiction of Pyrrhus in *Aeneid* Book II is obviously central here; but so too is Seneca’s *Troades*” (Miola 44). In Seneca’s play the ghost of Achilles commands his son Pyrrhus to execute Polyxena, the daughter of Priam, in order to appease him in the afterlife. Pyrrhus debates this command with Agamemnon and finally achieves it at the end of the play, where his slaughter of Polyxena makes up, along with Ulysses’ killing of Hector’s son, half of the play’s twin catastrophe (1065, *duplex nefas*). As Miola points out, “Seneca, more than any of the other readily available classical sources, stresses emphatically Pyrrhus’ filial relationship to Achilles” (44), an emphasis reproduced in Shakespeare’s musings on Pyrrhus during Hamlet’s tortured questioning of his own sense of filial obligation to the ghost.

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201 On *Titus*: “The ruthless piety of Titus in sacrificing Alarbus was invented not only to make him a stern old Roman but also to introduce another Senecan theme, this time from the *Troades*, where Hecuba’s daughter Polixena and Andromache’s son Astynax must be sacrificed to the shade of Achilles” (Bullough 26). On *Richard III*: “Harold Brooks has pointed out a number of interesting parallels…. [T]he place given to the Duchess of York corresponds to that of Hecuba in the *Troades*, both women being mothers of sons who were fatal to their countries. Hecuba, Andromache, Polyxena and Helen resemble the Shakespearian quartet of the Duchess, Elizabeth, Anne, and Margaret…. Anne, like Polyxena, marrying an enemy, knows that she is to be sacrificed” (Muir 1978, 37).

202 “For Aeneas’s tale to Dido, Shakespeare used Marlowe’s play, probably Virgil as well, and possibly Seneca’s *Agamemnon* and *Troas* in the translations of Studley and Jasper Heywood” (Muir 1978, 168).
Several critics have focused on the moment of “hesitation” in the player’s speech, where the sword “seemed i’th’air to stick” and “Pyrrhus stood, / And like a neutral to his will and matter, / Did nothing” (2.2.481-484), suggesting that it draws on the similar hesitation when Pyrrhus pauses before striking the death-blow against Polyxena in Seneca. Most recently Erica Sheen has argued that Shakespeare’s “source is Seneca’s Troades, translated by Jasper Heywood as Troas and published in 1581 in Thomas Newton’s collection of ‘Englished’ Senecas.” Describing how, “To appease the ghost of Achilles,” the Greeks “agree to sacrifice his erstwhile-betrothed Polyxena, one of the two surviving children of Priam and Hecuba,” Sheen cites the Heywood translation of the moment of execution in Seneca: “And hie upon his fathers tombe the youthful Pyrrhus stoode. / The manly mayd she never shronke one foote, nor backward drew… / Her corage moves eche one, and loe a strange thing monstrous like, / That Pyrrhus even himselfe stood stil for dread, and durst not strike.” Sheen declares it “a clear and direct parallel” (Martindale and Taylor 163-164).

Likewise, critics have identified the second chorus in Troades—which addresses the question of whether or not the soul lives on following the death of the body—as “a possible source for Hamlet’s ‘to be, or not to be’ soliloquy” (Miola 38). “Seneca tells us of that undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveler returns, about which Hamlet meditates” (Baldwin 2:411-412). “Indeed the whole of Hamlet’s famous soliloquy may be said to arise out of the question in Troas…: “verum est, an timidos fabula decipit, / umbras corporibus uiuere conditis?” (Cunliffe

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203 This prefigures not only the player’s account of Pyrrhus’ “sword, / Which was declining on the milky head / Of reverend Priam” (2.2.479-481), but also Nestor’s words to Hector in Troilus and Cressida: “thou hast hung thy advanced sword i’th’ air, / Not letting it decline on the declined” (4.5.188-189).
In Seneca’s chorus this question—“Is it true, or does a fable deceive the fearful that shades live on when their bodies are buried?” (371-372)—is developed in terms quite close to Hamlet’s: “Is nothing gained in yielding the soul to death? Are the wretched faced with further life? Or do we die wholly, and does no part of us survive?” (376-379). After posing the question, the chorus answers in the negative—“After death there is nothing” (397, Post mortem nihil est)—and concludes by describing the traditional figures of the underworld as “hollow rumors, empty words, a tale akin to a troubled dream” (405-406).

The speech foreshadows Hamlet in several ways. First, the language is similar: the notion of afterlife as a “tale” (fabula) that is told to scare the “faint-hearted” (timidos) and as a “fear” (metum) that faces the living (rather than the Christian notion of the afterlife as an object of hope) is similar to Hamlet’s “fear of something after death.” Seneca’s metaphor of the afterlife as “a troubled dream” (sollicito... somnio) also resonates with Shakespeare’s phrase, “what dreams may come.” Second, the dramatic context is strikingly similar: this meditation on the afterlife question comes in the middle of both plays, following earlier scenes in which the son of a fabled warrior is commanded by his father’s ghost to comfort its disturbed spirit by settling a score with the living, which leads the son to perform the tragedy’s culminating murder. Thus, Seneca’s chorus involves a dramatic irony similar to Hamlet’s speech: both are abstract meditations expressing skepticism about the traditional stories of an afterlife, and yet both are
delivered after a ghost has come from precisely such an afterlife, apparently proving them wrong in advance.\(^{204}\)

*Troades* is also a fascinating and illuminating intertext for *Troilus and Cressida*. Simply listing some of the characters featured in both plays would suggest this: Ulysses, Agamemnon, Achilles, Helen, Calchas, Cassandra, Polyxena, Andromache. (Achilles and Cassandra don’t actually deliver lines onstage in *Troades*, but both are important and implicitly present: Achilles makes the demand of Polyxena’s sacrifice, and Cassandra is discussed during the fatal drawing of “lots” to raffle off the Trojan slave-women.) While there are a number of identified sources for Shakespeare’s play—Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*, Henryson’s *The Testament of Cresseid*, Chapman’s *Iliad*, Caxton’s *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye*, Lydgate’s *Troy Book* (Muir 1978, 141)—the tragedy by “heavy” Seneca is as far as I know the only extant play Shakespeare would have known featuring all of these characters. There are also significant plot parallels. In both plays, there is a debate in the Greek camp, governed by Agamemnon, about how to please Achilles and thereby ensure a successful campaign. Both Seneca and Shakespeare portray Cassandra as the tragically sympathetic yet unheeded prophet on the Trojan side, and Calchas as the tragically callous yet “credited” prophet on the Greek side. (Indeed, in both plays it is the shifty yet authoritative pronouncement of Calchas that directs the play to its unhappy conclusion: in *Troades* he demands that Polyxena must be sacrificed to her “bridegroom”

\(^{204}\) “The chorus in *Troades* ends by dismissing tales of the underworld…. This conclusion contradicts the action of the play, wherein Achilles’ ghost reportedly appears and demands vengeance. Bullough (vii. 25-6) notes that Hamlet’s soliloquy contains a similar inconsistency: after encountering his father’s shade, Hamlet refers to the afterlife as ‘The undiscover’d country, from whose bourn / No traveler returns’” (Miola 39).
Achilles, and in *Troilus and Cressida* he orders that Cressida be handed over to the Greeks in the prisoner exchange.) Both plays portray Polyxena as the Trojan princess to whom Achilles is “betrothed.” Both also put Helen onstage in her shabby grandeur as the hated yet desired woman at the heart of the war, a bane to both nations. In Seneca, Helen is told, “You pestilence, disaster, blight on both our peoples, do you see these burial mounds of the leaders, and the bare bones lying unburied everywhere across the plains? They were strewn by your marriage. It was for you the blood of Asia and Europe flowed” (892-896), and she herself says, “It is hard to lose one’s country, but harder to be afraid of it” (912-913). Likewise in Shakespeare Helen is told that she is “bitter to her country… / For every false drop in her bawdy veins / A Grecian’s life hath sunk; for every scruple of her contaminated carrion weight / A Trojan hath been slain” (4.1.69-73).

Shakespeare also follows Seneca in portraying the suffering Trojans as idealized victims, but the arrogant Greeks as base conquerors. In Seneca, Hecuba says of Hector “as long as you stood, Ilium stood” (31, quo stetit stante Ilium). In Shakespeare, Cassandra similarly warns Priam to hang onto Hector in order to hold himself, and Troy, upright: “hold him fast; / He is thy crutch; now if thou lose thy stay, / Thou on him leaning, and all Troy on thee, / Fall all together” (5.3.59-62). In Seneca, Andromache says “my mind is filled with a private dread from this fearful night’s dream” (435-436); in Shakespeare, she says, “My dreams will sure prove ominous to the day” (5.3.6). Likewise, Achilles is described abusing Hector’s body in both plays. In Seneca, he “stood victorious in his proud chariot and plied the reins, dragging Hector and Troy (*Hectorem et Troiam trahens*)” (188-189). In Shakespeare, Achilles says, “Come, tie his body to my
horse’s tail; / Along the field I will the Trojan trail” (5.8.21-22). Both also ridicule his effeminate loafing. In Seneca, “amidst the carnage of Greece and burnt ships he lay idle, forgetting war and weapons, striking his tuneful lyre with a dainty pick” (319-321); “loytring then a loofe he lay, unmindfull of the fight, / Insteede of armes with scratch of quill, his sounding harp to smight” (Newton 23). Likewise in Shakespeare, Achilles “in his tent / Lies mocking our designs... / Upon a lazy bed... on his pressed bed lolling” (1.3.144-161).

As such parallels suggest, Troades foreshadows Shakespeare in portraying the Greek heroes, especially Achilles, with a certain cynicism, a sense of belatedness. Homeric sublimity is largely a thing of the past, and the Greeks are pale shadows of their heroic selves: Achilles is literally a ghost, and his son isn’t much better. At the end of Troades the cynical reduction of the Greeks is most obvious in the contrast between the children of the two chief Homeric heroes: where the noble Trojan Astynax is a sublime filial image of Hector who does his father proud in facing death, the brutal Greek Pyrrhus is a degraded image of Achilles who is rather weak and contemptible both in following the demands of his father’s ghost and in his wavering hesitation to fulfill them. As we have seen, it is precisely this hesitation in Pyrrhus when he is to strike the death blow that Shakespeare mirrors in Hamlet. In Hamlet, however, the belated Pyrrhus figure is ostensibly restored to heroism through his eventual swashbuckling achievement of murder in the bloody finale. In Troilus and Cressida, on the other hand, Achilles himself degenerates into baseness: his epic heroism is negated, reduced to a parody of itself.  

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205 In his Anatomy of Criticism Frye describes this quality as proper to the mythos of irony and satire, a “fallen” world in which there are no grand heroes.
Where *Hamlet* shows the heroic regeneration of the Pyrrhus figure, who eventually rises to the occasion and becomes almost a re-embodiment of his heroic father, *Troilus and Cressida* shows the anti-heroic degeneration of Achilles, who turns into his own worst Pyrrhus, a childish ape of the legend. Instead of delaying the execution out of some finer moral feeling (which Seneca’s Pyrrhus and Shakespeare’s Hamlet might be read as doing), then finally going through with it out of a sense of duty, Shakespeare’s Achilles has no noble compunction about executing the noblest of the Trojans. He has no qualms about having Hector killed; he only has qualms about doing it himself, and so dispatches Hector at arm’s length, through the proxy of his henchmen warriors, the Myrmidons. Thus, where Seneca’s Achilles is literally a ghost of himself, Shakespeare’s Achilles is figuratively a ghost of himself.

**Shakespeare’s Satirical Bitterness**

In *Troilus and Cressida*, Shakespeare not only picks up and exaggerates the hints of contempt for the Greek heroes in the “belated” tragedy of *Troades*; he also reinforces this cynical debasement with the bitter scorn of Elizabethan satire. Like Marston in *The Malcontent*, he inserts a railing Elizabethan satirist in the midst of his quasi-Senecan tragedy. In this respect Thersites plays the same role as Malevole: both constantly reduce the classical heroes to contemptible objects of satire, ranting about how the leaders—Menelaus, Agamemnon, etc.—are all cuckolds. (Malevole: “Agamemnon—Menelaus—was ever any duke a *cornuto*?” Thersites: “All the argument is a whore and a cuckold.”)

In fact, Shakespeare’s Thersites may be an implicit portrait of Marston himself (Bednarz
48). (Alfred Harbage says that “of all the hypothetical identifications of characters in Shakespeare’s plays, that of Thersites with Marston has the most to recommend it” [116].) Unlike *The Malcontent*, however, *Troilus and Cressida* belongs not to the Jonsonian subgenre of comical satire, in which foolish characters are purged at the end of the play in accordance with good judgment, but to a new subgenre of *tragical* satire, in which the satirist’s bitter contempt takes on the sublime, transcendent scope of Seneca’s tragic crime and threatens to demolish the very grounds of aesthetic pleasure. The play’s gustatory language takes up the sadistic bitterness of Elizabethan satire and presents it as the inevitable consequence of desire, transforming the sweetness of pure pleasure into tragic bitterness.

Here I am contradicting an old view established by O. J. Campbell. Campbell argued that *Troilus and Cressida* is a “Comicall Satyre” in the vein of Jonson and Marston, and on the surface the Quarto epistle (“A Never Writ er, to an Ever Reader”) seems to second him, describing the play as “full of the palm comical” and suggesting that Shakespeare is universally pleasing, even to those predisposed against such pleasure: “the most displeased with plays are pleased with his comedies.” Thus Shakespeare is presented—or misrepresented—as a champion of aesthetic common sense, especially the “savory” pleasure associated with *sal*: “So much and such savoured salt of wit is in his comedies, that they seem (for their height of pleasure) to be born in that sea that brought forth Venus.” However, this promotion of pleasure is more the bookseller’s ruse than the

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Heinrich Heine, for instance, wrote that *Troilus and Cressida* “is pervaded by a clamorous bitterness... such as we never find in plays of the comic muse,” that it is “neither a comedy nor a tragedy in the usual sense,” and that it requires a “new aesthetics” (Hillebrand 523).
author’s truth: it is a pitch to move merchandise. “And believe this, that when he is gone, and his comedies out of sale [sine sale?], you will scramble for them… Take this for a warning; and at the peril of your pleasure’s loss… refuse not” (Muir 1982, 193-194). Despite the commercial’s promise that the work will be pleasing, the aesthetic experience that Shakespeare offers in this play is something else entirely: Troilus and Cressida irresistibly negates aesthetic sweetness in favor of satirical bitterness. We can take as representative of its artistic philosophy the line given to Thersites: “that that likes not you, / Pleases me best” (5.2.101-102). Whoever approaches the play with the hopes raised by the epistle will be sorely disappointed: neither liking nor likable, Troilus and Cressida exhibits a whole-hearted participation in the aesthetic sadism of “bitter” Elizabethan satire.

Unlike the printer’s epistle, the author’s “Prologue armed” (F) makes no guarantee of pleasure. Rather than the epistle’s menu of comedic delicacies, its culinary metaphor simply observes that the plot covers “what may be digested in a play,” then declares: “Like or find fault, do as your pleasures are: / Now good or bad, ‘tis but the chance of war” (29-31). Nor should this ambivalence be read as conventional authorial modesty, inviting the audience’s ultimately positive response: if we turn to the end of the play, where such affirmation of audience pleasure is conventionally prompted, we find no such thing. The epilogue, delivered by Pandarus, offers a nasty contradiction of the flattering conclusions typical of Shakespearean comedy. Where the latter reinforce the

See As You Like It: “If it be true that good wine needs no bush, ‘tis true that a good play needs no epilogue. Yet to good wine they do use good bushes, and good plays prove
aim to please—as in Twelfth Night’s “our play is done, / And we’ll strive to please you every day”—the meta-dramatic parting shot of Troilus and Cressida alludes to the play’s failure to produce pleasure, to the disappointment of audience members who came to this “performance” expecting to be pleased and instead have been disgusted: “Why should our endeavor be so desired, and the performance so loathed? What verse for it?” (5.10.38-40). The ensuing “verse” employs the familiar gustatory analogy, but in a different tenor with a different flavor: “Full merrily the humble-bee doth sing / Till he hath lost his honey and his sting” (5.10.41-42). This song activates the complex of flavors—mel, sal, fel—in the metaphor of taste, setting the vehicle of mel (“honey”) alongside the tenor of artistic expression (“sweet” singing), but only to observe that such aesthetic sweetness has been abandoned: “being once subdued in armed tail, / Sweet honey and sweet notes together fail” (5.10.43-44). Where the epistle did not negate pleasure but asserted the “sharper” middle flavor of sal (“savoured salt wit”), this verse dissolves mel in fel: “my fear is this, / Some galled goose of Winchester would hiss” (5.10.52-53). It conflates the bitter taste of “gall” with the expression of aesthetic displeasure (“hiss”).

The audience is implicitly called to identify with this galled hiss, which reproduces in miniature the aesthetic experience of the whole play; the translation of “sweet honey” and “sweet notes” into “galled” bitterness is reflected in the process of the the better by the help of good epilogues.... I charge you, O men, for the love you bear to women... that between you and the women the play may please.”

208 Compare the “rancorous breasts” in What You Will who “discharge / Impostum’d malice on his latest Scene” with “the blurt / Of a goose breath” (2:232).
Trojan War in general and the two young lovers in particular. Priam invokes the same
gustatory terms to describe the coupling of Paris with Helen: “Paris, you speak / Like one
besotted on your sweet delights; / You have the honey still, but these the gall” (2.2.141-
143). His point is that what for Paris constitutes mel constitutes for his countrymen only
fel. This honey-gall equation is reasserted when Diomedes calls Helen a “whore”; Paris
protests, “You are to /o bitter to your countrywoman,” to which Diomedes responds,
“She’s bitter to her country” (4.1.68-69). Diomedes is making the same point as Priam:
although Helen may taste like honey to you, she tastes like gall to us. This mel-fel
conflation colors everything, loading with monumental mockery, for instance, the scene
in which Pandarus visits Helen and insists on applying the epithet “sweet” to her every
time he opens his mouth: “Well, sweet Queen.... Go to, sweet Queen.... Sweet Queen,
sweet Queen; that’s a sweet Queen.... What says my sweet Queen, my very very sweet
Queen?... What says my sweet Queen?... sweet Queen.... honey-sweet Queen.... Farewell,
sweet Queen.... sweet Queen” (3.1). Here, as Colie says, “Mel drips” (332). Such
honeyed flattery finds its mirror opposite in the satiric abuse of Thersites, from which
instead drips fel: “Thersites, / A slave whose gall coins slanders like a mint” (1.3.1191-
192). Thersites constantly inverts or contradicts the sickly-sweet language of mel with the
satirical bitterness of fel and the absolute disgust of foeditas. Thus, when Hector says
“Good night, sweet Lord Menelaus,” Thersites spews a sarcastic outburst, as if all the
verbal honey makes him nauseous: “Sweet draught, ‘sweet’ quoth a! Sweet sink, sweet
sewer” (5.1.71-73). Here we see the action of his “gall” that “coins slanders like a mint”: 
he translates the *mel* in Hector’s epithet “sweet lord” into paradoxes joining mellifluous adjectives with nouns that are clearly *foeditas*: sweet sink, sweet sewer.

*Mel* is most fully translated into *fel* and *foeditas* in the relationship of the two title characters, where the absolute honey of love’s pleasure becomes the gall of sexual agony. In its inception their romance is sweet, not the mockingly ironic sweetness of Pandarus’ ridiculous flattery of Helen but a pure, idealized, essential sweetness that goes beyond *mel* itself. In Troilus’ vision of sensual pleasure the conventional gustatory language is worked up into a fine frenzy:

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Th’imaginary relish is so sweet
That it enchants my sense. What will it be
When that the wat’ry palate tastes indeed
Love’s thrice repured nectar? —death, I fear me,
Swooning destruction, or some joy too fine,
Too subtle-potent, tuned too sharp in sweetness
For the capacity of my ruder powers…. (3.2.17-23)
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Danger lurks behind this voluptuous delight: the threat of dissolution, and also of an analogous shift in register on the palate, where sharpness intrudes upon the sweetness of *mel*: “too sharp in sweetness.” The hint of *sal* in lovemaking is later made explicit in Troilus’ complaint against “Injurious Time,” which ends not with the sweat of union but the salt of separation: “a single famished kiss, / Distasted with the salt of broken tears” (4.4.46-47). The “repured nectar” has mixed with *sal* and lost its pleasing flavor (“distasted”); soon it will be *fel*. (Later, tears are associated with gall instead of salt: “eyes o’rgalled with recourse of tears” [5.3.55]). This distastefulness is most exquisite in Troilus’ expression of disillusionment with Cressida, where he pushes the gustatory analogy all the way to *foeditas*: “The fractions of her faith, orts of her love, / The
fragments, scraps, the bits and greasy relics” (5.2.156-157). Like Pandarus’ epilogue, Troilus’ speech is reflexively meta-dramatic, a “reflecting judgment” that mirrors the aesthetic experience of this bitter play—a banquet of good honey gone bad and sweet notes turned sour.

Thus, where Seneca’s Troades is ultimately uplifted by the “sweet” affect of shared grief and communal mourning in tragedy—“Sweet to one grieving is a host of mourners, sweet that whole peoples are loud with laments” (1009-1010, Dulce maerenti populous dolentum, / dulce lamintis resonare gentes)—Shakespeare’s Troilus is suffused with the painful bitterness of Elizabethan satire—“The bitter disposition of the time” (4.1.49)—and engrossed in fel: “O deadly gall, and theme of all our scorns!” (4.5.30).

Scorning Scorn of Senecan Idiot Fools

One of the purposes of bitter literary gall is to perform a satirical “purging.” In Shakespeare and the Poets’ War, James Bednarz offers a new take on the old theory that in Troilus and Cressida Shakespeare, inspired by Marston, “purged” Ben Jonson. Bednarz’ account of Shakespeare’s antagonism with Jonson, triangulated with Marston, helps situate Troilus in its complex generic position, as a new kind of drama that embodies ideals contrary both to the judgmental rationality of Jonson’s “comical satire” and to the irrational pleasure of Shakespeare’s own “festive comedy.”

209 “If poets want to thrive, their fictions must be pleasing. Marston accepts festive comedy but recognizes the cost of choosing imagination over reason. Modern commentators often read his entire canon as unnuanced satire, but his early comedies for Paul’s trace a kind of negative dialectic, with the thesis of comical satire and the antithesis of festive comedy converging in What You Will” (Bednarz 198).
reasserts some of the normative, rational judgment of Jonson’s humoral drama in the tragic neo-Senecan purging of the court in *Antonio’s Revenge* and the comic neo-Senecan purging of the court in *The Malcontent*, Shakespeare absolutely kicks over this judgmental, normative authorial rationality in *Troilus and Cressida*. “Troilus’s nihilism corroded both the romantic and the satiric norms of the Poet’s War, and through it Shakespeare repudiated festive comedy even as he demolished comical satire” (Bednarz 258). I will argue that this demolition is best understood in terms of common and uncommon sense.

Bednarz shows that Jonson’s comical satires present an ideal of authorial rationality in the triumph of judgment over “humors,” while Shakespeare’s festive comedies present an ideal of authorial irrationality in the triumph of desire over reason.  

Jonson’s authority is based on the self-confident assertion of authorial judgment but “irrational self-denial” (185). On the other hand, the poetics of festive comedy, as seen in *Twelfth Night*, is based not on the self-confident assertion of authorial judgment but “irrational self-denial” (185). It

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210 According to Bednarz, Shakespeare and Marston join forces against Jonson, setting the “prologue armed” of *Troilus* and the “armed epilogue” of *Antonio and Mellida* in opposition to the “armed Prologue” of *Poetaster*, the play in which Jonson mocked Marston explicitly and Shakespeare implicitly (258-262).

211 The centerpiece of Jonson’s poetics is this “authorial self-reflection” (Bednarz 264), which is represented as lucid, clear-sighted self-knowledge. Jonson asserts an artistic common sense by claiming to see clearly that he can see himself clearly.
celebrates the losing-one’s-mind of demented fantasy and the dreamy imagination. Thus in *Twelfth Night* Sebastion says, “Or I am mad, or else this is a dream. / Let fancy still my sense in Lethe steep; / If it be thus to dream, still let me sleep!” (4.1.61-63). Sebastion is “willing to ’distrust [his] eyes’ and ’wrangle with reason’ (4.3.11-14)” (Bednarz 187).

In contrast to such irrational denial of one’s own vision in Shakespeare, “Jonson affirms that accurate self-reflection is possible” (Bednarz 184). This is one of the convictions that Shakespeare seems bent on interrogating, if not fully dissolving, in *Troilus and Cressida*.

Jonson’s theatrical assault… had originated in a contentiously debated question: was it possible for writers to know themselves and accurately estimate their cultural value? As both Jonson and his detractors had realized, his new program demanded its audience’s assent to his judgment as a condition of its own probity. Shakespeare and Marston, however, blasted his ideas. In *Troilus and Cressida*, people are held to be incapable of unmediated self-knowledge, since we depend on others to tell us who we are and only know ourselves through their reflections. Jonson’s ‘confidence’ in his own merit is as ridiculous as Ajax’s self-love…. Through [Shakespeare’s] dissection of the notion of value, literary criticism began within late Elizabethan drama to interrogate the process of self-reflection. (Bednarz 263)

The *locus classicus* for Shakespeare’s treatment of this question is, of course, the theory of “reflection” that Ulysses and Achilles expound in one of the play’s bizarre philosophical duets. Achilles asks “what are you reading,” and Ulysses replies:

A strange fellow here
Writes me that man, how dearly ever parted,
How much in having, or without or in,
Cannot make boast to have that which he hath,
Nor feels not what he owes, but by reflection;
As when his virtues, shining upon others,
Heat them and they retort that heat again
To the first giver. (3.3.95-102)
Muir observes, “The identity of this author has been much debated—as much as the satirical rogue quoted by Hamlet” (126, note). I would suggest that one of these possible authors is Seneca: the chorus in *Troades* offers another parallel that indicates how Shakespeare takes up not only the characters and mythology but also the conceptual themes of Seneca’s tragedy. In line 1023, Seneca’s chorus says, “est miser nemo nisi comparatus” [no man is wretched but by comparison], which echoes interestingly with Ulysses’ claim that “man… cannot… have that which he hath, but by reflection.” More generally, the main thrust of Seneca’s passage, like Shakespeare’s, is the dependency of the individual on the group, the interdependence of the self and the other. The chorus insists that misery loves company, and that one can only see one’s state of wretchedness in negative relation to the fortune of another.

Shakespeare’s characters likewise insist that fortune (success, honor, reputation) requires company, that one can only see one’s own state of fortune in terms of its positive reflection in another. In his reply, Achilles says:

This is not strange, Ulysses.
The beauty that is borne here in the face
The bearer knows not, but commends itself
To others’ eyes; nor doth the eye itself,
That most pure spirit of sense, behold itself,
Not going from itself; but eye to eye opposed
Salutes each other with each other’s form,
For speculation turns not to itself
Till it hath traveled and is mirrored there
Where it may see itself. This is not strange at all. (3.3.102-111)

Here, Achilles articulates a tension between psychological common sense and social-rhetorical common sense, regarding which takes priority and precedence over the other. Psychological common sense is symbolized in the claim that sight can see itself. Social-
rhetorical common sense, on the other hand, is symbolized in the claim that vision cannot see itself, except by seeing how it is seen in the sight of another. Ulysses’ response reinforces the latter position, that self-perception must be socially mediated:

I do not strain at the position—
It is familiar—but at the author’s drift;
Who in his circumstance expressly proves
That no man is lord of anything,
Though in and of him there be much consisting,
Till he communicate his parts to others;
Nor doth he of himself know them for aught
Till he behold them formed in th’applause
Where they’re extended; who, like an arch, reverb’rate
The voice again…. (3.3.112-121)

This passage offers a neo-Roman portrait of social-rhetorical common sense. In Ulysses’ account of public “communication,” the stability of social status is achieved through the “applause” that “reverberates” like an “arch.” We might compare this with Seneca’s Epistle 95: “Let us possess things in common (in commune)…. Our relations with one another are like a stone arch, which would collapse if the stones did not mutually support each other, and which is upheld in this very way” (Gummere 3:91). Ulysses seems to adopt something like this view, arguing that psychological identity depends on social identity and that the latter has priority over the former: the conscious reflection of individual self-perception is derivative of the social, communal, inter-subjective consensus of a sensus communis. Individual self-possession depends on communal belonging; personal identity depends on social status. No man is lord of anything.

I would argue that this relativistic, social-constructivist theory (surely related to the Trojan debate about “value” and “particular will”) is later put to the test, pushed to its limit or reductio ad absurdam in the killing of Hector. That is, Shakespeare shows
Achilles putting Ulysses’ theory of socially constructed identity into radically cynical practice, transforming the individual achievement upon which his heroic identity rests (killing Hector) into a collective action, a social process. Achilles sets his Myrmidons, like a pack of dogs, upon the unarmed Hector, and commands them: “On, Myrmidons, and cry you all amain: / Achilles hath the mighty Hector slain!” (5.8.13-14). Like the reflection of the individual eye (I) that sees itself in the mirrors of the other eyes, only to attribute as belonging to itself what it sees in them, Achilles defines himself confidently and heroically through his reflection in the I-glasses of these Myrmidon-mirrors, which establish the basis for Achilles’ first-person singular eye (I) that defines itself through them (“Follow me, sirs, and my proceedings eye” [5.7.7]; “Along the field I will the Trojan trail” [my emphasis]). Achilles performs a cynical application of the theory of social construction through collective reflection, and thus forces the audience—us—to confront the ugly side of the coin: we must decide whether we can accept the implications of the hypothesis. Achilles turns the theory of reflection into a reverberating echo, producing and reproducing his heroic image in the sound of the false claim—“Achilles hath the mighty Hector slain”—which becomes the “bruit” that echoes throughout Troy and throughout history: “Achilles! Achilles! Hector’s slain! Achilles! – The bruit is Hector’s slain, and by Achilles” (5.9.3-5). Here is the epitome of the theory of a socially constructed “reflection” that leads to the consensual “reverberation” of

212 “Troilus and Cressida” imitates comical satire in exposing the delusion of romantic love…. But Shakespeare’s play undermines the delusion of honor shared by epic and comical satire. The reputation of Achilles depends solely on the legend of his having killed Hector, which the Myrmidons actually did, after sundown, when their adversary was unarmed” (Bednarz 261).
applause ("No man is lord of anything, / … / Till he behold them formed in th’applause / Where they’re extended; who, like an arch, reverb’rate / The voice again"). The heroic identity of Achilles exists in this echoing reverberation, which draws out the insidious relativism or nihilism implicit in the theory of reflection. A lie becomes the truth.

The obvious objection to this reading is that in Achilles’ orchestrated contract-killing of Hector through his proxy soldiers we see not an application but a perversion of the “reflection” theory. But this objection fails to recognize, I think, the radical skepticism—and even the anti-humanistic nihilism—of this philosophy. The audience is certainly prompted to ask, “Is this really Achilles?” He is supposedly the warrior who defeated Hector, the only Greek great enough to conquer him in battle, but this character is something else entirely! He is a backroom dealmaker, who contrives to put a “hit” on Hector and then merely passes around the falsely heroic version to claim credit for doing what he didn’t do. The reality of Achilles here is not the same as the idea of Achilles. But this observation, which Shakespeare must have factored into his aesthetic calculations, is only possible if we throw aside the skeptical philosophy of reflection that Ulysses and Achilles offer. (The observation is based on a distinction between perception and reality—or between essential individual identity and socially constructed identity—that is precisely what this philosophy rules out of bounds.) If one cannot verify one’s own essential nature independently of social construction (“reflection”), how can we object that the social construction of the heroic Achilles is contradicted by (does not correspond to) his real character? We cannot. The only way to deny the conclusion of social

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213 In Radical Tragedy, Dollimore champions the play’s radical anti-essentialism as a forerunner of postmodern theory.
construction of the self is to deny the premise (that the “self” consists in its social reflection in the “other”).

Thus we see that the idea of performative social construction in the reflection theory implies, if not an ontological nihilism, at least a profound epistemological skepticism (“no man is the lord of anything, / … / Till he communicate his parts to others”). Indeed, Ulysses expresses an interesting corollary to this skepticism a bit later, when he says, “’Tis known, Achilles, that you are in love / With one of Priam’s daughters” (3.3.193-194). (These lines introduce the Polyxena subplot). Achilles responds with an implicit challenge to such knowledge of inner life: “Ha! known?” Here Achilles asserts the opacity of intention, the independence of a kind of sensus privatus—“this my privacy” (3.3.190)—against the public knowledge of Ulysses’ sensus communis. But, once again, Ulysses sets social-rhetorical common sense in a position prior, and superior, to psychological self-knowledge: “All the commerce that you have had with Troy / As perfectly is ours as yours” (3.3.205-205). Ulysses denies the private realm in the name of public interests, denies that Achilles’ love life is a sensus privatus separable from the Greek sensus communis. Ulysses’ confidence in public judgments about the private realm of the self is striking, in this scene and throughout the play. He displays a clinical, instrumental and invasive control over the supposedly private world of others: their identity, self-knowledge, “sense of self.” Thus he tells Achilles, “The providence that’s in a watchful state / … / Finds bottom in th’ uncomprehensive deeps, / Keeps place with thought and almost like the gods / Does thoughts unveil in their dumb cradles” (3.3.195-199). Here, long before the obsessive and meticulous accounts of sociologists
like Foucault (for whom the powerful, watchful, disciplinary gaze of state institutions simultaneously inspects and constructs the soul of the individual subject, which is merely an “effect” or “symptom” of power), we see a prophetic fantasy of the steel scalpel of such political power probing unerringly and omnipotently in the recesses of the human heart, *subjecting* human subjectivity to the Other, knowing the Self prior to, and more effectively than, the Self knowing itself. Peering with the shameless gaze of statecraft, Ulysses claims to see into the depths of Achilles’ subconscious thoughts and feelings; he “finds bottom in th’ uncomprehensive deeps” of the dark reflecting-pool of Achilles’ mind. Indeed, Achilles himself admits, at the end of the scene, “My mind is troubled like a fountain stirred, / And I myself see not the bottom of it” (3.3.302-303).

Thus, Ulysses’ extreme skepticism regarding the ability of others to have accurate self-perception stands in contrast to his overweening confidence in his own ability to perceive into others.214 Or perhaps it is not his confidence that he can perceive the other’s self so much as his confidence that he can *construct* the other’s self: not knowledge but power. This is most evident in his psycho-social manipulation of Ajax, but it also appears in his brief interaction with Cressida and in his third-party observation of her and Diomedes. At Cressida’s entrance to the Greek camp, Ulysses reiterates his preference for social common sense over “privacy.” When Agamemnon kisses Cressida, Nestor says, “Our general doth salute you with a kiss,” to which Ulysses makes the witty observation, “Yet is the kindness but particular; / ‘Twere better she were kissed in general” (4.5.19-21). This pun conflates “general” as military leader with “general” as

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214 His skepticism about the “speculation” of self-perception stands in inverse relation to his confidence in the “inspection” of observation.
human collectivity. (Interestingly, both senses are retained in the opposing term, “private,” which refers both to military follower and to human individuality.) Ulysses’ wordplay reiterates the priority of the collective and the communal over the personal and individual, the public over the private. He wants Cressida’s lips to be felt as a *sensus communis*, not a *sensus privatus*—a general kindness, not a particular privilege.

In these respects Shakespeare’s character is a neo-Senecan Ulysses, for the “Ulyxes” of *Troades* is also a consummate politician, an impersonal observer and proponent of collective over individual values. Thus, just as in *Troilus* Ulysses speaks as the voice of the Greeks collectively, articulating their common cause—for instance, in the famous “degree” speech that expresses a literally cosmic, universal vision of the Greeks as a hierarchical social collective, in opposition to the individualistic assertions of Achilles—so in *Troades* Ulysses speaks as a “vox Graiorum omnium,” the collective voice of the Greeks rather than an individual. When Ulysses confronts Andromache to demand that she hand over her son Astynax to be killed, Ulysses introduces himself by saying, “I ask this first, that, although these words are spoken from my mouth, you should not consider them to be my own: it is the voice of all the Greeks” (524-527, *hoc primum peto, / ut, ore quamvis verba dicantur meo, / non esse credas nostra: Graiorum omnium / ... vox est*). This is also the scene where Ulysses shows most dramatically his genius for observation and detection (allowing him to discover that Andromache is hiding Hector’s son). At Hector’s tomb, Andromache refuses to hand over her son and claims that Astynax is dead, swearing that “he has lost the light; he lies among the dead, and
entrusted to the tomb he has received the due of those departed‖ (603-604).

Here Ulysses stops and employs his characteristic talents: “Now my mind, summon up your cunning, your deceit, your trickery, everything that is Ulysses. The truth is never lost. Observe this mother. She is grieving, weeping, groaning; yet she paces nervously up and down, and strains her ears to catch each word spoken. She is more fearful than mournful. My skills are needed” (613-618). Ulysses has realized that the details of the scene don’t add up. His declaration, “ingenio est opus,” literally “there is a need for my genius,” points to his natural talent for inspection, paying close attention to what Andromache’s appearance (her features and behavior) says, in contrast to what her tongue says: Ulysses notices that Andromache “fears more than she grieves” (618, magis haec timet, quam maeret). And this tells him, in contradiction to what her words tell him, that her son is alive rather than dead.

Shakespeare’s Ulysses does something similar with Cressida when she enters the Greek camp. During the bizarre exchange of kisses, Cressida engages in simultaneous verbal banter with the Greeks, trading quips as well as lips. And she seems to hold her own, giving as good as she gets despite her circumstantial disadvantage (she’s outnumbered, another example of the Greeks collectively victimizing an isolated Trojan). There is quick-wittedness in her sharp tongue. Nestor observes that she is a “woman of quick sense,” to which Ulysses responds with one of his most heated speeches:

Fie, fie upon her!  
There’s language in her eye, her cheek, her lip,  
Nay, her foot speaks, her wanton spirits look out

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215 She is exploiting verbal ambiguity to obscure how she has hidden Astynax in his father’s tomb: he is literally “lying with the dead.”
At every joint and motive of her body.
O, these encounterers, so glib of tongue,
That give accosting welcome ere it comes,
And wide unclasp the tables of their thoughts
To every tickling reader! Set them down
For sluttish spoils of opportunity
And daughters of the game. (4.5.54-63)

Here, Shakespeare’s Ulysses asserts the same thing as Seneca’s: although this clever Trojan woman tells a good story and thus can deceive most of the Greeks with the “quick sense” of her verbal language, through my special genius for observation I (“eye”) can perceive what her body says through its nonverbal language, which contradicts her words. Ulysses claims the ability to read the Trojan woman like a book, deciphering in her cheek, her lip, her foot—“every joint and motive of her body”—another language, a subtext. This feature of Ulysses is underlined by the first English book on Seneca, a publication almost exactly contemporaneous with Shakespeare’s play. Cornwallis’ *Discourses Upon Seneca the Tragedian* (1601) discusses a number of maxims from Senecan drama; of the eleven sententious quotations from the tragedies that it examines four are from *Troades*, more than any other play. One is Ulysses’ observation—“Magis haec timet, quam maeret, ingenio est opus” (Fitch: “She is more fearful than mournful. My skills are needed”)—and in his commentary, Cornwallis points to the same genius for “reading” the nonverbal language of the body that Shakespeare’s Ulysses performs on Cressida: “our intents speak in face: as what they would shun, they run into; they see but themselves, and beholding nor knowing nothing else, doe like themselues, easily discover what they wish most secret” (n. p.). Cornwallis thus generalizes Ulysses’ talent for observation, for scrutiny: “there is no action almost, that can escape a wise
obseruation…. Thus feare, thus loue, thus hatred, thus all make the faces of men, despite of their hearts, goe to confession” (Cornwallis, n. p.). In the same vein, we see Cressida’s face “goe to confession” before the observation of Shakespeare’s Ulysses.\(^{216}\)

This scene from Troades in which Andromache hides Astynax in Hector’s tomb was popular with Elizabethan dramatists.\(^{217}\) In fact, its literal situation is invoked figuratively in Troilus and Cressida in what may be a Senecan allusion. Ulysses talks to Achilles about his dying reputation: “The cry went once on thee, / And still it might, and yet it may again, / If thou wouldst not entomb thyself alive / And case thy reputation in thy tent” (3.3.184-187). The live burial of Hector’s son becomes metaphorical in Ulysses’ warning that Achilles should not “entomb thyself alive.” The dramatic context here reinforces the verbal resonance. Ulysses says, “better it would fit Achilles much / To throw down Hector than Polyxena. / But it must grieve young Pyrrhus now at home, / When fame shall in our islands sound her trump, / And all the Greekish girls shall tripping sing: / ‘Great Hector’s sister did Achilles win’” (3.3.206-211). The punning phrase “throw down,” which combines the idea of killing Hector on the battlefield with the idea of taking Polyxena to the marriage bed, actually describes the fate of Astynax, who is literally “thrown down” from the tower to his death by the Greeks at the end of

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\(^{216}\) See Thersites: “A proof of strength she could not publish more, / Unless she said ‘My mind in now turned whore’” (5.2.111-112).

\(^{217}\) Troades influenced Shakespeare in his use of tomb-images in Titus (Miola 21-22). It is also quoted in The Spanish Tragedy; after Hieronimo says “vindicta mihi” and quotes Seneca’s “per scelera” line from Agamemnon, he says: “Fata si miseris juvant, habes salute; / Fata si vitam negant, habes sepulchrum. / If destiny thy miseries do ease, / Then has thou health, and happy shalt thou be; / If destiny deny thee life, Hieronimo, / Yet shalt thou be assured of a tomb” (Bevington 51).
Troades. (It also echoes the brutal conflation of military domination and sexual possession in Seneca’s near-simultaneous representation of the murder of Hector’s son and the bloody quasi-marriage of Polyxena to Achilles’ ghost.) In the Shakespeare passage, “young Pyrrhus” will be ashamed and emasculated by his father’s betrothal to Priam’s daughter, because it has taken precedence over Achilles’ death-wish for the Trojans. In Seneca, however, the perverse double crime of the murder of Astynax and the wedding-death of Polyxena resolves this contradiction by uniting the two alternatives, allowing Achilles to “throw down” Hector in the form of Hector’s son thrown from the tower, and to also “throw down” Polyxena in the form of her marriage-murder performed by his own son on his own grave mound.

This comparison highlights some important features of Shakespeare’s romantic plot. While Hector’s pathetically noble death in Troilus and Cressida matches the pathetical sublime of his son’s death in Troades, the fate of Shakespeare’s Cressida offers a profound yet instructive counterpoint to Seneca’s Polyxena. On one hand, both girls are unfortunate brides, led into a bizarre and ill-fated quasi-wedding that marks their unhappy ruin: there is something rotten and uncertain in the “marriage” with Pyrrhus to which Helen rather deceptively calls Polyxena, and also in the “marriage” with Troilus to which Pandarus rather coercively leads Cressida. On the other hand, however, these parallels only sharpen the contrasts. Polyxena is the bravely pathetic, pathetically brave, “sublime” tragic victim, happy to sacrifice herself and meet death rather than corrupt herself by sharing the marriage bed of a Greek warrior, whereas Cressida is a mysteriously bold yet cowardly, self-compromising or self-preserving figure, who seems
eager to share the bed of the Greek soldier Diomedes rather than be alone. Cressida chooses the faithless role of soldier’s girl over the faithful role of martyr that Polyxena plays, and thus becomes the base, scornful, contemptible woman of Elizabethan satire rather than the sublime woman of Senecan tragedy. And yet there is something haunting and even tragic about her opaque nature and the conscious, deliberate mutilation she performs upon her relationship, her reputation, and her own self-image.

If Cressida doesn’t offer the tragic sublimity of Seneca’s Polyxena, what is the aesthetic appeal for Shakespeare of this frustratingly difficult (yet “easy”) heroine? I think it is a satirical sublimity produced by the uncommon sense that Cressida prompts in Troilus, the uncommon sense of a paradoxical notion of identity that emerges from the violence she does to the idea of self-perception as “reflection.” Although Bednarz may be overstating things in claiming that Shakespeare endorses Ulysses’ skeptical view of identity as reflection, it is certainly true that Shakespeare represents this skeptical view with great force and relates it thematically to the disintegration of identity in the lover’s plot. However, Shakespeare shows how this view of identity as reflection leads to the reductive and at times outright false view of identity epitomized in Ulysses’ simplistic definition of Cressida as a mere whore. In its own way, this simple fixed identity (“Cressida is a whore”) is just as falsely reductive as the echo of Achilles as a heroic warrior (“Achilles hath the mighty Hector slain”). Thus, the skepticism about identity based on self-perception—Achilles cannot see himself for what he is in himself—is counterbalanced by the parody of identity based on social reflection—Achilles is only what others see in him, only who they report him as being. And the parody seems to
follow from the skepticism: early in the play Achilles is nothing except the “reflection” of his reputation; therefore late in the play he is everything that the reverberation of his reputation echoes, even if this echo is the lie that he defeated Hector. Thus, if identity through self-determination is ironically undercut in this play, so is identity through the determination of others. Both of these “commonsense” forms of identity are demolished through the false or opaque identities of Achilles and Cressida, who are represented as paradoxical contradictions of themselves: Achilles is not Achilles (the hero defined as the one who slays Hector is shown to be the one who does not slay Hector), and Cressida is not Cressida (“This is, and is not, Cressida”).

Such paradoxes suggest an uncommon sense of identity, an uncommon sense of the self. This paradoxical uncommon sense is represented with a transcendental sublimity in the relationship of Cressida and Troilus; in this respect, the bitterly satirical love plot is more profound than the war plot. Cressida and Troilus interrogate the paradoxes of identity where Ulysses and Achilles turn unproblematically from recognizing the paradoxes to cynically using them, capitalizing on them through the brutal self-interest of war and politics. Achilles turns from the sublime mystery of theory (who can know himself?) to the callous pragmatism of practice (if the soldiers say I killed Hector, who will know any different?). Troilus and Cressida, on the other hand, move with increasingly painful self-consciousness through the tawdry course of their love-affair, from the tortuous death-throes of which they struggle to articulate, despite their impending relegation to the footnotes of neoclassical history, the perverse and paradoxical logic that is determining their lives. They both express psychological
uncommon sense through a denial of visual perception and simple identity, contradicting
the evidence of their own eyes (and I’s). Consider, for instance, Cressida’s speech that
seems to literally look back and “reflect” on her bond with Troilus:

Troilus, farewell! One eye yet looks on thee,
But with my heart the other eye doth see.
Ah, poor our sex! This fault in us I find,
The error of our eye directs our mind;
What error leads must err – O, then conclude
Minds swayed by eyes are full of turpitude. (5.2.105-110)

This mysterious speech does not represent the unified consciousness of perception
posited through the Aristotelian common sense. Rather it represents the divided
consciousness of a discordant, self-divided double perception—the “one eye” (or I)
contradicts the “other eye.” Thus, where Achilles’ earlier speech about the eye (I) trying
to see itself serves as an illustration of the psychological concept of common sense (a
unified ego), this speech about two eyes (two selves) belonging to one person yet
contradicting each other serves as an illustration of psychological uncommon sense,
calling into question the very unity and reflectivity of perception originally presumed by
Aristotle’s common sense. Cressida’s identity is complicated through her own reflection,
the process of which denies any “simplicity” in her self-perception (such as the simplistic
explanation that she has always been a simple whore) because of the complex (literally
duplex) eye’s (I’s) relation to itself.

Cressida’s complex reflections on identity are mirrored in Troilus. Watching her
betrayal with Diomedes, Troilus wants

To make a recordation to my soul
Of every syllable that here was spoke.
But if I tell how these two did co-act,
Shall I not lie in publishing a truth?
Sith yet there is a credence in my heart,
An esperance so obstinately strong,
That doth invert th’attest of eyes and ears;
As if these organs had deceptive functions,
Created only to calumniate. (5.2.114-122)

Through his paradoxical language and his “inversion” of the senses, Troilus defies both psychological and rhetorical common sense. He does not accept the judgment of his own sense-perception (the Aristotelian common sense is supposed to relay “th’ attest of eyes and ears”), nor does he accept the judgment of the perception of others (social consensus). He rather suggests the contradictory logic of paradox (rhetorical uncommon sense): “Shall I not lie in publishing a truth?” Troilus questions the communal authority of traditional wisdom and proverbial opinion, as well as the certainty of his own psychological common sense. But if he denies both his own perception and the perception of others, what can he affirm? It seems that he has faith now in nothing, except perhaps the uncommon sense of his own perception of contradiction and the paradoxical perception of his own failure of perception. In his own way no less excruciating than Seneca’s Oedipus, Shakespeare’s Troilus sees that he doesn’t see. He “experiences the night” not in the physical form of Oedipus’ gratuitous vision of blindness (973, noctem experitur), but in the psychological form of a dark night of the soul (he “swaggers himself out of his own eyes”). This painful recognition leads him to a fantasy of contradiction, a transcendent language that fuses the debasement of Elizabethan satire with the sublimity of Senecan tragedy.

We can describe Troilus’ expression of disillusionment as a poetics of “uncommon sense” because in it we find all three forms of “common sense”—
psychological, rhetorical, and aesthetic—under attack. As we already saw, Troilus says that there is “a credence in my heart... / That doth invert th’attest of eyes and ears; / As if these organs had deceptious functions, / Created only to calumniate” (5.2.118-122). Here, expanding on his earlier fear of losing the capacity to distinguish among the manifold of sensory data—“I do fear besides / That I shall lose distinction in my joys” (3.2.24-25)—Troilus turns Aristotle’s sensus communis upside down. While the common sense, traditionally located in the heart, serves to make the impressions of the five senses both distinct and coherent to the mind, the unnatural “credence” in Troilus’ heart serves to jumble the senses and “invert” the normal process of perception. Second, as Rosalie Colie observes, Troilus’ “refusal of his own sense-evidence” takes the form of “paradoxes” and “nonsense” (342). Thus, where earlier the lovers were defined by proverbial language—“true as steel,” “false as water,” etc.—here they are defined by riddling language, by the uncommon linguistic sense of paradoxes: “This is, and is not, Cressid” (5.2.144). Troilus is fighting a mental civil war in which his reason and intuition are pitted against each other.

In this catastrophic breaking point, Troilus represents his romantic disillusionment as a sublime “aesthetic idea,” a painful representation of the imagination equal to the masterpiece of a Senecan criminal’s monstrous genius. Troilus expresses a sense of identity in which the noumenal idea of the “true” Cressida stands in painful opposition or contradiction to the phenomenal appearance of the “false” Cressida. (This both mirrors and inverts Achilles, where the “true” inner man is a contemptible opportunist and the “false” outward perception is a sublime hero.) This painful contradiction is in Kantian
aesthetic terms the grounds of a judgment of the sublime. As Troilus dizzies himself shuttling between two contradictory conclusions (this is Cressida; this isn’t Cressida), the metaphysical idea developed in his speech—“madness of discourse, / That cause sets up with and against itself”—is something very close to what Kant called “antinomies of reason”: paradoxical processes of thought whereby the mind derives, by logical necessity, two contradictory and mutually exclusive conclusions, neither of which is possible to deny but either of which implies the negation of the other.

Kant’s philosophy is uniquely attuned to the way that such paradoxical antitheses in the process of thought—“Bifold authority, where reason can revolt” (5.2.142)—have aesthetic implications. For instance, his second “antinomy of reason”—everything consists of simple parts; nothing consists of simple parts—concerns unity, the possible or necessary existence of “simple beings” (Critique of Pure Reason 476). This is the same metaphysical question that Cressida shocks Troilus into interrogating: “If there be rule in unity itself...” (5.2.139). Likewise, Kant’s first antinomy—the world is spatio-temporally limited; the world is spatio-temporally infinite—reflects a conflict between the mind’s sensible faculties and its supersensible ideas: the same conflict that accounts for the “mathematical sublime,” where the mind is “pushed to the point at which our faculty of imagination breaks down” (CJ 101). The aesthetic feeling attached to this experience of mental breakdown is a first-order feeling of displeasure and a second-order feeling of pleasure: “The feeling of the sublime is, therefore, at once a feeling of displeasure, arising from the inadequacy of imagination..., and a simultaneously awakened pleasure, arising from this very judgement of the inadequacy of the greatest faculty of sense” (CJ
Kant thus defines aesthetic experience of the sublime as a paradox: a form of displeasure that is *on account of that very fact* pleasurable. This contradiction—the paradoxical production of pleasure through displeasure—links Kant’s formulation of the sublime with the sadomasochistic aesthetic bitterness of satire in *Troilus and Cressida*, which offers readers a satirical bitterness offensive to common taste and incompatible with the shared pleasure of a *sensus communis*. If readers are to find a Kantian aesthetic pleasure in this play, then, it must be a satirical form of sublimity that can with good reason be called uncommon sense.

**Rejecting the Sensus Communis in Timon of Athens**

*Nobody pretends that Timon is a very good play, but given the Malcontent theme this is the cleverest treatment of it ever written.* (Empson 180)

While the representatives of Senecan tragedy are largely opposed to the representatives of Elizabethan satire in *Troilus and Cressida*—for instance, Hector’s idealism is opposed to Thersites’ cynicism—the two are united in *Timon of Athens*. We can see this by comparing the title characters. The hero of *Troilus and Cressida* ultimately abandons satirical disillusionment and embraces tragic violence: in contrast to the cynical pacifism of Thersites, Troilus becomes obsessed with trying to wreak vengeance on Diomedes. But the hero of *Timon of Athens* permanently transcends Senecan vengeance through the logic of satire: Timon is possessed by an absolute desire to express universal hatred towards the whole world, which in a strange way turns him into a satirical pacifist like Thersites, unwilling to bother fighting anyone in particular.
Timon thus unites the roles of tragic avenger, represented in Alcibiades, and satirical critic, represented in Apemantus. Where Alcibiades is a bloodthirsty neo-Senecan scourge (at least until the end of the play), Apemantus is the cynical Elizabethan railler. Timon fuses the two roles into one, defining himself though the opposition to common sense that is shared by both. And just as Troilus’ bitter disillusionment is more sublime than Achilles’ cynical opportunism—and more sophisticated than his own violent bloodlust directed subsequently at the Greeks—so Timon’s bitterly universal hatred of humanity is more profound than Alcibiades’ vindictive rage at Athens. In both cases, the furor of satire transcends the furor of Senecan tragedy because it makes itself abstract and absolute; it refuses to accommodate itself to a particular, contingent target. In aesthetic terms, then, we see in Timon how the sublimity of a violent yet transcendent Elizabethan satirist can surpass the sublimity of a Senecan tragic hero.\(^\text{218}\)

Where *Troilus and Cressida* is the satire of a tragedy, *Timon of Athens* is the tragedy of a satirist. Unlike the somewhat marginal or artificial (disguised) satirist figures we have seen in other plays (Malevole, Antonio as a fool, Lear’s Fool, Thersites), Timon is a

\(^{218}\) In Timon’s profound social alienation we see a dramatic representation of Kant’s sublime. Kant writes: “The delight in the sublime, no less than in the beautiful, by reason of its universal *communicability* not alone is plainly distinguished from other aesthetic judgements, but also from this same property acquires an interest in society (in which it admits of such communication). Yet, despite this, we have to note the fact that *isolation from all society* is looked upon as something sublime, provided it rests upon ideas which disregard all sensible interest” (*CJ* 128-129). The cynical asceticism of Timon’s “isolation from all society” leads him also to “disregard all sensible interest.” He refuses to enjoy tasty food, nice clothing, and the other luxuries that once made him the life of the party, and he refuses to benefit from his new antisocial lifestyle (which is why he is so angry at finding the unwanted gold when he digs for roots).
“real” dramatic person (not disguised like Hamlet, Antonio, or Altofronto) and is the unquestionable hero of the play. Nevertheless, Timon is introduced to the audience as an aesthetic object: he is the subject of a painter’s portrait and a poet’s description. The poet invokes the strong imagination of artistic fantasy: he sees “big imagination” (1.1.33) in the painter’s portrait. When the poet discusses his own art it is, significantly, not simply literary but allegorical and even satirical (it is “reprehensive” poetry): “My free drift / Halts not particularly, but moves itself / In a wide sea of tax. No levelled malice / Infects one comma in the course I hold” (1.1.45-48). In this notion of an abstracted or hypothetical mode of representation—whose objects are general rather than particular—the poet invokes a principle defended by Elizabethan satirists. He is the play’s first representative of Elizabethan satire, its first spokesman. By invoking a theory from the self-defenses of Elizabethan satirists, the poet also prepares us for the appearance of Apemantus, who serves (like Thersites in Troilus and Cressida or the Fool in King Lear) as a transported Elizabethan satirist, brought back to ancient times to offer satirical commentary on the tragic action. Furthermore, the ironic hypocrisy of the poet’s performance raises a profound question about the relation between theory and practice that is crucial for Timon’s transformation into a satirist. That is, the poet’s position is one of bad faith: his poem represents Timon surrounded and sucked dry by flattering sycophants, and yet the poet is precisely one of those sycophants. He is a participant in the process he criticizes; he is guilty of the same sins that he “taxes.” This irony is brought to transcendental, sublime self-consciousness in Timon’s relentlessly reflexive

219 Later the poet plans to write “a satire against the softness of prosperity, with a discovery of the infinite flatteries that follow youth and opulency” (5.1.33-35).
career as a satirist. Timon refuses to be a participant in the process that he criticizes—or he at least refuses to turn a blind eye to the way that he is implicated in the object of his satirical attacks. This reflexive scorn for the self, this satirical contempt that includes the satirist’s self as its own object, links Timon with Apemantus instead: “Apemantus, that few things loves better / Than to abhor himself” (1.1.60-61).

From the outset, Apemantus is defined by his opposition to communal celebration and his violation of the social decorum that Seneca defines as “common sense.” One of Timon’s guests declares, “He’s opposite to humanity” (1.1.276). He is opposed to the communal feeling that binds people together by a sense of similarity, belonging, the “feeling for the community” definitive of the Roman sensus communis. Apemantus doesn’t share whatever it is that other people share insofar as they “have something in common.” This alienation from the sensus communis is reiterated when Apemantus first encounters Timon: Timon says, “O, Apemantus! You are welcome,” and Apemantus replies, “No, / You shall not make me welcome. / I come to have thee thrust me out of doors” (1.2.22-24). This exchange introduces the theme of banishment and the paradox of self-banishment that connects Apemantus with Timon and Alcibiades. Apemantus’ alienation is social where Alcibiades’ is political: Alcibiades gets himself kicked out of the state military, but Apemantus only tries to get himself kicked out of a dinner party. However, the deliberate strategy behind Apemantus’ banishment suggests a theoretical sophistication: he knowingly goes to Timon’s feast only in order to alienate himself from it (“I come to have thee thrust me out of doors”). Thus a self-conscious pathology defines
Apemantus, an obsessive reiteration of his alienation from common sense that he can only claim by continually provoking its reenactment.

Where Apemantus is defined as a satirist who opposes the *sensus communis*, Timon is characterized initially by his assertion of community, although in a wildly irrational form that violates common sense. Timon’s generosity is all one-way, he gives and never receives. In his first public speech, Timon addresses his guests with an unconsciously ironic language of ideal friendship and generosity: “I have often wished myself poorer, that I might come nearer to you. We are born to do benefits; and what better or properer can we call our own than the riches of our friends? O, what a precious comfort ‘tis to have so many like brothers commanding one another’s fortunes!” (1.2.97-102). This maxim by which Timon first defines the essence of humanity—“we are born to do benefits”—might serve as a motto for the way that he emerges as a sort of caricatured spokesman for the celebration and philosophy of gift-giving represented by Seneca’s *On Benefits* (translated by Arthur Golding and published in 1578). In fact, John Wallace has argued that the play is a parody or travesty of Seneca’s treatise: “Athens as Timon wishes it to be is the world of *De beneficiis* gone wild, gushing with reciprocity, bathed in sentiment, and wholly lacking in the virtuous mean based on right reason that Seneca upheld even in his more emotional moments” (355). Thus, Wallace posits a complex mutual or reciprocal critique between the treatise and the play: “if the play is clearly a critique of Stoic social ethics, Seneca himself serves to criticize the actions of Timon” (355).

220 “The structure… of the play… explodes Timon’s false belief that he is a member of a rhetorical community” (Graham 172).
Timon’s prodigal generosity in bestowing benefits is not only a violation of Stoic “right reason” in general, but in particular a perversion of “common sense,” the *sensus communis* that Seneca in *De Beneficiis* prescribes as a governing principle for giving gifts: “There should be common sense in a gift” (1.12.3: *Sit in beneficio sensus communis*). In the masque that is performed at this feast, there is also a suggestion of the psychological common sense and an implicit identification of Timon with it. A lady enters dressed as Cupid, and says, “Hail to thee, worthy Timon, and to all / That of his bounties taste! The five best senses / Acknowledge thee their patron, and come freely / To gratulate thy plenteous bosom” (1.2.119-122). Where common sense is invoked in relation to Timon, however, it is done so only to make his lack of common sense the clearer. Thus in his commentary on the masque, Apemantus invokes the psychological derangement of madness: “They are madwomen. / Like madness is the glory of this life” (1.2.129-130). The early Timon is such a “madman” because he lacks psychological or social “sense” in his acts of financial kindness. Both Apemantus and the faithful steward Flavius diagnose Timon’s derangement or social frenzy as a kind of “senselessness” by which his soul is blocked from seeing and hearing what should be obvious—he cannot or will not perceive the significance of the data of his eyes and ears. Apemantus says “Thou wilt not hear me… / … O, that men’s ears should be / To counsel deaf, but not to flattery!” (1.2.249-251). Likewise, Flavius says, “No care, no stop; so senseless of expense / That he will neither know how to maintain it / Nor cease his flow of riot… / What shall be done? He will not hear” (2.2.1-8).
Timon’s only self-defense is idealistic rather than commonsensical: “Unwisely, not ignobly, have I given” (2.2.171). This portrayal of Timon as blind to clear evidence and deaf to good counsel, yet proud of his capacity for generosity, recalls what Seneca describes as the “sense of benefits” in De Beneficiis. Seneca asks, “do you call that man unhappy who has lost his sight, whose ears have been closed by some malady, and yet do not call him wretched (miserum) who has lost all sense of benefits (sensum beneficiorum)?” (Basore 3:157). Timon’s generous soul is closed to the evidence of his very eyes and ears, yet still retains a grand (although deluded) “sense of benefits.”

However, while Timon first displays this uncommon sense of generosity, in which everyone is a friend with whom everyone shares everything, he later displays the uncommon sense of Senecan furor. This furor is introduced in the notion of “anger” (ira) as a form of madness. Initially, Timon is opposed to such irrational anger. Thus, he responds to Apemantus’ refusal of social decorum with a spirited rebuke:

Fie, thou’rt a churl. Ye’ve got a humour there
Does not become a man; ’tis much to blame.
They say, my lords, Ira furor brevis est,
But yon man is ever angry.
Go, let him have a table by himself,
For he does neither affect company
Nor is he fit for’t, indeed. (1.2.25-31)

Here Timon diagnoses Apemantus’ social indecorum as a psychological disorder, explaining his churlish opposition to social common sense in terms of the mental derangement of psychological common sense—the “madness” of anger. The Latin phrase, Ira furor brevis est, is a neoclassical commonplace. In the first paragraph of De Ira, Seneca cites this same proverbial definition of rage: “Certain wise men, therefore,
have claimed that anger is temporary madness” (*Quidam itaque e sapientibus viris iram dixerunt brevem insaniam*) (Basore 1:107). However, Timon’s rebuke of Apemantus’ antisocial lack of decorum, and his diagnosis of it as a manifestation of *furor*, ironically prefigure his own social uncommon sense—and its connection to psychological uncommon sense, to the *furor* that is definitive of Senecan tragedy.

In his movement away from the “common sense” or good sense of Senecan philosophy, Timon embraces the uncommon sense of Senecan tragedy: rage, alienation, and vindictive hatred. He takes on a *furor* that is not normal anger, nor even the composed, self-possessed, consistent anger of the cynical satirist Apemantus, but an anger with the violent bloodlust and universal scope of a tragic madman. Timon becomes an angry Timon. He is “a madman” (3.4.99) whose psyche is generally deranged (“distracted soul”) and specifically furious. He now enters “in a rage” (s. d.), just as Atreus enters Seneca’s *Thyestes* as “angry Atreus” (180, *iratus Atreus*). In fact, *Thyestes* is a Senecan intertext that helps explain the generic complexity of Timon’s tragical-satirical rage. We can see this by observing Shakespeare’s recurring food motif, a gustatory theme that combines the aesthetic sadism of the “bitterness” of Elizabethan satire with the vengeful sadism of Seneca’s Thyestean banquet. For instance, during the first banquet scene, Timon tries to smother the satirical ranting unkindness of Apemantus with the kindness of welcoming generosity—“let my meat make thee silent”—but Apemantus replies, “I scorn thy meat.” In his explanation of this scorn, Apemantus introduces the theme of cannibalism that resonates with the satirical variation on the Thyestean banquet that Timon cooks up later: “’Twould choke me, for I should ne’er
flatter thee. O you gods, what a number of men eats Timon, and he sees ‘em not! It grieves me to see so many dip their meat in one man’s blood; and all the madness is, he cheers them up, too” (1.2.36-41). In this description Apemantus describes the banquet as a perverse ritual of cannibalism, as in Seneca, with Timon playing a variation or inversion of the Thyestes role. (Where Thyestes is invited to feast with his brother and unwittingly is served his own children’s flesh and blood—he “sees ‘em not” and is “cheered up” by Atreus—Timon invites guests who “consume” him. In Thyestes the guest is the unknowing agent of cannibalism; in Timon the host is the unknowing object of cannibalism.)

Apemantus’ cynical diet of roots not only foreshadows Timon’s own diet as a satirist but also intersects strangely with the Thyestean theme of cannibalism. After Apemantus’ satirical saying of vegetarian grace (“Amen… I eat root”), Timon immediately turns to another guest, Alcibiades, who along with Apemantus is the second dramatic foil to Timon. (These two characters are connected as the only two unwilling or at least uncomfortable guests at the feast—both somehow out of place—and they both express their discomfort at the feast through the indecorous language of cannibalism.) Timon tells the general “your heart’s in the field now,” and observes, “You had rather be at a breakfast of enemies than a dinner of friends.” Alcibiades replies, “So they were bleeding new, my lord; there’s no meat like ’em. I could wish my best friend at such a feast” (1.2.72-78). Here Apemantus interjects, reinforcing the cannibal connection: “Would all those flatterers were thine enemies then, / That thou mightst kill ‘em and bid me to ‘em” (1.2.79-80). Alcibiades, with his virulent military aura, has picked up the
Thyestean violence that was figurative in Apemantus’ satirical description of the banquet and made it literal (like Atreus, he really kills people for his “breakfast of enemies”), and Apemantus has returned to the theme and reiterated his attack on the sponging guests by invoking the general’s real capacity for violence: he wants Alcibiades to slaughter them as he would enemy soldiers, and claims that he would then partake with the general in eating their corpses.

These hints of perversion in the first banquet set up the outright perversion of the second, “mock” banquet. After his sudden anger has descended on him, like the onset of overwhelming furor in the soul of the Senecan hero, Timon calls his steward and instructs him, “Go bid all my friends again… / I’ll once more feast the rascals.” Flavius objects with his commonsense logic, “O my lord, / You only speak from your distracted soul. / There is not so much left to furnish out / A moderate table,” but Timon insists: “Go, I charge thee, invite them all. Let in the tide / Of knaves once more. My cook and I’ll provide” (3.5.7-14). This mock banquet is an act performed through furor rather than generosity and it reflects Timon’s dual affiliation to both Elizabethan satire and Senecan tragedy. In the psychological derangement of his “distracted soul,” Timon’s furor has begun to show the signs of an inventive genius; like the Senecan hero, it has inspired him to arrange his spectacle of revenge as a perverted ritual. However, this spectacle involves not the bloody violence of tragedy but the symbolic abuse and linguistic sadism of satire.

Thus, as he did earlier in Titus Andronicus, Shakespeare here offers, with the help of

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221 “See Titus: I will grind your bones to dust, / And with your blood and it I’ll make a paste, / … / And make two pasties of your shameful heads, / And bid that strumpet, that unhallowed dam, / Like to the earth swallow her own increase. / This is the feast that I
Thomas Middleton, a re-presentation of the Thyestean banquet.\footnote{222} But there is a profound generic twist: like Marston in *Antonio’s Revenge*, Shakespeare serves this Thyestean banquet with the “bitter sauce” of Elizabethan satire. Indeed, it is more properly a satirical banquet than a tragic one: the Senecan meat is missing and the satirical sauce is all that is left. But just as, in Timon’s great invective speeches, Shakespeare uses the sublime language of Senecan tragedy to express satirical scorn, so in this feast he employs the sadistic anti-social form of a Senecan tragic crime to express the contempt proper to Elizabethan satire.

This neo-Senecan reading of Timon’s mock banquet is supported by the internal evidence of the cannibalism language and by the external evidence of an earlier Timon play upon which Shakespeare and Middleton probably drew, “an English academic comedy written at Cambridge” (Bevington A-50). “The Timon comedy is an anonymous play dating from c. 1601-5 that is a very likely source for *Timon of Athens*” (Dawson and Minton 359). This comedic *Timon* probably “provided theatrically compelling details… such as the mock banquet” (Dawson and Minton 27). In fact, the *Timon* comedy have bid her to, / And this the banquet she shall surfeit on. / … / …come, be everyone officious / To make this banquet” (5.2.185-192, 200-201).

\footnote{222} The consensus is that Middleton was Shakespeare’s collaborator on *Timon of Athens* and the coauthor of this mock banquet scene. However, while Shakespeare probably delegated parts of the scene to Middleton, there is little doubt that he oversaw its function in the plot. “The way we see it Shakespeare probably took the lead, not only contributing about 65 per cent of the whole, but producing the overall plan” (Dawson and Minton 4). As Dawson and Minton observe, stylistic analysis leads Shakespeare editors to label the mock banquet scene as “Mixed authorship, but mostly by Shakespeare” (406). Shakespeare contributed the dramatic “meat” of the scene: “The central section, the mock banquet, is certainly Shakespeare’s. Holdsworth notes strong Shakespearean image clusters in the mock grace” (406).
reinforces the Thyestes parallel in its staging of the mock banquet. In scene 4.5 the guests enter and look forward with watering mouths to the expected feast ("honey sops," "pie," etc.). Then Timon enters, eager to reveal the vindictive reality of the feast, hidden beneath the covered dishes. But first he delivers an ironic soliloquy, celebrating the banquet with words that have a double sense: "O happy mee, equal to Jove himselfe! / I going touche the starres. Breake out O joy, / And smother not thyselfe within my breast. / Soe many friends, soe many friends I see…" (Bullough 328). The subtext of this exuberant speech is the vindictive rage that animates it: Timon is excited about how the mock banquet will embody his hatred in a grand, shocking fashion. And this subtext is, quite literally, a Senecan one: the first two lines here are translated from Thyestes, where Atreus spouts off in the same way in the corresponding situation: “I am going equal to the stars and above everyone, touching the lofty sky with the crown of my proud head” (885-86, Aequalis astris gradior et cunctos super / altum superbo vertice attingens polum).\(^{223}\)

Although Shakespeare’s Timon does not have such an explicit echo of Seneca’s play, it is deeply engaged with Senecan tragedy and with the portrayal of the misanthropic satirist as a Senecan hero. The play is actually structured like a Senecan tragedy, in which the hero perceives some profound and irreparable injury that utterly

\(^{223}\) Newton’s edition has: “Nowe equall with the Starres I goe, beyond each other wight, / With haughty heade the heavens above, and highest Poale I smite” (86). The passage is also translated by Ben Jonson in Sejanus: “My roof receives me not; ’tis air I tread: / And, at each step, I feel my advanced head / Knock out a star in heaven!” (5.7-9). The anonymous Timon author seems to be working from Thyestes because of the clear plot parallel and because his words are closer to Seneca than Jonson’s: “equal to Jove” literally echoes “aequalis”; and “I going touche the starres” is closer to “astris gradior” than “at each step, I… / Knock out a star.”
changes his identity and alters his stance to humanity, the world, and the gods, sending him into a raging furor that transforms him from a human being belonging to the world of men to a “mythical monster” belonging to the pantheon of legend (see Dupont). But Shakespeare’s profound inventiveness is to reproduce this structure in the story not of any perverse crime or bloodshed but of a man becoming a satirist, a process represented as the rejection of the sensus communis. In the mock banquet scene, Timon savors the anticipation of the main course with bitter asides and ironic double entendres. He says, “Gentlemen, our dinner will not recompense this long stay,” and “my good friend, what cheer?” (3.7.32-40). The guests notice that the feast is made up of “All covered dishes” (3.7.48), like the banquets in Thyestes, Titus Andronicus, and Antonio’s Revenge. Before uncovering them, Timon delivers a satirical blessing:

> Make the meat be beloved more than the man that gives it. Let no assembly of twenty be without a score of villains. If there sit twelve women at the table, let a dozen of them be as they are. The rest of your foes, O gods—the senators of Athens, together with the common tag of people—what is amiss in them, you gods, make suitable for destruction. For these my present friends, as they are to me nothing, so in nothing bless them; and to nothing are they welcome. (3.7.75-84)

Here Timon uncovers the dishes to reveal smoking water (and according to most editors, stones): “Uncover, dogs, and lap.”

The generic complexity in this scene is reflected in its tension between particularity and abstraction. On one hand, Timon is mad at his former “friends” in particular and his feast is supposed to punish them personally. Like the Senecan tragic hero-villain, Timon is a vindictive character trying to exact revenge on particular enemies

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224 Shakespeare’s Titus says “welcome, all. Although the cheer be poor, / ‘Twill fill your stomachs” (5.3.28-29).
by throwing this perverse banquet for them (like Atreus serving Thyestes, Titus serving Tamora, Antonio serving Piero, etc.). On the other hand, however, Timon’s rage is never targeted in the way that such revenge tragedies demand, but remains abstract (Timon’s guests are anonymous and interchangeable, un-individuated). Like the Elizabethan satirist, Timon is a principled observer of society trying to attack generalized features of the public as a whole rather than particular individuals. This abstraction makes him the most profoundly satirical of Shakespeare’s satirical avengers: his rage does not fasten onto particular human targets the way that other tragic satirists do (Hamlet, Troilus, and Lear all kill people at the end of the play). Timon only attacks social groups, not named individuals, and has an expanding, increasingly inclusive category of enemies: “the senators of Athens, together with the common tag of people.” He moves from his friends, to the ruling aristocrats, to the “common” people (the plebeians). At the same time, instead of merely delivering the commentary—the abusive words—of an Elizabethan satirist, Timon also aims to embody some of the violence of the Senecan avenger in his quasi-Thyestean banquet. In addition to abusing them verbally (“smiling, smooth, detested parasites, / Courteous destroyers, affable wolves, meek bears...”) he abuses them physically, beating them and throwing rocks at them: “dost thou go? / Soft, take thy physic first. Thou too, and thou” (3.7.98-99). Thus, he performs a simultaneous abstraction of Senecan violence and literalization of satirical abuse.

In his final words to the guests, Timon mixes the universal misanthropy of a cynical satirist with the bloodthirsty urge for destruction of a Senecan villain: “Burn house! Sink Athens! Henceforth hated be / Of Timon man and all humanity” (3.7.103-
104). In calling for the destruction of the “house” of Athens, Timon echoes the
bloodthirsty rage of Seneca’s “Fury” (*Furia*) towards the Atrean *domus* in the prologue
of *Thyestes*. Seneca’s Fury urges the ghost of Tantalus to “goad this unnatural house into
vengeful rage…. Let there be no limit to their anger (*irarum*), no shame in it; let blind
rage (*caecus furor*) incite their minds…. Let the shaky fortunes of this violent house
(*domus*) crumble” (27-34). It is this same anger, the blind rage of *furor*, which Timon
now exhibits. “He’s but a mad lord,” “Lord Timon’s mad” (3.7.108-116). One of his
shocked guests asks, “Know you the quality of Lord Timon’s fury?” (3.7.106). The
answer is: a satirical, yet Senecan quality. It is the quality of psychological uncommon
sense, the impulsive bloodlust of Senecan *furor* that animates Timon’s invective
speeches. Compare how, in *Thyestes*, Seneca’s Fury conjures up a vision of the perverse,
all-consuming disorder and destruction of rage:

Let the ruler be ruined and the ruined turn ruler…. Let them be as hateful
to themselves as they are to all. Let there be nothing that anger (*ira*)
regards as forbidden. Let brother be afraid of brother, parent of son, son of
father; let death come to children vilely, but birth more vilely; let husband
be menaced by wife’s enmity; in this unnatural home let adultery be the
lightest of misdeeds. Let right, faithfulness and law perish utterly. Let
them carry war overseas, let spilt blood drench all lands, and over the
mighty leaders of nations let Lust exult victorious. And let heaven not be
immune to your evil. Why are the stars glittering in the sky, their fires
maintaining their due of glory in the firmament? Let there be another
night, let daylight be lost from the heavens. (35-51, Fitch)

This “aesthetic idea” of universal corruption and mutual destruction, articulated by a
figure (*Furia*) who is not human but a supernatural personification of infernal *furor*, is
the closest we get in Senecan tragedy to the abstract, absolute rage of Timon in his
subsequent ranting speeches. His furor manifests itself in a similar outpouring of grand verbal violence.

Consider, for instance, how Timon’s next soliloquy fuses the destructive furor of Senecan tragedy and the abusive invective of Elizabethan satire.

Let me look back on thee. O thou wall
That girdles in those wolves, dive in the earth,
And fence not Athens! Matrons, turn incontinent!
Obedience fail in children! ....

Son of sixteen,
Pluck the lined crutch from thy old limping sire;
With it beat out his brains! Piety and fear,
Religion to the gods, peace, justice, truth,
Domestic awe, night rest, and neighborhood
Instruction, manners, mysteries, and trades,
Degrees, observances, customs, and laws,
Decline to your confounding contraries,
And let confusion live! Plagues incident to men,
Your potent and infectious fevers heap
On Athens, ripe for stroke! Thou cold sciatica,
Cripple our senators, that their limbs may halt
As lamely as their manners! Lust and liberty,
Creep in the minds and marrows of our youth,
That ‘gainst the stream of virtue they may strive
And drown themselves in riot! Itches, blains,
Sow all th’ Athenian bosoms, and their crop
Be general leprosy! Breath infect breath,
That their society, as their friendship, may
Be merely poison! ....
The gods confound—hear me you good gods all—
Th’ Athenians, both within and out that wall;
And grant, as Timon grows, his hate may grow
To the whole race of mankind, high and low. (4.1.1-40)

In Timon’s hate for “the whole race of mankind” we see the universalizing tendency of social uncommon sense like the odium of Senecan tragedy, but rendered fully abstract and absolute. His invective combines the “universal wolf” of Ulysses’ cultural nightmare in Troilus and Cressida, the “general leprosy” of Seneca’s plague in Oedipus, and the
diseases of Thersites’ curses. It experiments with the sublime mixture of neo-Senecan pathos and satirical invective that was developed in Marston’s drama. Timon details literal human corruption in a whole catalogue of diseases: there is “cold sciatica,” “itches,” “blains,” and “general leprosy.” This language of human rot is the literary filth, the *foeditas*, proper to Elizabethan satire. In the more sordid invocations of “cold sciatica,” Timon speaks the language of a satirist like Thersites, who abuses Achilles and Patroclus: “Now the rotten diseases of the south, … lethargies, cold palsies, raw eyes, dirt-rotten livers, wheezing lungs, bladders full of impostume, sciaticas, … incurable bone-ache, … take and take again such preposterous discoveries!” (5.1.17-23). But in the more catastrophic, epidemical images of “general leprosy” and “plague” in which “breath infect[s] breath,” Timon speaks the language of a tragic, supernatural plague like that in Seneca’s *Oedipus*.

The Senecan, Oedipal hints of Timon’s vision—with its invocation of a general plague and of a parricide who will “beat out” his father’s brains—are magnified in his subsequent invective. Thus, his very next speech (his first in the woods) intensifies the wish for a general self-annihilation of the natural environment and a confusion of natural

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*225* See *Antonio’s Revenge*, whose hero offers an earlier example of the same sublime invective: “If Pythagorean axioms be true, / Of spirits’ transmigration, fleet no more / To human bodies; rather live in swine, / Inhabit wolves’ flesh, scorpions, dogs and toads / Rather than man. The curse of heaven reigns / In plagues unlimited through all his days; / His mature age grows only mature vice, / And ripens only to corrupt and rot / The budding hopes of infant modesty” (3.1.110-118). Marston’s mixed style fuses the high mode of Senecan declamation with the low mode of satirical invective, and his vision of “plagues unlimited” is reiterated with obsessive detail in Timon’s “Plagues incident to men.” He also prefigures Timon’s cynical reduction of human beings to vicious life forms: wolves, dogs, toads. (Timon calls the Athenians “wolves,” and he and Apemantus call each other “dog” and “toad.”)
order through universal disease and corruption: “O blessed breeding sun, draw from the
earth / Rotten humidity; below thy sister’s orb / Infect the air” (4.3.1-3). This description
resembles Oedipus’ description of the plague in the opening speech of Seneca’s tragedy:

the Titan [Sun] returns hesitantly, his beams made gloomy by filthy clouds. As his cheerless fire delivers somber light, he will look forth on homes left desolate by the greedy plague…. No gentle breeze with its cooling breath soothes our hearts..., but the Titan… augments the fires…. Phoebus’ sister (soror) glides obscured through the heavens, and the overcast daylight discolours the gloomy sky” (Oedipus 1-4, 37-47).

However, Timon puts in the imperative and subjunctive mood the vision that Oedipus
describes in the indicative. Simultaneously, Timon reveals this vision of natural
destruction to be an analogy to social destruction (an analogy exemplified in the theme of
sexual disease); he justifies the Senecan vision of universal plague through a satirical
vision of society as universally rotten foeditas—the nature of man as well as the nature of
nature is corrupt: “There’s nothing level in our cursed natures / But direct villainy.
Therefore be abhorred / All feasts, societies, and throngs of men” (4.3.19-21). Timon has
taken up Apemantus’ opposition to social common sense in a radical and absolute form:
he too will live in utter alienation from the sensus communis embodied in feasts and
societies. (But where Apemantus still attends human assemblies, only to sit by himself
and provoke his own banishment, Timon makes a clean break from society, never going
back indoors or inside the city walls.)

Like Apemantus, Timon now becomes a cynical satirist who prefers roots and
scorns the food of banquets. Besides connecting him dramatically to the diet of the
satirist, this move also connects him thematically to the gustatory definition of
Elizabethan satire: “Earth, yield me roots. / Who seeks for better of thee, sauce his palate
/ With thy most operant poison” (4.3.23-25). Here we might recall Antonio’s desire to “cook” Piero’s courtly “sweetmeats” in the “tart sour sauce” of his satirical Senecan revenge-purge. With this new attitude towards the “palate,” Timon rejects the sweetmeats of flattering banquets and welcomes the bitterness of satirical roots. There is still a hint of the honeyed sweetness of mel in the gold that Timon, digging for bitter roots, finds instead in the earth. Like honey, it is “Yellow,” and like the deceptive honey of flattering speech it “will make / Black white, foul fair, wrong right” (4.3.28-29). But it is only a false sweetness, to make filth seem palatable, a guilded mel used to make foeditas appear sweet: “She whom the spittle house and ulcerous sores / Would cast the gorge at, this embalms and spices / To th’ April day again” (4.3.40-42). This unwanted discovery of gold instead of roots prompts a still more universal, abstracted object for Timon’s hatred, which is now directed not merely at his false friends, nor all of the “common” people inside the walls of the city, nor even all the living organisms inhabiting the natural order, but at the very literal foundation of this whole natural and social order that he has rejected, the planet itself: “damned earth, / Thou common whore of mankind….” (4.3.42-43). His hatred has become abstract, principled, and self-conscious: hence reflexive. Paradoxically, it is precisely when the object of his fury has been rendered most general and universal—directed at the world itself—that Timon finally aims it at a single, particular, individual human object: himself. “His semblable, yea, himself, Timon disdains. / Destruction fang mankind” (4.3.22-23). This is why his furor transcends that of a Senecan avenger through the critical abstraction of satire. Where the Senecan hero
generally targets others while excepting himself, this satirist attacks abstractions in others and eventually applies these abstractions to himself.

In this scene Timon again encounters one of his doubles, Alcibiades, who is the first to meet the hero now that Timon is, like him, an exile from Athens. Alcibiades asks, “What is thy name? Is man so hateful to thee / That art thyself a man?” and Timon responds by defining his new identity as nothing but the label of this hatred for man: “I am Misanthropos, and hate mankind” (4.3.51-53). In this speech act of self-naming, the content of the declaration is the satirist’s scorn for humanity, but its form is that of the Senecan hero. Timon’s “I am Misanthropos” is the grandly willful self-fashioning through self-naming that is such a potent feature of the neo-Senecan tradition in the Renaissance; we can compare it to Atreus calling himself “Atreus iratus,” or Medea’s infamous declaration “Medea superest.” “The triumphant utterance of [one’s] own famous name is pure Seneca, the most stunning instance of a habit that runs through all the plays” (Braden 33). However, in turning his attention from Alcibiades to the general’s “whores,” Timon returns to the filth and bitterness of Elizabethan satire. Timon tells Timandra, “make use of thy salt hours,” recalling the language of sal and fel; he connects the rotten food of love in satire with the rotten disease of Pandarus’ epilogue in Troilus and Cressida: “Be a whore still. They love thee not that use thee. / Give them diseases, leaving with thee their lust. / Make use of thy salt hours: season the slaves / For tubs and baths, bring down rose-cheeked youth / To the tub-fast and the diet” (4.3.84-88). In this perverse “seasoning” of “rosy” young love through “salt hours,” Timon recalls the inversion of love’s sweetness (mel) in Troilus through the “salt of broken tears” and the
bitterness and filth (*fel* and *foeditas*) of heartbreak and venereal disease.\(^{226}\) (Like Pandarus, she awaits the failure of “sweet honey and sweet notes” and the slow agony of a sexually diseased whoremaster, who will “sweat and seek about for eases” and “bequeath you my diseases.”)\(^{227}\)

After the vision of destruction through sexual corruption in his abuse of Timandra, Timon gives gold to Alcibiades and spews an analogous dream of ruin that commands Alcibiades to be both agent and object of destruction, an absolute, infinite destruction without exception or limits, even for itself:

Be as a planetary plague when Jove
Will o’er some high-viced city hang his poison
In the sick air. Let not thy sword skip one.
Pity not honoured age for his white beard…. 
But set them down horrible traitors. Spare not the babe
Whose dimpled smiles from fools exhaust their mercy.
Think it a bastard whom the oracle
Hath doubtfully pronounced thy throat shall cut,
And mince it sans remorse. Swear against objects.
Put armour on thine ears and on thine eyes
Whose proof nor yells of mothers, maids, nor babes,
Nor sight of priests in holy vestments bleeding,

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\(^{226}\) To the whores, Timon says, “Plague all, / That your activity may defeat and quell / The source of all erection. There’s more gold. / Do you damn others, and let this damn you; / And ditches grave you all!” (4.3.162-166). This “plague” of sexual corruption combines the satirical cynicism of Thersites and Pandarus with the tragic bleakness of Seneca’s Oedipus, who is faced with a similar plague produced by sexual perversion (incest): “There are no individual grave mounds covering revered bones…. There is no land for graves…. No prayer, no skill relieves those stricken; healers fall, the disease drags down all succor” (*Oedipus* 66-70).

\(^{227}\) In the ironically mellifluous pet name “sweet,” Alcibiades drips a smear of *mel* in with Timon’s shower of *sal, fel*, and *foeditas*: “Pardon him, sweet Timandra, for his wits / Are drowned, and lost in his calamities” (4.3.89-90). But Timon insists on *foeditas*: “Paint till a horse may mire upon your face” (4.3.148).
Shall pierce a jot. (4.3.109-127)  

Here again Timon invokes the Senecan image of the plague on Thebes, as well as the Oedipal myth of the oracle and the fated parricide (the cause of the plague) that is opposed through infanticide. In describing the “bastard whom the oracle / Hath doubtfully pronounced thy throat shall cut,” Timon echoes Seneca’s Oedipus, who says, “I may kill my father with my own hand. The Delphic laurels warn me of this” (15-16). At the same time Timon envisions a brutal, merciless negation of communal feeling and sympathy in the bloodthirsty execution of a whole population. This execution is described as a “planetary plague,” like the plague in Seneca: “No quarter is immune or exempt from destruction. Each age and sex perishes equally; the young are joined to the old, fathers to sons by the deadly plague (funesta pestis)” (Oedipus 52-55). But where Oedipus struggles to stop the plague in Seneca’s play, Timon is eager to spread it.

Timon also turns on his other double, Apemantus, who appears after Alcibiades leaves. Timon declares, “More man? Plague, plague!” Apemantus then accuses Timon of artificial mimesis, of adopting his role—“Men report / Thou dost affect my manners, and dost use them”—and Timon immediately translates this mimetic language back into the pathological language of infection, the reproduction of disease: “’Tis then because thou dost not keep a dog / Whom I would imitate. Consumption catch thee!” Apemantus picks up the same image of disease in the first line of his reply, “This is in thee a nature but infected” (4.3.198-203). This encounter stages the contradiction of two mirror-images, an

228 This speech inverts the Aristotelian common sense, through which the data of the sight and vision are presented to the soul; Timon demands an “armor” to block the impulses from the “eyes” and “ears,” so that the visual and aural images of the suffering community will not “pierce” the hardened psyche.
antagonism between two reflections of each other. What is most revealing about this confrontation is the profound attachment to uncommon sense that Apemantus and Timon both display. They tolerated each other’s roles surprisingly well in the original feast scene, perhaps with a mutual appreciation for their respective differences that allowed each to show his defining feature (Timon his welcoming generosity, Apemantus his antisocial cynicism). Now, however, when they seem, finally, to agree about everything and to have chosen the same vocation, they cannot stand being together in the same space: they both want to occupy the same ground. My study clarifies the logic behind this confrontation by highlighting the feature of their respective self-definations that they refuse to share: uncommon sense. They cannot share their alienation from the sensus communis of Athens because then it would be a shared uncommon sense, a paradoxically “common” uncommon sense. This satirical uncommon sense is the exception to the rule in their society, and while there can be countless numbers of the rule there can only be one instance of its exception—and both Timon and Apemantus claim themselves as this exception. Thus, paradoxically, by this contradictory logic Apemantus and Timon here appear identical precisely in their denial of sameness, their refusal to accept their mutual identification. Each accuses the other of imitating him. Apemantus says, “Do not assume my likeness” (4.3.219). As the original satirical spokesman for the opposition to common sense, Apemantus thinks he has a prior claim to the alienation from the sensus communis that Timon now expresses. Timon replies, “Were I like thee, I’d throw away myself”

229 The most incisive observer of Timon, Apemantus offers a diagnosis that pinpoints Timon’s alienation from the sensus communis: “The middle of humanity thou never knewest, but the extremity of both ends” (4.3.302-303).
(4.3.220). Apemantus responds with a reflexive, stichomythic counterpunch (a profound expression of paradox): “Thou has cast away thyself being like thyself— / A madman so long, now a fool” (4.3.221-222). But Timon only reiterates the stubborn, illogical assertion of difference: “I am not thee” (4.3.279).

Having rejected all human community, even the cynical, uncommon fellowship of Apemantus, Timon acts as if he now has no connection to other human beings, as if he cannot even recognize a fellow human face. Thus when his faithful steward appears Timon asks “What are thou?” Flavius says, “Have you forgot me, sir?” and Timon replies, “I have forgot all men” (4.3.474-475). Inspired by Flavius, Timon momentarily proclaims one exception to his absolute, universal hate of humanity: “Forgive my general and exceptless rashness, / You perpetual sober gods! I do proclaim / One honest man— mistake me not, but one, / No more, I pray” (4.3.496-499). But he still tries to fit in Flavius as one exception to his general rule, rather than changing his general rule: “Go, live rich and happy, / But thus conditioned: thou shalt build from men, / Hate all, curse all, show charity to none, / But let the famished flesh slide from the bone / Ere thou relieve the beggar” (4.3.526-530). When Flavius refuses to join Timon’s absolute rejection of compassion, of human feeling-with, Timon rejects him too: “Stay not. Fly whilst thou art blest and free. / Ne’er see thou man, and let me ne’er see thee” (4.3.536-537). By now, Timon has become a satirical version of Oedipus, having mutilated himself into a condition of willed blindness in which he cannot recognize any familiar faces and thus is totally divorced from all human relationships. He wanders in a self-imposed absolute exile from his city-state and all of mankind, just as Seneca’s Oedipus
banishes himself from Thebes at the end of the play, with only personified figures of disease and death to keep him company.\textsuperscript{230}

Indeed, Oedipus is the closest analogy to Timon in Senecan tragedy. (As we have seen, Shakespeare points to this analogy with his repeated references to parricide, plague, and the oracle.) One profound parallel is that like Timon, Oedipus is almost unique among tragic heroes in his refusal to take vengeance on others: his tragic catastrophe is not an act of bloody vengeance on others but self-violence. Oedipus only targets himself for punishment. However this comparison also highlights one of the crucial transformations in Shakespeare’s satirical version of Senecan tragedy, of Oedipus as a satirist. Where Oedipus destroys himself out of care for his community, and banishes himself from the city at the end of the play in order to save Thebes from the plague he brought upon it, Timon destroys himself out of hatred for his community, and banishes himself not in order to save the city but in order to sing its destruction: it is precisely after he leaves Athens that Timon most forcefully invokes an Oedipal plague, calling down a universal sickness to destroy the city. Where \textit{Oedipus} is thus ultimately the tragedy of one who loves his community, and sacrifices himself out of devotion to the \textit{sensus communis}, \textit{Timon of Athens} is the tragical satire of one who hates his community, and kills himself out of hatred for the \textit{sensus communis}.\textsuperscript{231} Where Oedipus blinds himself in trying to save others, to give hope, Timon kills himself in trying to destroy others, to give

\textsuperscript{230} “I am bringing with me the deadly maladies of the land. Savage Fates (\textit{Fata}), the shuddering tremor of Disease, Wasting and black Plague (\textit{Pestis}) and ravening Pain, come with me: I rejoice to have such guides (\textit{ducibus}) as these” \textit{(Oedipus} 1058-1061).

\textsuperscript{231} See his epitaph: “A plague consume / You wicked caitiffs left! / Here lie I, Timon, who alive / All living men did hate” (5.5.73-76).
them the paradoxical hope of despair, to infect them with his uncommon sense of misanthropy, his lust for human self-destruction. Thus, Timon’s only desire is the abstract destruction in which the raging avenger (Alcibiades) and the threatened community (Athens) will each serve as the agent of the other’s destruction: “Be Alcibiades your plague, you his” (5.2.74). Timon is an Oedipus who wants the plague to be mirrored everywhere, in every community.

At this late stage in Timon’s career, even the murderous threat of Alcibiades towards the whole city appears only as an embodiment of one portion of his absolute hatred, a particularization of his universal desire for revenge. As a literal form of Timon’s abstract attack on humanity, the military assault on Athens strikes the tragic satirist as an incidental and ultimately irrelevant action, as a distant game in which he has no stake and holds no personal interest. “If Alcibiades kill my countrymen, / Let Alcibiades know this of Timon: / That Timon cares not” (5.2.54-56). This is a profound negation of tragic passion in general and of Seneca in particular. Indeed, just as Braden has shown that the Senecan tragic hero is a kind of perverse mirror-image of the Senecan wise man, at this point Timon, through his sublime disengagement from the more properly Senecan furor of tragic revenge, achieves his own kind of paradoxical fusion with the Senecan sapiens. Timon’s satirical rage ends up as a strange double of Stoic apatheia: “I care not” (5.2.62). He hates people so much that his hate has transcended itself. Timon’s newfound wisdom of apathy through suffering is a profoundly negative alienation from the conditions of life itself, an abstract negation whose only assertion is the contradictory affirmation of this very negation. Thus he expresses the uncommon sense of this new wisdom in the
rhetorical form of paradox: “My long sickness / Of health and living now begins to mend, / And nothing brings me all things” (5.2.71-73). His bloodthirsty rebellion has culminated in nihilistic resignation. Timon says, “I am sick of this false world…. / Then, Timon, presently prepare thy grave. / … Make thine epitaph, / That death in me at others’ lives may laugh” (4.3.378-383).

Before his death, however, Timon has one more dialogue with the sensus communis. As the other encounters with possible allies or mirrors have done, Timon’s final confrontation with the Athenian senators shows him again being offered the alliance of renewed community, the opportunity to rejoin some form of common sense. And, as with the other encounters, it only reinforces his uncommon sense: Timon is shown flirting with the sensus communis, only to savor more intensely the gesture by which he rejects it. Thus, when the senators are ready to give up on Timon’s sympathy, he deliberately dangles it before them to renew their hopes. One says, “We speak in vain,” but Timon objects by claiming he still has feelings for Athens, that he still has a passion for the sensus communis, “But yet I love my country, and am not / One that rejoices in the common wrack / As common bruit doth put it” (5.4.75-78). After recapturing the senators’ ears with this claim of lingering compassion, of an intact communal affiliation, Timon offers his final, ironic expression of sympathy for the Athenian populace. He says

Commend me to them,  
And tell them that to ease them of their griefs,  
Their fears of hostile strokes, their aches, losses,  
Their pangs of love, with other incident throes  
That nature’s fragile vessel doth sustain  
In life’s uncertain voyage, I will some kindness do them.  
I’ll teach them to prevent wild Alcibiades’ wrath. (5.4.82-88)
Here Timon offers his message of hope and assistance as an antidote to the bloody violence of a Senecan tragic *furor* or *ira* (“wrath”). But his offer ends up being anything but helpful; it is a call not to hope but to despair:

I have a tree which grows here in my close  
That mine own use invites me to cut down,  
And shortly must I fell it. Tell my friends,  
Tell Athens, in the sequence of degree  
From high to low throughout, that whoso please  
To stop affliction, let him take his haste,  
Come hither ere my tree hath felt the axe,  
And hang himself. (5.4.90-97)

Timon’s contradictory way of thinking attaches itself to the utter annihilation of community in this final “sympathetic” gesture towards the city threatened with destruction by Alcibiades: he suggests mass suicide. The implicit logic here is that the most “private” form of death—defined through and enacted by the Self in relation to itself—might not only preempt but actually transcend mass execution, which is the most “common” form of death—defined through and enacted by the Other.

This invitation to communal affirmation through a collective self-negation is profoundly paradoxical; thus it is hard to determine whether the invitation is simply sarcastic—a purely ironic travesty of concern for the *sensus communis*—or whether it actually expresses a residual spark of the *sensus communis* in Timon’s heart, a real desire for some kind of ultimate human connection through the consensus of a death drive. Perhaps it only expresses his final ambivalence, the contradiction that he is necessarily caught in whereby he can only express his tragic uncommon sense in the form of a perversion of this *sensus communis* that nevertheless mirrors and thus reasserts it. In its fulfillment of this promise, however, Timon’s final gesture in life—actually going
through himself with the suicide he proposes to others—holds out his “hopeless” hope for a shared human fate. In his very last speech Timon fashions himself not only a satirical Oedipus but also the voice of fate and plague for others, the Oracle itself: “Thither come, / And let my gravestone be your oracle. / Lips, let four words go by, and language end. / What is amiss, let plague and infection mend. / Graves only be men’s works, and death their gain. / Sun, hide thy beams” (5.2.103-108). In these paradoxical lines Timon articulates the simultaneous self-strangulation of language as well as life-breath, prefiguring the physical suicide of his biological death with the rhetorical suicide of his semantic death. The command, “language end,” refers to his own lips—a particular imperative for his own tongue to fall silent—but it also suggests a more abstract and universal command. (Just as “Sun, hide thy beams” hints at the abstract negation of Old Testament creation—a negative fiat, Let there be no light—so “language end” suggests a negative command leveled against communicability itself: Let there be no more language.) This self-negating speech act gives voice to the idea that others can join him by leaving the world and agree with him by silencing themselves forever. Thus his last, paradoxical gesture towards consensus is an invitation to belong to a society forged by absolute alienation, united around the rejection of humanity and of the world itself. Timon’s suicide is a metaphysical refusal to accept the preconditions for any sort of negotiation with the world that life offers.

In the perverse logic of satirical scorn fused with the universalizing impulse for destruction in Senecan tragic furor, Timon’s transcendently universal hatred comes to almost the same thing, in practical terms, as universal love. Paradoxically, he hates
humanity too much—with too absolute and universal a murderous rage—to kill anyone in particular. Timon refuses to have any particularized enemies because that would imply particular friends. His rage and vindictiveness is always plural, and simply moves by expanding in ever-wider concentric circles, always with himself at the center: he first hates his friends, then he hates all the wealthy Athenians, then he hates all of Athens itself, then he hates all of humanity, then the whole of mother earth and the cosmos, and finally, it seems, the very transcendental conditions of existence. He becomes a sort of pacifist hermit, unwilling to take up arms against anyone (because unwilling to take up arms on behalf of anyone). In this way Timon represents a dramatic contrast with Alcibiades: Timon’s vision, his dream of universal suicide, is opposed to Alcibiades’ campaign of total massacre.

Alcibiades’ plan of slaughter is, of course, ultimately averted. When Alcibiades reaches the city walls, the Athenian senators protest against an indiscriminate massacre: “We were not all unkind, nor all deserve / The common stroke of war” (5.4.21-22). This appeal is a direct contradiction of Timon’s misanthropy, which calls for all of humanity to receive the common stroke of destruction. The senators suggest equity, a sense of proportion and moderating judgment in rendering punishment: they protest the notion that “great tow’rs, trophies, and schools should fall / For private faults in them” (5.4.25-26). This appeal to the power of judgment and perception—the ability to make distinctions—is an appeal to social common sense. They plead with Alcibiades to pick out only individual, particular objects for his vengeance, rather than attacking the whole community (the *sensus communis*): “kill not all together” (5.5.44). They also protest
against one of the main principles of Senecan tragedy, whose bread and butter is family vendettas like the house of Oedipus and Atreus: “Crimes like lands / Are not inherited” (5.5.37-38). Ultimately, Alcibiades relents and accepts these reasonable terms: “not a man / Shall pass his quarter or offend the stream / Of regular justice in your city’s bounds / But shall be remedied to your public laws / At heaviest answer” (5.4.59-63). In this resolution, whereby Alcibiades lays aside his murderous wrath and accepts his reintegration into the Athenian sensus communis, we see a final exclusion of neo-Senecan furor. “Bring in thy ranks, but leave without thy rage” (5.4.39). The madness for revenge that Timon transcends through satirical abstraction and cynical self-criticism, Alcibiades here suppresses. (Just as Alcibiades adopted it in a reasonable way, so he gives it up reasonably.) Thus, in their final opposition we see two very different models for escaping the furor of Senecan tragedy: Timon’s satirical sublimity, which scorns all particular targets through its very absoluteness, and Alcibiades’ political pragmatism, which accepts compromise and self-moderation.

Timon’s uncommon sense will allow no such self-moderation. This is why he becomes tragic at the same time as he becomes a satirist; these are two descriptions of the same process, two appearances of the same phenomenon. In this sense Timon is the most coherent, unified figure representing the fusion of Senecan tragedy and Elizabethan satire: more than Malevole, more than Antonio, more than Thersites, more than Troilus. He is consumed by the process of becoming a satirist and the process of his own tragic furor, and he shows better than any other character from the period how this can be a single action, structured as a rejection of the sensus communis and unified around a
violent, raging expression of uncommon sense that has given up all hope of ever finding its way back home.

Shakespeare is neither as explicitly Senecan nor as consistently satirical as Marston, but tracing the mutual influence of those traditions in Marston’s work has illuminated the darker literary genealogy of Shakespeare’s tragical satires. Indeed, Senecan and satiric elements are less easily charted in Shakespeare’s drama not because they are absent, but because they are less clearly demarcated: what is in Marston an oftentimes awkward and artificial vacillation between self-consciously Senecan and self-consciously satiric posturing becomes, for characters like Troilus and Timon, a profoundly singular experience of uncommon sense that draws on the same two literary resources even as the latter are blended beyond all distinction. Where Marston fabricates his “fantastical” outfit of uncommon sense by sewing together a tapestry of satirical and Senecan passages, Shakespeare presents the originary naked body of uncommon sense, which writhes and covers itself first in one color then another, revealing not just the fool’s motley dress but, underneath it, the shocked flesh of the human animal.
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