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THE HERO AND HIS MOTHERS IN SENECA'S *HERCULES FURENS*

ABSTRACT. Stróżyński Mateusz, The hero and his mothers in Seneca's *Hercules Furens*.

The article deals with an image of the heroic self in Seneca's *Hercules* as well as with maternal images (Alcmena, Juno and Megara), using psychoanalytic methodology involving identification of complementary self-object relationships. *Hercules*' self seems to be construed mainly in an omnipotent, narcissistic fashion, whereas the three images of mothers reflect show the interaction between love and aggression in the play.

Keywords: Seneca, *Hercules*, mother, psychoanalysis.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, Thalia Papadopoulou have observed that the critics writing about Seneca's *Hercules Furens* are divided into two groups and that the division is quite similar to what can be seen in the scholarly reactions to Euripides' *Herakles*.¹ However, the reader of *Hercules Furens* probably will not find much

¹See: T. Papadopoulou, *Herakles and Hercules: The Hero's Ambivalence in Euripides and Seneca*, "Mnemosyne" 57:3, 2004, pp. 257–283. The author reviews shortly the literature about the play and in the first group of critics, of those who are convinced that *Hercules* is "mad" from the beginning, but his madness gradually develops, she enumerates Galinsky (G.K. Galinsky, *The Herakles Theme: The Adaptations of the Hero in Literature from Homer to the Twentieth Century*, Oxford 1972), Zintzen (C. Zintzen, "Alte virtus animosa cadit". *Gedanken zur Darstellung des Tragischen in Senecas "Hercules Furens"*, [in:] E. Lefevre (ed.), *Senecas Tragödien*, Darmstadt 1972, pp. 149–209), Shelton (J.-A. Shelton, *Seneca's "Hercules Furens": Theme, Structure and Style*, Goettingen 1978) and Fitch (J.G. Fitch, *Seneca's "Hercules Furens". A Critical Text with Introduction and Commentary*, Ithaca–London 1987). In the second group of those who have "positive" attitude towards the hero and who consider him to be innocent and a victim of external forces she includes Motto and Clark (A.L. Motto, J.R. Clark, *Maxima virtus in Seneca's "Hercules Furens"*, "Classical Philology" 76, 1981, pp. 101–117), Lawall (G. Lawall, "Virtus" and "Pietas" in Seneca's "Hercules Furens", [in:] A.J. Boyle (ed.), *Seneca Tragicus: Ramus Essays on Senecan Drama*, Victoria 1983, pp. 6–26), Zwierlein (O. Zwierlein, *Senecas Hercules im*

evidence of similarities in the play's structure which does not seem to be as divided and chaotic as Euripides' play. Seneca's *Hercules* seems to be much more organized and structured, at least, according to some critics.²

In this paper I will propose to look at Seneca's play from a psychoanalytic perspective, focusing on maternal imagos as they are depicted in the play and on the relationship of Hercules to them. André Green, a prominent French psychoanalyst, in his main book about the psychoanalytic reading of tragedy, suggested that we can approach the text and/or theatrical spectacle as a symbolic space which can be divided further into a more accessible ("conscious") space of the stage in which the characters reveal something of themselves by their words and actions, and a more hidden ("unconscious"), off-stage space. According to Green, the space of tragedy is "the best embodiment of that 'other scene', the unconscious? ... Between the exchanges, between the monologues nothing is vouchsafed about the character's state of mind (unless he says it himself)".³ It is like a family situation, when a child sees his parents' actions and hears their words, but has to fill the gaps with his own unconscious fantasies. In the literary context, it is the reader who fills the gaps, by engaging into the tragic text or spectacle. Norman Holland pointed out that the author "extrojects" or "projects" a mental process into the text, so "the psychoanalytic critic treats the text itself like a mind."⁴

Some scholars within the classicist field of study proposed to look at Seneca's play in a bit similar way. William H. Owen suggested that Juno's "insatiate desire for revenge" eventually "lead to her ultimate renunciation... of all personality except Madness."⁵ Jo-Ann Shelton argued that Juno should be seen

Lichte kaiserzeitlicher und spaetantiker Dichtung, Wiesbaden 1984) and Billerbeck (M. Billerbeck, *Seneca: "Hercules Furens". Einleitung, Text, Übersetzung und Kommentar*, Leiden 1999), Fitch (J.G. Fitch, "Pectus o Nimium Ferum": Act V of Seneca's "Hercules Furens", "Hermes" 107:2, 1979, pp. 240–248) 25 years earlier noticed this division, but ascribed the positive trend to more "philosophical" studies that have been done on *HF* (J.G. Fitch, "Pectus...", p. 240). Cf. also his brief summary of the controversy in J.G. Fitch, *Seneca's...*, p. 21. It would seem reasonable to divide the authors into three groups: first, based on Stoic reading of the text (e.g. B. Marti, *Seneca's Tragedies. A New Interpretation*, "Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association" 76, 1945, pp. 216–245); second, more "psychological" readings with their negative attitude towards the main character (the strongest position seems to be that of Henry and Walker's article, that could be added to the works mentioned by Papadopoulou: D. Henry, B. Walker, *The Futility of Action: a Study of Seneca's "Hercules Furens"*, "Classical Philology" 60:1, 1965, pp. 11–22), and third, more recent studies that try to advocate Hercules against "accusatory" works from the 60ties and 70ties (of which A.L. Motto, J.R. Clark, op. cit., seems to be a good example).

²Henry and Walker argued that "the dramatic structure and the development of the plot are episodic and clumsy" – D. Henry, B. Walker, op. cit., p. 11).

³A. Green, *The Tragic Effect*, trans. A. Sheridan, Cambridge 2011, pp. 1–2.

⁴N.N. Holland, *Psychoanalysis and Literature – Past and Present*, "Contemporary Psychoanalysis" 29, 1993, pp. 1–2.

⁵W.H. Owen, *Commonplace and Dramatic Symbol in Seneca's Tragedies*, "Transactions of the American Philological Association" 99, 1968, p. 303.

as a part of Hercules: "Seneca wants us to realize that Hercules' enemy is not a goddess, but the irrational force that dwells in his mind and motivates his actions... It is madness that directs his weapons. Juno is a vivid dramatization of the disorder in the human mind".⁶ Recently, also Segal has emphasized the internal, psychological aspect of Seneca's drama, which permits to think of characters as symbolic externalizations of Hercules' inner feelings. Segal writes: "In Seneca the tragic element operates in a struggle that is almost entirely inward, in a battle against the passions rather than in a head-on conflict with divine powers, universal moral principles, or an unyielding world order."⁷ What seems to be problematic here is the fact that even though such approach is very enlightening and inspiring, and it seems to be in harmony with psychoanalytic approach, nevertheless, the critics tend to suggest that the characters of the play have internal, emotional life as if they were real people. It is difficult to agree, for instance, with Shelton when she says that Juno is a personification of a force that dwells in Hercules' mind, since in reality there is no such thing as Hercules' mind. In fact, Hercules himself could be understood as a personification of some "irrational forces" or processes of the mind as much as Juno, since they are both literary characters, born of Seneca's mind's conscious and unconscious creativity.

Therefore, it seems to make much more sense to treat Juno and Hercules (and, in fact, other characters as well) as symbolic expressions of psychological forces, whereas the goddess is depicted in a less real fashion than Hercules, which is a clearer indication of her symbolic status. I agree with Shelton's interpretation of Juno, but I will not apply this scholarly attitude solely to Juno or the gods, but also to other characters. I will not treat characters in the play like real people whose inner world can be reconstructed through psychoanalysis, but, rather, I will take a different route. In this paper I will attempt to use some strategies borrowed from Otto F. Kernberg's method which integrates ego psychology school with object relations school of psychoanalysis. In short, Kernberg's method is based on a premise that internal world of human psyche is built of unconscious representations of the subject ("the self", in psychoanalytic language) and the other ("object") which are joined together by particular affects (emotions). The basic "building blocks" of psyche are self-object-affect units which are expressed further in unconscious fantasies or in actual interpersonal relationships.

⁶J.-A. Shelton, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

⁷C. Segal, *Boundary Violation in Senecan Tragedy*, [in:] J.G. Fitch (ed.), *Seneca. Oxford Readings in Classical Studies*, New York 2008, p.139. Much earlier Haywood noticed the absence of "real" divine powers and the conventional way in which their names are mentioned in the play (R.M. Haywood, *Notes on Seneca's "Hercules Furens"*, "Classical Journal" 37:7, 1942, pp. 423–424). He also argued that Seneca wanted to picture Hercules' madness as a purely human and natural phenomenon, although he regarded it to be an effect of "intense excitement following the killing of Lycus" – R.M. Haywood, *op. cit.*, p. 422).

Kernberg's attitude is purely clinical, so, obviously, some changes must be made in the method to adjust it to a literary analysis of a text. But what I find particularly useful in his interpretive strategies is that he understands the internal life in terms of dramatic interactions between "actors" (self and object images) who experience various affects and desires towards each other and do various things to each other.⁸ Such an approach seems to be applicable to ancient literature, especially, to ancient drama and does not involve any psychological analysis of the author. The method that will be used in this paper focuses entirely on the text itself and identifies in it the basic units of self and object relationships, defined by affects, desires and wishes. The two basic ways in which those self-object units are expressed in the text are (1) dramatic interactions between characters and (2) poetic images (metaphors, similes etc.). The reader can evaluate to what extent this approach casts some new light on Seneca's play and enriches the more traditional literary interpretations of it.

THE OMNIPOTENT, GRANDIOSE SELF

What is probably most easily noticed in the tragedy (although not all commentators seem to agree on that) could be called, to borrow psychoanalytic vocabulary, an omnipotent or grandiose self image, associated primarily with Hercules and expressed through this character.⁹ This phenomenon of the grandiose

⁸Kernberg has been developing and presenting his theory and its technical applications for several past decades now. The concept of self-object-affect units and of interpretive strategies based on this concept can be found, for instance, in: O.F. Kernberg, *Internal World and External Reality: Object Relations Theory Applied*, New York 1980 (especially, chapter nine); E. Caligor, O.F. Kernberg, J.F. Clarkin, *Handbook of Dynamic Psychotherapy for Higher Level Personality Pathology*, Washington 2007 (especially, chapter three); O.F. Kernberg, *Some Implications of Object Relations Theory for Psychoanalytic Technique*, "Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association" 27, 1979, pp. 207–239 and idem, *Object Relations Theory in Clinical Practice*, "Psychoanalytical Quarterly" 57, 1988, pp. 481–504.

⁹"The grandiose self" is a term used by Heinz Kohut to describe narcissistic personalities (H. Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self*, New York 1971). It was adopted by Kernberg (e.g. O.F. Kernberg, *Further Contributions to the Treatment of Narcissistic Personalities*, "International Journal of Psychoanalysis" 55, 1974, pp. 215–240) who, however, explained this phenomenon in much different terms than Kohut. A similar clinical phenomenon was called by Herbert Rosenfeld, a British analyst who also wrote significant papers about narcissism, an "omnipotent, destructive self" or a "mad self" (H. Rosenfeld, *On the Psychopathology of Narcissism. A Clinical Approach*, "International Journal of Psychoanalysis" 45, 1964, pp. 332–337 and *A Clinical Approach to the Psychoanalytic Theory of the Life and Death Instincts: An Investigation Into the Aggressive Aspects of Narcissism*, "International Journal of Psychoanalysis" 52, 1971, pp. 169–178). Not all critics see Hercules as grandiose: e.g. Marti saw in him a "patron saint of Stoicism" and suggested that the play should be seen along with the *Hercules Oetaeus* with which it forms a unity (B. Marti, op. cit., pp. 221–224 and 241–242). Later, Motto and Clark also argued that the story of the *Her-*

self image has been referred to by the critics in various ways.¹⁰ Seneca's Hercules as a character seems to express the two coexisting and intertwined aspects of the grandiose self as understood by Kernberg: "The main characteristics of these narcissistic personalities are grandiosity, extreme self-centeredness, and a remarkable absence of interest in and empathy for others in spite of the fact that they are so very eager to obtain admiration and approval from other people."¹¹ The first aspect is an idealized self-concept which makes those individuals proud, conceited, arrogant and superior to others, even though they desperately need others' attention and approval, at the same time. The second aspect is a lack of empathy and deep emotional life, expressed particularly by the inability to experience authentic mourning after a loss of objects.

Hercules in the play is depicted by Seneca almost exactly in this manner, possessing both highly idealized and omnipotent self image and a lack of deep, intimate relationships. Henry and Walker have gone to the extremes of interpreting Hercules as a grotesque character, a caricature of the tragic hero. In their paper they actually mock Hercules, calling him a "circus impresario" and a "ridiculous demigod with aspirations for full divinity", and refusing to acknowledge in him any positive or heroic qualities whatsoever.¹²

Hercules, in a mythological context, was, of course, the greatest of heroes and a demi-god, so one might say that his self-concept is not unrealistic. But Seneca still shows the reader that Hercules self-image is overly idealized even in the context of his traditional mythic identity. Not only does the hero present him-

cules Furens is a story about "deliberately oppressed and maligned greatness" (A.L. Motto, J.G. Clark, op. cit., p. 111).

¹⁰For example: "self-inflated ideas of grandeur" (D. Henry, B. Walker, op. cit., p. 19); "delusions of celestial grandeur" (W.H. Owen, op. cit., p. 305); "mad pride" (J.-A. Shelton op. cit., p. 21); "narcissistic concern with himself" (J.G. Fitch, "*Pectus...*", p. 243); "magnitude of his ego" (A.L. Motto, J.R. Clark, *The Monster in Seneca's "Hercules Furens" 926-939*, "Classical Philology" 89:3, 1994, pp. 269-272); "raging egomania" (J.G. Fitch, S. McElduff, *Construction of the Self*, [in:] J.G. Fitch (ed.), *Seneca. Oxford Readings in Classical Studies*, New York 2008, p. 177).

¹¹O.F. Kernberg, *Factors in the Psychoanalytic Treatment of Narcissistic Personalities*, "Journal of American Psychoanalytic Association" 18, 1970, pp. 51-85.

¹²D. Henry, B. Walker, op. cit., passim, but especially: 18-9. Their view provoked reactions from Motto and Clark who systematically tried to "defend" the hero against such "accusations". Those authors argue that such statements are nonsensical, because Hercules is not an ordinary man living peacefully with his wife and children, but a totally different type of character. They write about a "tragic elevation" of Herkules as a understandable phenomenon in his case. The critics also suggest that many authors, like Henry and Walker or Fitch manifest a contemporary "anti-hero" mentality which influences their judgement (A.L. Motto, J.R. Clark, op. cit., pp. 111, 116-117). Fitch in his commentary basically develops and sums up his earlier interpretation, pointing out Hercules' "preoccupation with himself, or rather with an image of himself as an invincible hero. This self-regard is so pervasive that it scarcely needs illustration..." (J.G. Fitch, *Seneca's...*, p. 26). He also shows how his "boundless self-regard" is reflected in his "condescending tone he adopts towards the gods", which is clearly hubristic (ibidem).

self in the play as equal to the gods and as a potential rival of Jupiter and Juno, but he also weaves into his omnipotent, grandiose self image everything that happens to him. A vivid example of this strategy is what he says and does when he suffers after realizing that his family has been killed. At first, when Hercules tries to express his misery, he expects Jupiter to kill him with his thunder and the whole universe to rise against him (1202–1218).¹³ He wants to replace Prometheus and be crushed by the Symplegades. Not only do Hercules' words seem theatrical and excessive, but they also reveal omnipotent fantasies in which he is at the center of the universe. Jupiter is the only one who is able to punish him in a proper way, because his crime is worse than that of Prometheus (who is also, like Hercules, a benefactor of humanity, and who was freed by him). In short, Hercules uses his suffering to exalt himself.¹⁴

A similar thing is happening when Hercules is further pondering his suicide. He cannot conceive of an ordinary way to do this. The act of suicide *per se* has to be, in his case, something unique, extraordinary and godlike (note the contradiction itself between being god and suicide!), so Hercules pictures suicide as his final and greatest labor (1280–1282).¹⁵ He asks for weapons and he says that if he does not get them, he will cut down the woods of Thracian Pindus, Bacchus' groves and Cithaeron's ridges to burn them all down along with his body. He also fantasizes about pulling down on himself the houses of Thebes and all the temples along with their gods. Those fantasies reveal an image of an omnipotent, ideal self, which borders on delusion, since Hercules seems to doubt if he could be killed even that way.¹⁶ The only way for him to be killed is by being crushed under the great mass which lies at the center of the universe (1284–1294). The last image can be also read symbolically as a metaphor for his self-centeredness.

¹³I use the text of the *Hercules* in Fitch's edition (J.G. Fitch, *Seneca's...*).

¹⁴This was the reading of Henry and Walker (D. Henry, B. Walker, op. cit., p. 19) as well as of Fitch (J.G. Fitch, "*Pectus...*", p. 242). In his commentary, however, Fitch points out that similar prayers are voiced by other Senecan characters: Medea, Hippolytus and Thyestes. He suggests that it is "the characteristic tendency of Sen. Trag. To present human crimes as leading, potentially and sometimes actually, to disruption of the very fabric of the universe" (J.G. Fitch, *Seneca's...*, p. 426). Even though it is a motif used by Seneca in other context, I suggest that in the *Hercules* it also serves a particular purpose in the context of Hercules' grandiosity.

¹⁵As Fitch observes, it is a consistent tendency of Hercules in the play to "reduce the situation to the formula of the labors" (J.G. Fitch, *Seneca's...*, p. 443). See also lines 46, 944–52, 965–981. In an earlier paper he noticed that when Hercules decided not to commit a suicide, he immediately envisaged his further life as a labor (J.G. Fitch, "*Pectus...*", p. 247). I understand this in terms of using every course of action in service of his omnipotent, ideal self.

¹⁶I do not agree with Fitch who suggests that it is "our sense that Hercules could indeed do these things; or at least that it is not inappropriate for a man of such mighty achievements to imagine that he could do them" (J.G. Fitch, *Seneca's...*, p. 445). Even though in his earlier article and in the introduction to his commentary he emphasized the grandiose aspect of Hercules, here he tends to diverge from his position.

The third group of omnipotent and grandiose fantasies is focused around the stain that is caused by Hercules' murder. The stain is so great that even all the water of Tanais, Nilus, Tigris, Rhine and Tagus could not purify it, not even the whole ocean (1321–1331). Here grandiosity is not built around positive qualities which could be praised or admired by others, but around absolute and total evil that must horrify everyone. Yet this horror or abhorrence still serves the purpose, because it means a total attention and a sense of awe. If Hercules is a villain, he must be the greatest villain of all time.

The fourth fantasy of the kind is linked to a potential exile (1332–1341). Hercules finds no place that could hide him or let him rest. It is a tragic commonplace, but Seneca uses it to emphasize Hercules' idealized self-image. He says that he lost the place for exile (“perdidi exilio locum” 1331).¹⁷ The whole universe shrinks from himself – again, these are not positive, but extremely negative features, and yet they reveal and underlying image of omnipotence and self-idealization. Hercules fantasizes he has the power to change the course of stars and he can even make Cerberus look less horrible, because of the absolute character of his evil deed that gives him a sort of manic inebriation, euphoria feeding on his own perfect evil. Not even the underworld is able to hide him from the eyes that watch him. But do they watch him with disgust or horror, or maybe – with awe and a sense of perverse admiration? Hercules seems to be able to transform the meaning of his crime. The crime turns to be something that he can show, exhibit and impress others with it. His crime seems to bestow upon him godlike power, significance, and a special place in the order of the universe. Seneca clearly wants to show the correspondence between those three fantasies and earlier self images that appear in the play before the murder of the family.

In the Prologue Juno says that the whole earth is too small for Hercules (*nec satis terrae patent* 46). She also invokes the three dimensions of the universe: the underworld, the earth and the heavens. Juno tacitly acknowledges that Hercules already possessed the earth, now he has overcome the power of Dis in the underworld, and the next thing he will probably do is to attack the heavens (47–55, 64–65 and 89–90). In her description, Hercules' self is swelling (“tumet” 68), as if it were metaphorically fill up the whole universe – first the earth, then the

¹⁷Cf. J.G. Fitch, *Seneca's...*, p. 456. Later he points out that it is a “most effective reversal of its [the commonplace's] usual meaning” (458). William Owen, on the other hand, showed the consistency between Hercules' “delusions of celestial grandeur” (W.D. Owen, *op. cit.*, p. 305) and the final motif of *perdidi exilio locum*. He writes that “[t]he expansive terrain has now, with pathetic irony, become the guarantor of the hero's contamination and concomitant humanization (1321–1341). The very lands and stars that knew his fame now, by that knowledge, prevent him from hiding himself and his guilt. Thus, a figure which seems at the outset no more than a rhetorical exaggeration has, through the broader working of the celestial references which it conventionally contained, significantly changed and been revitalized. It has become a vivid symbol for the overreaching which is the key to Hercules' personality and his tragedy.” (307)

underworld, and, in the end, heaven. Not only does Juno perceive Hercules in that way. It is also his own self-perception. In 592–604 he addresses the gods and suggests they should avert their look, because of Cerberus. Again, Seneca uses a commonplace in which the heavens witness human events and react emotionally,¹⁸ but he extends and modifies the meaning of the motif to emphasize the grandiose features of Hercules' character. But in fact, he speaks about his own power, the power to subdue the most horrible monster in the world. There seem to be two contradictory wishes that are expressed here: Hercules asks everyone not to look at himself, but, at the same time, he wants everyone to see how powerful he is. His “do not look at me” becomes equivalent with “look at me”. Phoebus, Neptune and Jupiter are his audience. He also mentions that he had been able to become the lord of the underworld (having replaced Dis), but he did not want to (“regnare potui” 610). He asks: what else remains to conquer? (“quid restat aliud” 613) The answer is not given, but the reader already knows the answer, because Juno gave it before – heaven is what remains to be taken by Hercules.

The third image of this “swelling” or of a space being filled up with Hercules' self appears at the end of the play, in the context of suicidal desires and fantasies associated with shame. In those three images there are different points of view and different contextual backgrounds. First, Hercules' strength and power (*virtus*) is the source of this excessive expansion. Then, it is his delusions and/or hallucinations in which he sees himself conquering heaven. At the end, it is Hercules' evil and crime that brings about a similar effect. It would seem those are entirely different cases: Hercules-the-hero, Hercules-the-madman, and Hercules-the-villain, but in fact those seem to be three different aspects of an omnipotent, grandiose, destructive self that is depicted by Seneca in the play.

The second aspect of Hercules' grandiose self is the shallowness of his emotional interactions with other characters.¹⁹ Seneca uses here a metaphor of absence.

¹⁸Owen writes that “[m]ore complex, though quite as conventional, is the use of the heavens as a reflection of moral order or disorder in the world of man. This may take several forms. Heavenly bodies may simply be affected with shame or grief at human events, and thus turn from their customary habits, as Aurora hides her face in grief for Memnon dead (*Troades* 239–240), or Phoebus hides his in horror at the deeds of Thyestes (*Agamemnon* 36, 53–56; *Thyestes*, passim).” (W.H. Owen, op. cit., p. 294). Fitch points out that the motif of the reluctance to let the Sun see evil sights is present already in Greek tragedy (J.G. Fitch, *Seneca's...*, p. 278).

¹⁹This subject was elaborated by Fitch (J.G. Fitch, “*Pectus...*”). In his opinion, Hercules “lacks affection for his family” (ibidem, p. 240) and “Hercules is only interested in events as they affect himself; and he thinks of himself purely in terms of his public image as all-conquering hero and monster-slayer” (ibidem, pp. 243–244). Fitch shows how Hercules virtually ignores his interlocutors, speaking to himself. In his later commentary he demonstrates how his “manifest lack of concern for his family” is expressed in Hercules' constant failure to respond to their love and his avoidance of mourning. Ultimately, Fitch concludes that Hercules' *virtus* is “tainted by aggression, ambition, and megalomania” (J.G. Fitch, *Seneca's...*, pp. 24–26) and points to “Hercules' narcissistic concern for himself and his self-image, which precludes the possibility of concern for others.” (ibidem, p. 36).

Hercules works very hard for the benefit of the whole humanity, he is the creator of peace (“auctor pacis” 250), and the one who, instead of the gods, is able to finally bring about peace and security for the whole universe by dispelling all fear (882–892). At the same time, and because of his labors, he is absent from the ones that love him and should be closest to him. Amphitryon says (210–211) that he hardly ever sees his beloved son, because, as soon as he ends one labor, he has to start another one, so he is never home. Later he uses *abesse/absens* several times: Hercules is absent from the earth (“terrae pacis auctorem suae/abesse” 251–252), Amphitryon calls himself the father of the ever-absent one (“semper absentis pater” 1256), and a few lines later he says again that his son is absent (“nunc servit absens” 273).²⁰ Also Megara expresses her loneliness and separation from husband in quite a poignant way, when she calls on her husband (279–298), which is, of course, linked to the fact that at the moment he is actually absent, but also suggests his more metaphorical absence, especially by reference to “their fate” and Hercules’ returns which are oblivious of her (“magna sed nimium loquor/ ignara nostrae sortis. unde illum mihi/ quo te tuamque dexteram amplectar diem/ reditusque lentos nec mei memores querar?” 295–298).²¹ Hercules himself seems to be (626–633) moved for a little while by the fact of his absence. He could be frightened, shamed or guilty because of that, but he only says that someone should have protected his family, when he could not. In this way Hercules blames the world, in order not to blame himself. His absence, then, is physical, but this spatial or geographical absence seems to be a symbol for a deeper, emotional absence of Hercules.²²

When we consider the way in which Euripides in his play pictures love between Heracles and his family and, especially, the way in which he emphasizes friendship and love between Heracles and Theseus, it becomes clear that Seneca’s Hercules and his interpersonal relationships are, in comparison, shallow and cold, in a quite striking way. In Seneca’s play Hercules is, in fact, pictured as someone who is deeply loved by his family and his friend, but who cannot reciprocate this love. It becomes particularly evident in the relationship between the hero and Amphitryon and in the lack of any interaction between Hercules and Megara after his return (592ff).²³

²⁰ Billerbeck suggest to translate it “in der Fremde”, but does not rule out the possibility of the other meaning: “eine gewisse beabsichtigte Doppeldeutigkeit von absens hier nicht auszuschliessen” (M. Billerbeck, op. cit., p. 307).

²¹ Fitch pointed out that the language here is that of erotic poetry (*sermo amatorius*) (J.G. Fitch, *Seneca’s...*, p. 208), and Billerbeck suggested an allusion to Penelope and Ulixes (M. Billerbeck, op. cit., p. 313), but neither of them comments on the contrast between the deep longing and love of Megara and the relative indifference of Hercules.

²² Henry and Walker go even further saying that “All his [Hercules’] achievements for humanity have not enabled him to protect his own family. The visit to Hell is of no service to them, and indeed can hardly be thought of as an additional contribution to the defense of the world.” (D. Henry, B. Walker, op. cit., p. 16).

²³ In Euripides’ play, on the other hand, love or friendship not only seem to be very real and

Hercules' emotional absence is symbolically expressed in the play also by the way in which he experiences mourning after killing his wife and sons, or rather, in the way he does not experience it. The hero does not speak about any feelings that we would expect in such a situation: pain of loss, deep sadness, anxiety, longing or sense of guilt. His only reaction is a violent fantasy involving a wish to destroy the one who is responsible for the murder. This inability has been recognized by Fitch who says that "feelings of human tenderness or grief come a poor second to his [Hercules'] obsession with punishment, with elimination of evil – with police action, so to speak".²⁴

Seneca masterfully shows the reader the surprise of Hercules who wakes up and notices that his weapons are gone. He is puzzled that there is anyone in the whole world who was brave enough to take away his weapons while he slept. There is again an omnipotent self image behind this puzzlement, as if not only Hercules had no match in the universe (what about the gods? – one could ask), but even the sleeping Hercules had no match whatsoever (1154–1156). This image is developed further, when Hercules' puzzlement (and anxiety) is transformed into a fantasy of someone who could be more powerful than him and who took away his weapons (1156–1159). He is eager to see his conqueror and he imagines him to be another son of Jupiter, his brother, similar to him, but even more powerful. It is interesting that, again, Hercules does not imagine that any god could conquer him or does not think of gods who, like Phoebus, are his divine brothers. He thinks that, if there is someone more powerful than he is, he must have been somehow hidden from him. Hercules does not look for someone real who could overcome him, but, instead, he projects his ideal, omnipotent self onto someone who could be his *alter ego*. In fact, a replica of himself, only – if that is possible – more powerful. This operation frees Hercules from a more realistic fear that he might have been actually defeated by someone more powerful and enforces his self-idealization, as if he was thinking to himself: "if there is someone who is better than me, it must be me, but a better version of me". There is really no real "other" for Hercules.

Then Seneca lets the reader see how Hercules finds out that his family is dead. His reaction is, instead of fear or sadness, rage ("ruat ira in omnis" 1167) and the rage is directed against everyone. It seems to be a defense against everything that might be felt instead: longing, grief, sorrow, guilt etc. This rage, however, is gradually ascribed to some more concrete figures. First, the perpetrator is anyone

mutual, but, at the end, they give a powerful sense of hope and resolution, despite of Heracles' madness and destructiveness. Chalk interprets love/friendship as interchangeable with virtue in Euripides' play, especially in the context of the ending of the play (H. Chalk, *Aretê and Bia in Euripides' "Herakles"*, "Journal of Hellenic Studies" 82, 1962, pp. 7–18). Fitch emphasized the differences between Euripides' and Seneca's Hercules, especially with regard to the ending of both plays in J.G. Fitch, *Seneca's...*, pp. 35–38.

²⁴J.G. Fitch, "Pectus...", p. 242.

who does not want to point out the enemy (1167–1168); second, it is his conqueror (“victor Alcidae” 1168) who is hiding somewhere. It is striking that what seems to be the source of anger for Hercules is that someone conquered him, not that his family died.²⁵ Seneca does not allow Hercules to experience in the play any depressive feelings and they are replaced by a paranoid projection of aggression onto external, mysterious objects who might be responsible for his misery, and, secondly, by immediate action, “police action”²⁶ which does not allow for thinking and feeling. Hercules is busying himself with finding the next labor, because this is and has been his way of life, as Amphitryon pointed out earlier. Hercules says to his family: “postpone your tears” (“differte fletus” 1175), which also shows his resistance to mournful feelings. Something similar happens also earlier, when he comes back home and sees that his family is threatened. His immediate reaction is looking for the enemy (even though Seneca suggests that it is the absence of Hercules that endangered his family) and asks: “Why should I waste the day in lamenting?” (“cur diem questu tero” 633) and says to Amphitryon and Megara: “differ amplexus, parens,/ coniunxque differ” (638–9).²⁷ To feel and express feelings is for Hercules a waste of time and a potential threat to the omnipotent, ideal self, so he acts immediately as if to ward off those feelings. At the same time, he maintains that his is the greatest suffering of all (“his etiam, pater,/ quicquam timeri maius aut gravius potest?” 1189–1190).

The two aspects of the omnipotent, grandiose self image seem to be linked to each other. The metaphor of swelling expresses Hercules’ desire to achieve a sort of absolute presence, but it is a presence that excludes the presence of others. The omnipotent self associated with Hercules is a self without objects, we might say, but in fact there are object images that correspond to this ideal self. First, those are idealized object images who are extensions or/and projections of Hercules’ self, like his twin-brother in a fantasy mentioned before or Jupiter of whom he speaks at times as of his real, all-powerful father. Second, there are devaluated object images of envious Juno who is insane with hate (110–111). Seneca depicted her towards the end of the Prologue as a mad, furious object who feels inferior to Hercules and devoured by bitter envy and rage. Henry and Walker also point out that Juno is at time pictured as a caricature, as a “ridiculous goddess”²⁸, and Fitch suggests that “Juno’s jealousy and vindictiveness are so unbalanced that one is forced to ask whether this is really the queen of the gods”.²⁹ What those scholars noticed can be understood in terms of devaluation of the object.

²⁵ As Fitch puts it: he thinks of himself purely in terms of his public image as all-conquering hero and monster-slayer (J.G. Fitch, “*Pectus...*”, p. 243).

²⁶ J.G. Fitch, “*Pectus...*”, p. 242.

²⁷ As Fitch comments: “Hercules characteristically puts a higher priority on violent retribution than on natural expression of love or grief” (J.G. Fitch, *Seneca’s...*, p. 420).

²⁸ D. Henry, B. Walker, op. cit., p. 18.

²⁹ Fitch suggests that Seneca pictured Juno as *Juno Inferna* rather than *Juno Caelestis*: “In

There are, of course, also all the people who are protected by Hercules and who benefit from his labors, but they are unimportant in the play. Hence, the image of the omnipotent self corresponds to images of envious and devaluated objects or to objects that are projections of the self. Hercules' self is also depicted as swelling and extending to heaven and the underworld, filling the whole universe, so that there is little room for objects that would be independent of this omnipotent self. The metaphor of absence is another side of this image. Hercules is as much absent from emotional relationships and family life, as he is present in an omnipotent fantasy world. His absence, therefore, is a dark shadow of his shining grandiosity. The hero at one point admits that someone else has to grieve over the death of his family, since he is not able to do that, because his face is hardened ("hic durus malis/ lacrimare vultus nescit" 1229). The metaphor of face seems to refer to the self as well. Earlier Hercules calls his heart too hard, too insensitive ("pectus o nimium ferum!" 1226). The images of hardened face and heart of Hercules seem to express the absence of emotions and concern for others, in contrast to Euripidean *Herakles* who actually sheds tears (1354ff).³⁰ Fitch and McElduff have suggested recently that Hercules' self "becomes a straightjacket for the authentic self: Hercules' heroic self-concept prevents him from relating adequately to father and wife (626–639), or weeping for the family he has destroyed (1226–1229), or responding wholeheartedly to his father's need of love and support."³¹

ALCMENA AND JUNO

Hercules' insanity and violence in the madness scene can be seen as a breakdown of a defensive structure of the ideal self. Before the madness Hercules was pictured as *auctor pacis*, destructive, but only towards monsters. Now his "monstrous" side is revealed to the reader, when he temporarily identifies with what he dedicated his life to destroy: a monster. But is the mad, destructive self of Hercules alone in the play? It seems that it corresponds to significant objects which are also mad and destructive. In the play they are all his enemies, along with the monsters and Lycus (who is pictured as a monster, too), but the

fact, as she appeals to the Furies to madden her, she herself becomes something of an infernal power, a Juno Inferna. The fact that she appears at night strengthens this impression. (J.G. Fitch, *Seneca's...*, p. 117). He also notices an interesting opposition between the quality of Juno's and Hercules' anger in the play: "Juno's is dark, female, frustrated; Hercules' brutal, unthinking, translated at once into action" (ibidem, p. 33).

³⁰Fitch comments that "Seneca makes him incapable of tears and presents this not as heroic endurance but as a disability caused by his unnatural way of life" (J.G. Fitch, *Seneca's...*, p. 432).

³¹J.G. Fitch, S. McElduff, op. cit., p. 177.

main destructive object, intimately involved in the scene of madness, is Juno, his stepmother.

Hercules' human and real mother, Alcmena, does not appear in the play and is mentioned only three times in the text. She is mentioned twice in a purely descriptive way, when Hercules is referred to ("Alcmena genitus" 527; "natus Alcmena" 773). The third time (and the first time in the play) she is mentioned by Juno herself and then she is pictured as Juno's triumphant rival ("victrix... Alcmena" 22). The absence of Alcmena corresponds symbolically to the absence of Hercules. Her non-existence in the play, which is not complete, since it is obvious that it is she who gave life to Hercules, reflects apparent absence of objects in Hercules' omnipotent self structure. Hercules fills up the whole space, so there is no space even for his actual mother, but what could be called "repression" of Alcmena from the play, to use a psychoanalytic term, cannot totally deny the fact that she is, after all, Hercules' mother, and this makes her hidden presence only more powerful.

If we look at a metaphorical expression of the Hercules-Alcmena diad in the play, we might say that Hercules does not need a mother. He is so powerful, so self-sufficient and immune to vulnerability and fragility, that it only seems reasonable that he has no mother, if to be a child of a mother means to be dependent, vulnerable, in need etc. If we understand Hercules as a character in the play who represses that fact that he is a child of a mother and represses all affective aspects of that relationship, we can specify this hypothesis by adding that he seems to appear as a self-sufficient self in relationship to an unimportant object, which is marked by affective indifference and general lack of love and dependence. This self-object unit, which at its root seems to be represented by Hercules and Alcmena, is repeated by Seneca in other interactions on the stage, mainly in the previously analyzed relationships between Hercules, on the one hand, and Amphitryon, Megara, the children, and Theseus, on the other. In fact, something interesting seems to be reflected in *their* affective relationship to Hercules. They are pictured by Seneca as relating to him as a maternal object, on a metaphorical level, of course. An example is a constant longing of Megara and Amphitryon for Hercules (and the reader is left to imagine the children's longing for their father as well). Hercules is to them an object which is desired, longed for, but distant and unreachable, at the same time. It seems at times that Hercules functions symbolically as a longed for, but distant mother in relationship to her abandoned children. It is particularly vivid in the first part of the play, where his family suffers from separation and anxiously, desperately waits for his return. As I observed earlier, Seneca repeats *absens* or *abesse* three times within twenty lines, in reference to Hercules.

If we juxtapose those two self and object images, we can see that in Hercules' open attitude the aspect that is repressed in his relationship to the object are libidinal affects of love and longing. Symbolically, it is done by Seneca by

his using (or not using) of Alcmena. Hercules is not related to any object image that would involve his dependence, love or need for this object, while, at the same time, he is exactly such an object for Amphitryon, Megara and the children. It is almost as if the repressed image of a good, but absent maternal object, returned under the disguise of Hercules, and the roles are reversed – as if he made the other characters feel what he does not feel: longing for a good, maternal object. It could be described in terms of mechanisms of repression and projection, understood in their modified, literary or textual meanings. I refer here to Kernberg's and his followers' proposition to see repression in terms of activating a more safe self-object unit instead of a more threatening one, and projection in terms of role-reversal within the unit, where affect or desire is ascribed to the object and dissociated from the self. We could say that in the *Hercules* the love of Hercules for his mother is repressed, projected on the object, and then displaced from Alcmena to other objects, especially, Amphitryon and Megara.

Alcmena has also some aspects which Hercules does not have: powerlessness, for example. As a mother she does not function as a protecting object to an endangered self, because of her absence, so she appears as weak and powerless, especially in the context of danger and persecution that are evoked in the play. This whole configuration, which seems to be very close to the picture of Hercules' omnipotent self, is clearly juxtaposed to Juno and her relationship with the hero. Juno is not a biological mother of Hercules, but in the traditional versions of the myth she nursed him in his infancy, albeit involuntarily, and thus became his mother.³² But she is, of course, an extremely negative maternal image, a *noverca* with all its emotional shades.³³ Bruno Bettelheim pointed out that the wicked stepmother in folktales stands for a maternal object colored with child's aggressive impulses which are projected onto her.³⁴ I do not want to suggest that Seneca's play or its narrative has any structural features of a folktale as a genre, but I want to suggest that symbolic juxtaposition of Juno and Alcmena seems to function in a similar way in Seneca's play. While Alcmena is absent, unimportant, Juno, on the other hand, is very much present and she is the *spiritus movens* of the play, a creator of Hercules' fate. While Alcmena is good and, perhaps, longed for (which is repressed, projected and displaced), Juno is evil and feared of (which is also repressed, as I shall demonstrate below). While Alcmena is

³² Cf. Diodorus of Sicily, IV.9–10, Pausanias IX.25.2, Eratosthenes, *Katasterismoi*, 44.

³³ See E. Wesołowska, *Prologi tragedii Seneki w świetle komunikacji literackiej*, Poznań 1998, pp. 53–54.

³⁴ Child protects the good mother imago by attributing sadistic impulses and actions to the symbolic character of a stepmother. The good mother in the tales is usually already dead, absent, but also idealized, while the real, intense self-object relationship is often pictured as a relationship of a sadistic stepmother and an abused child. See B. Bettelheim, *Cudowne i pożyteczne. O znaczeniach i wartościach baśni*, trans. D. Danek, Warszawa 2010, pp. 184–191.

powerless in terms of any protective activity, Juno is powerful, but in a dangerous, destructive, and harmful way.

Juno is depicted in two ways in the play, which I propose to associate to two distinct self-object units. The first one is an image of an omnipotent, ideal, fearless self (Hercules) in relationship to a devaluated, envious, and weaker object, colored by affects such as triumph, contempt, euphoria, hate, and a sense of control. Juno in the Prologue is depicted as insane with envy and hate, but her rage seems to be impotent (until the madness scene). She is weaker than Hercules and Seneca describes a kind of game between her and him, in which she always has to find another monster for him, but he kills them all anyway. He enjoys the game, because her attacks make him stronger, and he turns her hate into his glory (“in laudes suas mea vertit odia” 34–35): those are examples of triumph and euphoria which are associated to the omnipotent control of Hercules over Juno. She is the goddess, but she is unable to hurt Hercules, he laughs at her, always successful and triumphant, never tired of destroying her attempts of hurting him. I would even suggest that the grandiose aspect of Hercules’ character reflects “manic triad”, described by Melanie Klein: control, triumph, and contempt.³⁵

Not only does Hercules control Juno, wins with her in their “game” and euphorically enjoys her impotent hatred, but Juno is also afraid of Hercules (“me quoque invasit tremor;/ et terna monstri colla devicti intuens/ timui imperasse. Levia sed nimium queror:/ caelo timendum est, regna ne summa occupet/ qui vicit ima” 61–65). She is afraid that he will rob her of her position and power, replace her and her husband as a ruler of the universe. Hercules, on the other hand, does not seem to be afraid of Juno – on the contrary, he is fearless. It is a curious role reversal: a powerful goddess is afraid of a demigod, even though, as Amphitryon says, she is persecuting him from his birth (“sequitur a primo statim/ infesta Iuno; numquid immunis fuit/ infantis aetas?” 213–215) – not the other way around.

There is a very powerful sense of a triumph and control over the object (Juno), accompanied by manic fearlessness, in a following scene in which little Hercules destroys the snakes which are symbolically identified with Juno (“monstra superavit prius/ quam nosse posset. gemina cristati caput/ angues ferebant ora, quos contra obvisus/ reptabat infans igneos serpentium/ oculos remisso lumine ac placido intuens;/ artos serenit vultibus nodos tulit./ et tumida tenera guttura elidens manu/ prolusit hydrae” 215–222). Hercules is described as the one who *superat* and always *superavit* Juno and her monsters, moreover, as an infant who looks calmly, without any fear, into horrible eyes of the snakes, and who, almost effortlessly, strangles them. Amphitryon’s comment that he practiced for

³⁵M. Klein, *Mourning and Its Relationship to Manic-Depressive States*, “International Journal of Psychoanalysis” 21, 1940, pp. 211–218.

the hydra adds a particular coloring to this image – Hercules, even as an infant, plays with powerful Juno their game in which he always wins and his partner is impotent, enraged, unable to win. There is also a certain contempt for the object in this image, if we think of Jupiter's wife defeated by an infant in his play, without any problem or fear.

Another important feature of this self-object relationship is intense envy and greed. I refer here to a useful distinction that was made by Melanie Klein: "A distinction should be drawn between envy, jealousy, and greed. Envy is the angry feeling that another person possesses and enjoys something desirable – the envious impulse being to take it away or to spoil it. Moreover, envy implies the subject's relation to one person only and goes back to the earliest exclusive relation with the mother. Jealousy is based on envy, but involves a relation to at least two people; it is mainly concerned with love that the subject feels is his due and has been taken away, or is in danger of being taken away, from him by his rival. In the everyday conception of jealousy, a man or a woman feels deprived of the loved person by somebody else. Greed is an impetuous and insatiable craving, exceeding what the subject needs and what the object is able and willing to give."³⁶ Juno in the Prologue seems to be envious of Hercules, especially his power, almost divine status and his glorious deeds. At first, her envy (and vindictiveness that comes from it) is directed towards Alcmena. Juno suffers because of Alcmena's triumph over her and she seems to more envious than jealous. Even though the reader obviously knows that there is the third party involved here (Jupiter), Juno is not focused on her husband and the sense of being deprived of his love, but at the fact that Alcmena possessed something that she wants to have for herself. It is emphasized by the expression: "victorious Alcmena holds my place" ("escendat licet/ meumque victrix teneat Alcмене locum,/ pariterque natus astra promissa occupet,/ in cuius ortus mundus impendit diem/ tardusque Eoo Phoebus effulsit mari/ retinere mersum iussus Oceano iubar,/ non sic abibunt odia" 21–27).

She immediately starts to talk about Hercules and expresses similar feelings towards him and, of course, she cannot be jealous of Hercules in this context, because there is no triadic context: there is only him and her in this struggle. Juno equates Alcmena and Hercules, as if they were both the same object: someone who took from Juno what belongs to her and incurred intense envy – the angry desire to destroy their possessions in order to eliminate envy. She speaks about Hercules "envied power" ("invisa virtus" 115) and the whole monologue is permeated by a wish to take away from Hercules all he has and be a satisfied witness of his poverty and misery.

Hercules does not seem, on the other hand, to be envious, but rather greedy. Juno fears that he will possess heaven (e.g. "regna ne summa occupet/ qui vicit

³⁶M. Klein, *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works 1946–1963*, London 1975, p. 181.

ima; scepra praeripiet patri 64–6 and quaerit ad superos viam” 74). Later, in the scene of madness, Hercules openly speaks about his greedy wishes to conquer heaven (“immune caelum est, dignus Alcide labor./ in alta mundi spatia sublimis ferar./ petatur aether” 957–959). He wants to obtain a god-status for himself (“toto deus/ narratur orbe” 39–40). The difference between Juno’s envy and Hercules’ greed is that she does not want to *possess* what he has, but rather *destroy* it, since she already is the most powerful goddess and possesses all that Hercules wants to have. On the other hand, Hercules is not described as the one who wants to destroy Juno, Jupiter and the Olympus or to deprive them of their divine power and status, but he wants to possess immortality and divine power for himself, to become one of the gods. At the beginning of the scene of madness in a quasi-hallucinatory way he seems to see the gates of heaven open and the gods welcome him as their equal. So, initially, Hercules is described to be in a relationship to a good object that gladly shares his goods with the self and does it in a way that erases the differences of status between them. But suddenly Hercules thinks that Juno will certainly oppose his desires and thus he enters a different relationship with the object: a greedy, frustrated, angry self in relationship with a powerful, wealthy object which is stingy and keeps its happiness for itself. At this point, greed becomes very destructive and Hercules hallucinates destroying the gates and attacking Jupiter (961–967). Seneca for the second time uses the image of space: the earth cannot contain the swelling self of Hercules (“non capit terra Herculem” 960).

What is interesting is that envy is an attribute of Juno, not of Hercules. Seneca, therefore, ascribes feelings that would have been more natural as belonging to the self (Hercules) to the object (Juno) instead. As Wesolowska observed,³⁷ Juno feels a mixture of hate, admiration and fear towards Hercules, which are feelings quite understandable from a perspective of a man towards the gods, not the other way round. In fact, it is Hercules who has every reason to envy Juno, not the other way round. I would suggest that here we have again a textual projection of envy onto Juno through the strategy of role reversal. It is not a classical repression, like in the case of Hercules-Alcmena relationship, since envy does not disappear entirely from the text, but it is rather a projection through which the role are reversed, whereas the affect remains. Juno envy and Hercules grandiosity are pictured in the play as intimately linked to each other. For example, the almost same phrase *nec (or non) satis terrae patent* occurs twice in the play, and for the first time these words are said by Juno in the Prologue in reference to Hercules greed and pride, and the second time there are uttered by Hercules himself at the moment he returns from the underworld, in correspondence with Juno’s hate (“non satis terrae patent/ Iunonis odio” 605–606; earlier: “nec satis terrae patent” 46).

³⁷E. Wesolowska, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

So the mechanism of building relationships between characters is similar as before, in the case of fear. Both fear and envy are dissociated from Hercules' character and projected on Juno. We could also add helplessness and some aspects of weakness, which are in a similar way negated in Hercules and emphasized in Juno. The evidence for it can be the words of Juno in the Prologue, where she repeats time after time that she has been and still is defeated by Hercules: "superat malis" (33), "indomita virtus" (39), "de me triumphat" (58), and later, Amphitryon's: "monstra superavit" (215). Juno desperately admits that Hercules kills her monsters with much less effort than she finds them ("minorque labor est Herculi iussa exequi, / quam mihi iubere" 41–42).³⁸ This self-object unit, primarily depicted through Hercules' and Juno's interactions, could be described as an image of an omnipotent, ideal, fearless, and greedy self in relationship to a devaluated, envious, impotently enraged and somewhat helpless, fearful object, while the affect in the self is the euphoric triad of triumph, contempt and control.

However, is Juno's image only an image of an envious, frustrated object that is not to be feared? Surely not, since she is perfectly able to destroy Hercules and his happiness by driving him mad. It seems that projection of devaluated aspects of the self (Hercules) on the object (Juno) makes her look less dangerous than she really is, and by "really" I mean, of course, how she is depicted indirectly through the scene of madness and through its consequences, which are the expressions of her terrifying power to destroy and torture. The textual negation of Juno's power and of Hercules fear that correspond to each other can be, therefore, seen as defenses against this deeper, more threatening self-object unit in which the object is powerful, destructive, full of hate and extremely dangerous, while the self is terrified of it and is trying to defend against it, but to no avail. This self and object image is particularly expressed in the play by a symbolic fantasy of a monster.

Seneca also shows the reader several subtle similarities between Hercules and Juno, which emphasize their intimate connection. The first similarity is that both Hercules and Juno are metaphorically identified with monsters. Juno in a more obvious way, since she is the one who sends the monsters, they serve they and are symbolic extensions of her. But Hercules is also subtly identified with a monster,³⁹ even in the Prologue. Juno, for example, points out that Hercules wears what he fought with and what he had conquered ("armatus venit / leone

³⁸The motif of the weary Juno is probably taken from Ovid, as Fitch suggests in his commentary (J.G. Fitch, *Seneca's...*, pp. 133–134), but I would not agree with his impression that Seneca reworks this motif here with "a nice touch of humor in *labor*".

³⁹It is what Fitch suggests with caution, adding that "it seems more probable that *iamdudum* [in 1279–81] is rhetorical exaggeration..." (J.G. Fitch, *Seneca's...*, p. 443). Rose is more straightforward in her suggestion that: "It is as though throughout his labors, not merely now, he has felt himself to be a monster" (A. Rose, *Studies in Seneca's "Hercules Furens"*, Diss. Univ. of Colorado, 1978, p. 124).

et hydra" 45–46). By using physical parts of monsters Hercules is somehow acquiring their aggressive, powerful aspects.

This identification of Hercules with a monster becomes obvious in the scene of madness where he becomes one of those monsters he earlier tried to free the world from; in fact, the most powerful and dangerous of those monsters and the only successful one. In the Prologue Juno is looking for a monster that could be a match for Hercules, but she cannot find one ("quaeris Alcidae parem?/ nemo est nisi ipse" 84–85). Those words have double meaning. The more obvious meaning is that there is no-one as powerful as Hercules, but Juno is not looking for just anyone, she is looking for a monster, because earlier she was complaining that she has run out of monsters ("monstra desunt mihi" 40). It reveals a deeper meaning – the only monster that can be an equal match for Hercules is Hercules himself. It is mirrored by Hercules statement that if Juno prepares another monster, let it be his monster ("si quod parat monstrum, meum sit" 938–939). Motto and Clark notice the irony of this saying, but they understand *meum sit* as "belong to me".⁴⁰ It appears that Seneca wants to suggest that Hercules also is a monster in the space of the play. Juno finally discovers the way to triumph over him and it is to turn him against himself, more precisely – to turn Hercules-the-monster against Hercules-the-hero ("me vicit: et se vincat" 116).

Obviously, Hercules violence and sadism expressed in the madness scene are not just imposed on him by Juno. She is not turning someone kind and gentle into an aggressive monster. On the contrary, she is using traits that Hercules already has – his destructiveness, power, sadism, greed and mad pride.⁴¹ Earlier on those traits were used by Hercules to destroy Juno's monsters, so they were presented by Hercules as positive, beneficial, since he was using his aggressiveness to destroy more aggressive, but less powerful enemies. Now, in the madness scene, the same sadism is being directed against the innocent, against Hercules' family, and, obviously, loses all its "positive" characteristics.

The second similarity between Hercules and Juno is that both of them and other characters perceive the hero's act as the act done by Juno herself. She describes herself as insane with hate and rage (110–111), just like Hercules will become insane, and then she imagines that she will guide his hand during murder (118–120), as if it were her deed, not his, but, at the same time, it is really his deed, since only Hercules can vanquish Hercules.⁴² On the other hand, Amphitryon declares Juno guilty, by saying that what Hercules did is the crime of his

⁴⁰A.L. Motto, J.R. Clark, *The Monster in Seneca's "Hercules Furens" 926–939*, "Classical Philology" 89:3, 1994, p. 269.

⁴¹Fitch writes about "his brutality, his reliance on physical force and the famous weapons" (J.G. Fitch, "*Pectus...*", p. 240).

⁴²Shelton interprets this as an argument for seeing Juno as a representation of Hercules' inner madness (J.-A. Shelton, *op. cit.*, p. 23). Motto and Clark disagree completely with that line of thinking, suggesting that Juno's madness and her other sadistic qualities are a proof that Hercules

stepmother (“*crimen novercae*” 1202). Hercules does not argue with that. Even earlier, in the Prologue, Juno described Hercules’ labors as controlled by her, in a way, as if he was attacking her (by killing her monsters) and doing her will (she uses the word *iubeo* twice in lines 41–42).

The third way in which Hercules and Juno seem to be similar can be seen in the hero’s suicidal fantasies. He calls the suicide his next labor (1280–2) and the greatest one. The reader knows that in his labors Hercules killed monsters that served Juno, so his desire to kill himself is, symbolically, a recognition of himself as the monster and an attempt to get rid of that monster in an act of submission to the will of Juno. It can also be seen as an identification of Hercules with this object image (a monster) which is primarily associated with Juno in the play. One part of Hercules (the self) has to be sadistically attacked by another part of himself (the object). In the Prologue Juno says that Hercules turns her hate into his glory and enjoys her hate (33–35), and later she says that now she will reverse the roles – the power of Hercules that is envied by Juno (“*invisa virtus*” 114–115) will become the source of her enjoyment. She is doing to him what previously was done to her. Hercules reveals those sadistic features that previously were associated mainly with Juno: hate, vindictiveness, rage, envy, and destructiveness.

MEGARA: THE SELF-SACRIFICING MOTHER

Megara in the play seems to represent a distinctly different object relations than those described above. I already mentioned the way in which she functions as a self loving and longing for a distant object, when she calls on her lost husband. Her character is built by Seneca of many different aspects, so it has a complexity that is far greater than, for example, Hercules or Juno who tend to represent similar self and object images.⁴³ After having expressed her longing for Hercules, Megara can be seen from a much different angle. When she hears Lycus’ proposal, she replies declaring her strong contempt and hate for him – she barely can stand a thought of touching him (“*Egone ut parentis sanguine aspersam manum/fratrumque gemina caede contingam?*” 372–374). She also confesses that her hate for Lycus is dearer to her than the memory of her murdered

is innocent and has been actually persecuted by an external force (A.L. Motto, J.G. Clark, *Maxima virtus...*, p. 116).

⁴³ Shelton argues that all supportive characters in the play are not created as full and real stage personalities, but merely reflections of Hercules’ conflicts. She considers Megara to be just a “role” of a wife and a mother (J.-A. Shelton, *op. cit.*, pp. 28–30). I disagree with that, in that all characters tend to represent certain self and object images, usually one or two dominant images throughout the play. The same goes for Megara, but her image is more affectively complex, as I will try to show.

family (“*una res superest mihi/fratre ac parente carior, regno ac lare:/ odium tui*” 380–382) and that she waits for the gods’ vengeance (384–385).

Even though Megara expresses anger, vindictiveness, and hate (e.g. 495–500), she is not entirely dominated by destructiveness. Her hate is directed to Lycus, but she expresses a whole range of different emotions in different relationships, as we shall see further. In her dialogue with Lycus Seneca pictures her main aspect in the play, which is her heroic willingness for self-sacrifice, coming from her love and loyalty. In the dialogue Megara declares her loyalty to Hercules, her faithful love for him and her willingness to die (“*capta nunc videor mihi./ grauent catenae corpus et longa fame/ mors protrahatur lenta: non vincet fidem/ vis ulla nostrum. moriar, Alcide, tua*” 418–421). It is worth noting that she is not fearless as Hercules appears to be, but that her courage has a different ground. She talks about her fear openly (414), but she is also truly brave in that she does not hesitate to die for what she loves and wants to protect.

As I pointed out earlier, after Hercules comes back from the underworld, Megara is not involved in any interactions on the stage, which gives a particular cold quality to their marriage. Hercules is not emotionally engaged, while the reader still remembers intense love and faithfulness of his wife, which creates a powerful contrast. When Megara reappears in the play, it is only in the scene of madness. Seneca develops here the qualities that he gave her at the beginning of the play. We see her protecting her little son from Hercules who is convinced that he is Eurystheus’ son (“*at misera, parvum protegens natum sinu,/ Megara furenti similis e latebris fugit*” 1008–1009). It seems that Megara represents in the play a caring, protective, maternal object in a relationship to a dependent, vulnerable self, and an essential feature of this image is self-sacrificing love. Earlier, she was willing to give away her life for her love of Hercules, in the scene of madness she sacrifices her life in the name of her love for her children.

Thus, there are three main maternal figures in the play: Alcmena, Juno, and Megara, and each of them represents a different maternal *imago*. Alcmena stands for two aspects: (1) an absent, unimportant mother who, nonetheless, gave life to Hercules, and, at a deeper level, (2) a loved and longed for mother whose importance and presence in the play is denied and replaced by the image of an absent object. This deeper object image is expressed through defensive role reversal and displacement: Hercules is not pictured as a self which longs for a distant, good object, but other characters (Megara, Amphitryon and the children) long and wait for the hero who is distant and emotionally absent. Another general defense against the importance of object relations in the play is an omnipotent, ideal, grandiose image of Hercules, which is also self-sufficient and, thus, “motherless”.

Juno also, in a bit similar way, represents two object images: one more evident and defensive, another more hidden, but, at the same time, more influential.

Juno stands for (1) a devaluated image of an envious, vanquished, frustrated and fearful object, and (2) a powerful, destructive, sadistic, and terrifying object which eventually vanquishes and tortures Hercules. The first image is distorted by projective devaluation, since the goddess is pictured as weaker than the hero and as possessing all aspects which could be natural in Hercules, but somehow “unworthy” of his ideal self (envy, fear, frustration etc.), and it is also a defense against a terrifying, sadistic object image which breaks through the repressive barriers at the climactic moment of Hercules’ madness. Here the image is also distorted, but distorted by a projection of aggression, not by devaluation. Unlike in the case of devaluation, aggressive aspects of Hercules are not absent from his self and ascribed to Juno instead, but they are significantly present both in the self and object images, so that both Hercules and Juno are described as monsters. We might also say that here, technically, there is no repression of aggression (since Hercules is still described as somewhat sadistic), but denial and projective identification of sadism on Juno. Projective identification is the most primitive form of projection in which the impulse is not dissociated from the self and ascribed to the object, but remains in the self as well as in the object, which causes the self to fear the object’s aggression. In the case of Hercules and Juno this is what is demonstrated throughout the play – his aggression is projected on Juno, but it does not free himself from aggressive features. Moreover, the projective identification links together Hercules and Juno in a very powerful way: it is her who drives Hercules mad and it is her hand that commits the crime. As Rose put it: “...she [Juno] exemplifies *ira*. Her anger, hatred, and the dolor which craves vengeance on Hercules all reveal the turmoil of passion and prefigure a similar state of mind in the hero himself.”⁴⁴

Megara, on the other hand, seems to represent a maternal object which is the closest to a normal, loving and caring mother. She also seems to be the most “real” mother of the three that were mentioned above and it is due to her complex and differentiated emotional image: in the play she experiences love, longing and faithfulness (towards Hercules), fear, rage, and hate (towards Lycus), and loving care (towards her children) along with a desire to protect them at all costs with great courage. Seneca seems to contrast Megara with Alcmena and Juno. Like Alcmena, in the play (1) she actually gave life to Hercules’ children, and (2) she had those children with someone who belongs more to the world of gods than to the world of men (cf. Alcmena with Jupiter). But Megara is also very different from Alcmena of the play, since she is not absent, but powerfully present in her strong emotions, courage and self-sacrifice. Her futile attempt to protect the children from mad Hercules is an ultimate expression of her presence as a mother. The presence is emphasized by Seneca through her words:

⁴⁴A. Rose, *Seneca’s HF: a Politico-Didactic Reading*, “Classical Journal” 75, 1979, p. 138 (in a footnote). Cf. also A. Rose, *Studies...*, pp. 173–175.

“recognize Megara” (“agnosce Megaram” 1016), which she utters to her insane husband.⁴⁵

She is also contrasted with Juno, which is particularly clear at the moment in which Hercules has a delusion that she is Juno. It is suggested in 1010–1011 (“Licet tonantis profuga condaris sinu,/ petet undecumque temet haec dextra et feret”) and expressed openly in 1018–1019 (“Teneo novercam./ sequere, da poenas mihi/iugoque pressum libera turpi Iovem”). Seneca uses this delusion to create a powerful scene in which Hercules sees Juno instead of Megara, as if Juno in the play functioned as a distorted object image that prevented from seeing a more realistic maternal object. Megara tries to make Hercules to see that she is Megara, not Juno, but he cannot see her. The situation is complicated by Seneca in that Hercules in his madness sees yet another object image – not so much the powerful, sadistic object, but a devaluated, weak object which he wants to destroy. As Fitch writes, “here she is close enough, and powerless enough, to be caught and killed”.⁴⁶ Megara also tries to make Hercules see his children, as if she tried to save the whole relationship between a dependent, loving self and a loving, caring parent, but to no avail (“Parce iam, coniunx, precor,/ agnosce Megaram. natus hic vultus tuos/ habitusque reddit; cernis, ut tendat manus?” 1015–1017). Therefore, Juno is a mother who hates and destroys her son (Hercules), whereas Megara is an opposite image of a mother who protects her son from danger at all costs. Hercules does not see either, but only a devaluated object related to his grandiose self image.

The scene of madness reveals a conflict between a loving relationship between the self and the object, and other relationships which are permeated by aggression, fear, and envy. Seneca lets the reader watch how love and care, represented by Megara and her children, is sadistically destroyed by a terrifying image of Juno, a mother-monster with which Hercules identifies at this point in his madness. This image of an object as a monster corresponds with a similar object image. Hercules calls his son a monster when he kills him (“sed ante matrem parvulum hoc monstrum occidat” 1020): both self and object are permeated by evil and aggression in this mad fantasy which is in a striking contrast to the reality of love between the little son who is literally scared to death (“Pavefactus infans igneo vultu patris/ perit ante vulnus, spiritum eripuit timor” 1022–1023) and his loving mother who is willing to die in an attempt to protect him.

⁴⁵As Fitch comments, “[t]he proper name is used both for self-identification and with emotional implications (‘your loving wife’, etc.)” (J.G. Fitch, *Seneca’s...*, p. 380).

⁴⁶J.G. Fitch, *Seneca’s...*, p. 381.

HERCULES' MADNESS: ATTACK ON LOVE'S BONDS

Various self and object images which may be identified in the play seem to form a hierarchy – some are more hidden, other more on the surface, and the core, conflicted self and object relationships are revealed in the scene of madness. Then a dependent, vulnerable self and its loving relationship with a protective, caring object is sadistically destroyed by a powerful, terrifying object which is insane with hate. A dependent self (represented by the younger son) who wants to be loved by an object (represented by Megara) is terrified to death by a sadistic object who eventually smashes into pieces both the self and the object. But this core situation breaks through only at the climactic moment of madness. At other times the play, metaphorically, “defends itself” against this core conflict by activation of other self-object units. These are the images of an omnipotent, self-sufficient self that is not dependent on any object (Hercules in relationship to an absent Alcmena and in a shallow relationship with his family) and of an ideal, grandiose self which euphorically triumphs over depreciated, envious object (Hercules in relationship to Juno). What is defended against, denied or repressed here is dependence, need for love, vulnerability and other qualities which are present symbolically, when helpless children raise their hands to beg their insane father to spare them.

Norman Pratt analyzed the Hercules in terms of certain “massive systems of words expressing abstract ideas”, which “appear in pairs of opposites”.⁴⁷ Even though his understanding of his findings is linked to Stoicism, thus continuing Marti’s line of interpretation, I suggest that his research could be interpreted differently. Pratt found out that the play is built around the opposites of control and security, on the one hand, and non-control, chaos, and insecurity, on the other.⁴⁸ He concludes: “These are the main images used in the *Hercules Furens* to convey ideas related to the theme of irrationality pitted against the ideal of reason.”⁴⁹ But, in the context of this article, it seems that those finding reflect also the conflict between a defensive, omnipotent self that controls dangerous self-object relationships and establishes psychological security, but at the price of grandiose self-idealization and degradation of human relationships. The destructive chaos that must be controlled, but is unleashed in the scene of madness represents aggressive object relations.⁵⁰

The dependent, loving relationship which is at the core of the conflict and which is symbolically destroyed in the play is foreshadowed earlier, before

⁴⁷N.T. Pratt, *Major Systems of Figurative Language in Senecan Melodrama*, “Transactions of the American Philological Association” 94, 1963, p. 200.

⁴⁸Ibidem, pp. 200–210.

⁴⁹Ibidem, p. 210.

⁵⁰I suggest that the traditional Stoic interpretation of those conflicted forces in terms of reason and passion (as in Marti and Pratt) is a bit limiting in the light of a more comprehensive analysis of the play.

Hercules even appears on the stage, in a picture of the hero's family that is in danger. They are also helpless, vulnerable, dependent on an extremely sadistic, evil object, represented by Lycus. Hercules is never placed in that situation, until after the madness, but his family very much so. In fact, what Hercules does is an immediate attempt to undone this situation. When he realizes that his family was threatened by Lycus, he kills the usurper, as if he wanted to erase the whole scene, the scene in which a dependent self is at the mercy of a relentless, sadistic persecutor. He manages to do that, but only temporarily, since a while afterwards the same scene is enacted again: the roles are the same, but the actors change. Now Hercules plays a role of a sadistic persecutor of his helpless, dependent family, replacing Lycus. In effect, the worst fear of the play comes true, despite of an attempt to defend against that fear. Hercules and Lycus are similar in that they stand for the same object image (Lycus all the time, Hercules at times). As Owen suggests: "Seneca has then created, in the figure of Lycus, a careful *Doppelgänger* of the hero, a man of deeds, brutal, a master of *bella*. Lycus differs from the hero only in his candor in recognizing his lack of birthright (337–339) and his reliance not on right but on force—which he, too, calls *clara virtus* (340). All of these themes finally coalesce in the mad-scene..."⁵¹

It is as if the omnipotent self of Hercules in the play acted as a defense against the possibility of terrifying dependence: his children (or the whole family) are helpless – he is in control, they are weak – he is powerful, they are in danger and terrified – he is fearless, they lose – he always wins, they need protection – he protects himself since infancy, they wait and long for someone distant – he does not wait for anyone, but does everything by himself etc. And yet this omnipotent, ideal, defensive self is not totally in control of everything. Juno does not appear to be merely that devaluated object which always loses battles with Hercules, but eventually vanquishes the hero, forcing him to identify with helpless, tortured, destroyed self. She gains total control over him towards the end of the play. The defenses break and reveal the core conflict between love and hate, in which hate overcomes love. The ending of the play is a comment on that emotional situation. When Hercules comes to senses Seneca begins with another set of defenses against dependence, but they change and the whole atmosphere of the play is changed.

Although *Hercules* ends in a very pessimistic way, quite differently from Euripides' play, the destruction of love that has been pictured so dramatically is not complete. Amphitryon and Theseus survive, and they represent a capacity to love that is still present in the play. Amphitryon succeeds in preventing his son from suicide. Even though Papadopoulou understands Amphitryon's attempts to

⁵¹W.H. Owen, op. cit., p. 304. The similarities between Hercules and Lycus were also analyzed in some detail by A. Rose, *Seneca's...*

do so as a “psychological blackmail”⁵², I would see them – in the context of the whole play – as the residual expressions of care and love. Therefore, I agree with Fitch who writes that Amphitryon in the play represents “qualities of unambitious sanity and human love”.⁵³ Even though there is not much hope left at the end, the very survival of Amphitryon, with a corresponding survival of Hercules, seems to symbolize that there is something left: a relationship between a parent and a child, which could not be totally destroyed, even though it is rendered sterile, unable to nurture and support. Theseus also represents an object which survives – he also seems to represent a parent, when he offers Hercules shelter in Athens, a place to live. His love for Hercules is also sterile, but it is there, and so is hope. Thus, Seneca – following the old myth – withdraws from taking away all hope, and Hercules’ life can go on, despite of the madness and the murder.⁵⁴

THE HERO AND HIS MOTHERS IN SENECA’S *HERCULES FURENS*

Summary

The critics who wrote about *Hercules Furens* are either convinced that the main character is a persecuted, tragic hero, or a self-centered narcissist. The approach taken in this paper corroborates the latter interpretation, but does not focus entirely on Hercules, but also takes into consideration relationships between his heroic self image and other figures, namely, maternal characters of Alcmena, Juno and Megara.

Hercules’ grandiosity is revealed not only in his hubristic self-glorification, but also in his fantasies about revenge and suicide, which have particular self-centered character. He is also presented by Seneca as emotionally shallow and unable to reciprocate love. Alcmena functions in the play as an ‘absent mother’, whose meaning is denied or repressed, which can be understood in relationship to Hercules’ omnipotent self that is not dependent on anyone. Juno, on the other hand, is very much present, but she is similar to ‘wicked stepmothers’ of folktales. Her bond with Hercules is based on aggression, fear and devaluation, which tend to be denied on Hercules’ part. Megara is the most complex, realistic maternal figure, pictured by Seneca as the one who is able to love and protect her children, even to the point of self-sacrifice. Thus she is one of the representatives of hope that stems from human bonds (the other is Amphitryon).

⁵²T. Papadopoulou, op. cit., p. 279.

⁵³J.G. Fitch, “*Pectus...*”, p. 242.

⁵⁴I disagree here, to some extent, with Fitch who maintains that “Hercules’ decision to live on is not a source of new hope, and that his final speech is a long cry of pain” (Fitch 1987, 38). He focuses on Hercules and it seems, indeed, that this character’s behavior conveys no hope towards the end of the play, but Fitch leaves aside the other characters who, nevertheless, point to more hopeful aspects of the play’s ending.