

**TRANSACTIONS AND  
PROCEEDINGS OF THE  
AMERICAN PHILOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION 1918, VOLUME  
XLIX**

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Various

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**VARIOUS**

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TRANSACTIONS  
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1918

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I. — *On the Authenticity of the Hercules Octaeus*

BY PROFESSOR ARTHUR STANLEY PEASE

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FEW questions connected with the tragedies of Seneca have provoked more discussion and led to opinions more diverse than that of the authenticity of the *Hercules Octaeus*. Arguments drawn from the clumsy and inartistic quality of the play,<sup>1</sup> from its unusual length and two choruses,<sup>2</sup> from supposed peculiarities of vocabulary,<sup>3</sup> and still more from fancied differences in sentiment and conception between it and the acknowledged works of Seneca,<sup>4</sup> or, on the other hand, from

<sup>1</sup> Leo in his edition of Seneca's tragedies (1878), 53 ff.; *Gött. gel. Anz.* 1903, 7.

<sup>2</sup> Melzer, *De Hercule Octaeo Annacana* (1890), 22 f.; Steinberger, *Hercules Octaeus fabula num sit a Seneca scripta* (1891), 188.

<sup>3</sup> Leo, *op. cit.* 61 ff.; Summers, "The Authorship of the *Hercules Octaeus*," *Class. Rev.* XIX (1905), 44 f. In reply to various difficulties among those raised see Ackermann, "Der leidende Hercules des Seneca," *Rh. Mus.* LXVII (1912), 461 ff. Miss D. L. Cuthbert in a Master's thesis submitted in 1917 to the University of Illinois (as yet unpublished) has collected the words peculiar to some one play of Seneca but not found in any of the other plays, and finds that in the *Hercules Octaeus* there are 91 such words, a far smaller number, in proportion to the number of lines, than in any play with the exception of the *Octavia*.

<sup>4</sup> Barth *op. Peiper and Richter's* edition (1902), 319-320; Edert, *Ueber Senecas Herakles und den Herakles auf dem Oeta* (1900), 93 ff. Many of these objections are answered by Ackermann, *op. cit.* 430 ff. On likenesses in sentiment cf. Melzer, *op. cit.* 22 f.

precisely the opposite grounds of slavish and often unintelligent imitation of them,<sup>6</sup> have been advanced, supported, assailed, or defended by eager champions. Nor has the puzzle lacked further complications, inasmuch as various degrees of partial authenticity have been admitted, varying from complete rejection by some scholars,<sup>6</sup> rejection of parts and retention of other portions,<sup>7</sup> to the view that this is an unfinished product of Seneca,<sup>8</sup> or, finally, to complete acceptance of it and its authenticity.<sup>9</sup>

In the exposition of all the views thus briefly sketched not a little stress has been laid by scholars upon the likenesses between this play and the others usually admitted as genuine, and a set of parallel passages has been collected, few at first, but increasing like a snowball as each new critic has added his own gleanings to those of his predecessors. These points of similarity lie (1) in the broad treatment of extended passages; (2) in the expression of maxims and rhetorical or philosophical concepts and in other minor details; or (3) in actual phrases, half-lines, and, in four cases (484, 745, 1680,

<sup>6</sup> Leo, *op. cit.* 49 ff.; Summers, *op. cit.*; Edert, *op. cit.* So Leo thinks *H.O.* 1402-1478 almost a cento from the *Hercules Furens*, and Summers traces strong likenesses running through passages of some length (e.g. *H.O.* 781 ff.).

<sup>6</sup> E.g. D. Heinsius (cf. Schanz, *Gesch. der röm. Litt.* II, 2<sup>a</sup> [1913], 64); Richter, *De Seneca trag. auctore* (1862), 31 (but in the edition of Peiper and Richter [1902], 319, he takes back this view); Birt, *Rh. Mus.* XXXIV (1879), 509 (but he also later changed his mind, according to Ackermann in *Philologus*, Supplementband X [1907], 325, and to Birt himself in *Preuss. Jahrb.* cxliv [1911], 292, n. 3); Pais, *Il teatro di L. Anneo Seneca* (1890), 20; and Edert, *op. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> Habrucker, *Questiones Annaeanae* (1873), 47 ff.; Leo, edition, 70 ff. and *Gött. gel. Anz.* 1903, 7; Tachau, *Philologus*, XLVI (1888), 378; and Summers, *op. cit.* 47 ff. The segregations of genuine from spurious are largely based on subjective impressions and, like much similar Homeric criticism, have led to no convincing results. Even Edert, who regards the play as spurious, is convinced of its essential unity (*op. cit.* 93).

<sup>8</sup> Melzer, *op. cit.* Opposed to this opinion are Leo, *Gött. gel. Anz.* 1903, 8, and Ackermann, *Philologus*, Supplementband X (1907), 396.

<sup>9</sup> Steinberger, in *Abhandlungen . . . W. von Christ dargebracht* (1891), 188 ff.; Ribbeck, *Gesch. der röm. Dichtung*, III (1892), 69; and Ackermann in the two works already cited. The studies of Ackermann are by far the most exhaustive upon this subject.

1797),<sup>10</sup> nearly entire lines, repeated almost unchanged from other plays.

Making all due allowance for fortuitous coincidence, we yet find so many points of contact in all the groups mentioned as to force any candid student to admit some connection between this and the other plays, but it is a poor rule that does not work both ways, and those who have confidently argued that the facts cited are sufficient proof of identity of authorship have been vigorously answered by those who maintain that they are clear evidence of deliberate imitation by another writer than Seneca. And thus the game of philological battledore and shuttlecock might well continue. For if there is to be cited in the *Hercules Oetaeus* a thought or expression so conspicuous that the modern scholar has been struck by it and stimulated to compare it with some passage in another play, then an ancient imitator might have copied precisely this thought or expression (for example, compare the passage on suicide found in *H.O.* 929-930 with that in *Pho.* 98-99); while on the other hand, when the likeness between two passages is so vague as not to strike the attention or be easily carried in the mind, the doubt will at once be raised whether similarity really exists, or, if it does, is more than casual.

What is clearly needed, then, is a set of resemblances sufficiently numerous and precise to exclude the possibility of mere chance, and yet so unobtrusive as probably not to have been selected as material by a deliberate imitative artificer on the one hand, or, on the other, to have been written by one so deeply steeped (as some<sup>11</sup> consider the author of the *Hercules Oetaeus* to have been) in the writings of his model as to have reproduced, well nigh unconsciously, many of the details of their style. For the reasons just mentioned it has hitherto been difficult to gather such parallel

<sup>10</sup> Of these 745 is proverbial; cf. Ter. *Heaut.* 236. One other case cited by Summers (*op. cit.* 42) is line 27, but its likeness to *H.F.* 230, though close, is not one of metrical identity.

<sup>11</sup> E.g. Leo, edition, 73; Edert, *op. cit.* 105.