

Seneca Thyestes 1022-68.

Write a short paragraph (3-5 sentences) on a theme or idea relating to this module as it appears in this passage. OBSERVE - CITE TEXT - INTERPRET

In the final act Atreus' artistic and rhetorical brilliance as well as violence and manipulation of knowledge is shown to directly place Thyestes in a vulnerable position. The imperatives, "Hug them, kiss them," not only draws direct attention to the mouth and physical closeness of the father to the sons, but of the superiority Atreus has over Thyestes in bodiliness and knowledge. Thyestes has been polluted and violated by the flesh of his sons, a fact which he is not aware of as Atreus points out in the last line, "he tore his sons in his impious mouth, but he didn't know it and they didn't know it". The violent nature of Atreus' rhetoric is seen in his description of the murder of the sons. It seems as though he takes pride in what he has done by describing it in intense and vivid detail. For example, "I chopped up their lifeless bodies and tore them to pieces, little pieces." The violent retelling of the murders serves as the torture of Thyestes, forcing him vulnerable and perhaps tormenting him more than if he had witnessed the murders himself.

In this passage, Thyestes has just finished to eat and drink at Atreus' banquet and, asking to meet his sons, slowly discover that they have been killed by his brother and that he ate them.

In this situation Atreus shows off all of his artistic and rhetorical brilliance, controlling the situation, strong of the invulnerability that the knowledge of the truth and the situation of total and tyrannical control involve. He has the situation in hand, and the same unveiling of the truth is a small jewel of rhetoric and manipulation of time as it takes place in three distinct moments during dialogue with his brother, who is step by step made more vulnerable.

In the first moment he takes three verses to make his brother understand that not only they are dead, but something even worse had already happened: the use of the words is not casual, but veiled by a not too thin

layer of sadistic irony. Verse 1024 "*Fruere, osculare, divide amplexu tribu*" reflects how Thyestes has already hug his boys, while taking them with his hands, already kissed them, bringing and tasting them to and with his mouth, already split his embraces, but in his stomach.

In the second one, with two verses he tells his brother that not only he has their heads, but also their body: both what *superest* and what *non superest* are with him.

Finally, with a with a cold, cruel and sarcastic sentence, he tells him the truth: "*epulatus ipse es impia natos dape*". This is possibly the last, true, moment in which Atreus is somehow worried about maintaining absolute control of the situation, since, following the response of his brother, he lets himself go into a detailed and cruel description of the crime and the pleasure that the same, certainly justified and even limited, led him.

This lack of control is highlighted by two things: the first is the sentence "my haste cheated my rage", meaning that all he had done was led by passions and anger, the second one by the fact that while in the first part of his speech he is referring directly to Thyestes ("*ex vulture ipso sanguine caladium in tua / defundere ora debui*"), in the second one, the description of the crime itself, he is referring to his brother in the third person, as to say that he is not talking to him anymore, but just showing off to an audience all the irrational passion that all he has done led to him.

Upon realising the extent of the crimes committed against him, Thyestes' torment, as well his brother's depravity, is shown through his erratic description of the scene. The chosen adjectives 'looped off' 'wrenched off' 'torn' and 'broken' do not only depict the extent of the butchery. In describing the scene in such barbarity Seneca (?) is showing that having indulged in his own anger to excess Atreus has gone entirely mad, and in doing so addresses the subject of revenge as a cyclic evil from which no virtuous good can come.